



Basel, June 2016

3rd Basel Summer School in African Studies (21–28 June 2017) **African Studies and Africanists: Whence the Gaze?**

Concept note

The aim of the Basel Summer School in African Studies 2017 is two-fold: Thematically, it allows PhD students to engage with the question of how locality and positionality frame research in African Studies and in Area Studies more generally. From the point of view of academic skills, it enables PhD students to enhance their skills in presenting their work to a scientific audience. The Summer School seizes the opportunity to integrate the participation at the 7th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS), which takes place in Basel from 29 June to 1 July 2017.

1) African Studies in Europe and Area Studies in Africa

Social Anthropology is not alone in assuming that engaging scientifically with foreign societies enables the researcher to gain new perspectives on his or her own social (and academic) environment and is, amongst others, fruitful for theory building. This requires a reflection on the researcher's own position and his/her relationship to the society or region he/she studies. Traditionally, this assumption has been mainly based on the experience of, and reflection on a 'one-way' perspective from the 'Global North' (the researcher and research money) to the 'Global South' (the object). African Studies and research on and in Africa are typically conducted by Western students and scholars doing research on 'the other' in 'the field', or by African scholars and students – whether based in or originating from Africa – working on their 'home' societies and regions.

The predominance of a North-to-South gaze in research in and on Africa and in African Studies generates an imbalance that is problematic for the quality and relevance of Africa-related scientific knowledge (or scientific knowledge related to the 'developing world' in general). At the same time, there is an assumed value of a gaze on 'the other' for the understanding of the 'self'; and what is more, a value of a gaze from the outside – by the other – for the understanding of the 'self'. The Summer School sets out to promote more reflection on the relationship between the position and locality of the researcher and his or her geographical area of studies. Ultimately, it suggests that researchers seek to identify approaches that allow a 'reciprocal' perspective by reflecting methodological and conceptual foundations but also, in practice, by systematically taking these issues into account in the framework of exchange and collaboration.

The Summer School reflects on the relationship between the location of the researcher and the region of his or her studies by asking several key questions: How does the origin and residence of a researcher frame his/her research on a specific society or region? To what extent does it make a difference whether a researcher is 'from there' (e.g. West African studying West Africa) or not (e.g. European studying West Africa)? What is the added value of doing research in a foreign geographical area and what is the added value of studying one's own society or region? And how does the relationship between the location of the researcher and the region of his studies change when the typical direction of the gaze changes (i.e. from 'the South' to 'the North')?

ECAS 2017 is an opportunity to address these questions. It offers a framework that *per se* deals with such issues. African Studies have a long tradition in Europe. The position of European scholars of Africa – the relation between their location and the area of their studies – has been reflected before, and it is crucial that this reflection continues. Another important question, which has increasingly been addressed in recent years, concerns the position of African scholars in the diaspora, their relation to their 'home societies' and the meaning of this relationship to their studies. Of equal importance is that students and scholars based in Africa reflect their relation to the geographical areas they study along similar lines – whether they work on their own societies or regions, on other countries and regions in Africa or on areas outside of the continent. Participants in the Summer School will discuss these questions against the background of inputs from senior

scholars and selected literature, and will reflect on their own situation. The discussion is structured in three workshops along the following major themes:

Normativity

The motivation of the scholar, the choice of the subject and the role of interests and values

Conceptualisation

The local and global history of concepts, their translatability across cultures and political and social settings.

Validity

On what grounds can we claim the validity of our research findings? What is the relative weight of practical concerns, moral considerations and scholarly interests in lending validity to research findings?

In the first part of the workshops, resource persons will give keynote addresses around the issues raised by these topics followed by a general discussion. The resource persons suggest texts to be read. In the second part of the workshops, participants will have the opportunity to make short presentations of their work including a reflection on how it relates to the workshop topic, followed by comments by the resource persons.

Goals: The participants

- a) *develop the competence to reflect on their own position within their present and future academic environment,*
- b) *are aware of the importance of doing so for the relevance and content of their work, and*
- c) *develop approaches that allow for a more reflected and reciprocal perspective in their research.*

2) Advanced Study Skills

All participants prepare and present posters introducing themselves and their PhD projects. The design of their posters and their presentation skills are reviewed by respective experts. Based on the experts' general input as well as on direct feedback and recommendations within small working groups, participants re-design their posters and develop strategies to improve their presentation skills. The posters will be on display at the ECAS 2017.

Goals: The participants

- a) *develop their ability to present their research to a scientific audience, and*
- b) *develop the skills to design an adequate scientific poster.*

Experts

Rose-Marie Beck, Professor of African Languages and Literatures at the University of Leipzig (Germany)

Mamadou Diawara, Professor for Anthropology at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt am Main (Germany)/Founding Director of Point Sud, Bamako (Mali)

Dag Henrichsen, Head of Archives at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (Namibia Resource Centre – Southern Africa Library), Basel (Switzerland)

Elísio Macamo (*convenor*), Associate Professor of African Studies at the University of Basel (Switzerland)

Giorgio Miescher, Carl Schlettwein Foundation Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in Namibian and Southern African Studies at the Centre for African Studies Basel (Switzerland)

Noor Nieftagodien, Associate Professor and Chair of the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)

Sophie Oldfield, Associate Professor of Urban Studies, University of Basel (Switzerland)

Advanced Study Skills are taught by experienced external coaches:

- Sabine Rosta (owner LUCID business communicationschange manager, communications expert)
- Martina Schradi (psychologist, communication designer)

Programme

Wed, 21 June 2017	11am-12am Welcome, organisational issues
	1.30pm-6pm Whence the Gaze? Introduction (Macamo)
Thu, 22 June 2017	9am-12am Presentation of posters (Macamo, Rosta)
	1.30pm-6pm Advanced Study Skills: Presentation skills (Rosta)
Fri, 23 June 2017	9am – 12am Advanced Study Skills: Scientific posters (Schradi)
	1.30pm – 6pm Advanced Study Skills: Group work (Rosta, Schradi)
Sat, 24 June 2017	9 am – 6pm Advanced Study Skills: Individual/group work (Rosta, Schradi) Preparation of workshops
Sun, 25 June 2017	-
Mon, 26 June 2017	9am – 3.30pm Workshop 1: Normativity (Henrichsen, Miescher, Nieftagodien)
	4pm – 6pm Workshop 2: Conceptualisation (Macamo, Beck)
Tue, 27 June 2017	9am – 12 am Workshop 2: Conceptualisation (Macamo, Beck) continued
	1.30pm – 6pm Workshop 3: Validity (Oldfield, Diawara)
Wed, 28 June 2017	9am – 12am Concluding session
Thursday, 29 June 2017	ECAS
Friday, 30 June 2017	ECAS
Saturday, 1 July 2017	ECAS

Preparation

In preparation for the Summer School, participants should

- read the texts for preparatory reading
- design a poster to be presented at the Summer School
- prepare a 5-minute presentation of their poster and project

Preparatory reading:

Workshop 1) Normativity

Henrichsen, Dag, und Giorgio Miescher. „Namibian and Southern African Studies in Basel: A case for an intellectual project“. *BAB Working Paper*, Nr. 01 (2017).

Ndebele, Njabulo S. 1986. 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa'. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12 (2): 143–57.

Workshop 2) Conceptualization

Macamo, Elísio. „Before We Start: Science and Power in the Constitution of Africa“. In *The Politics of Nature and Science in Southern Africa*, herausgegeben von Maano Ramutsindela, Giorgio Miescher, und Melanie Boehi, 323–34. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016.

Macamo, Elísio. „“Concern” as a Form of Proximity in African Studies“, 2017.

Mbembe, Achille Joseph. 2016. 'Decolonizing the University: New Directions'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15 (1): 29–45.

Workshop 3) Validity

Comaroff, Jean, und John L. Comaroff. „Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa“. *Anthropological Forum* 22, Nr. 2 (1. Juli 2012): 113–31.

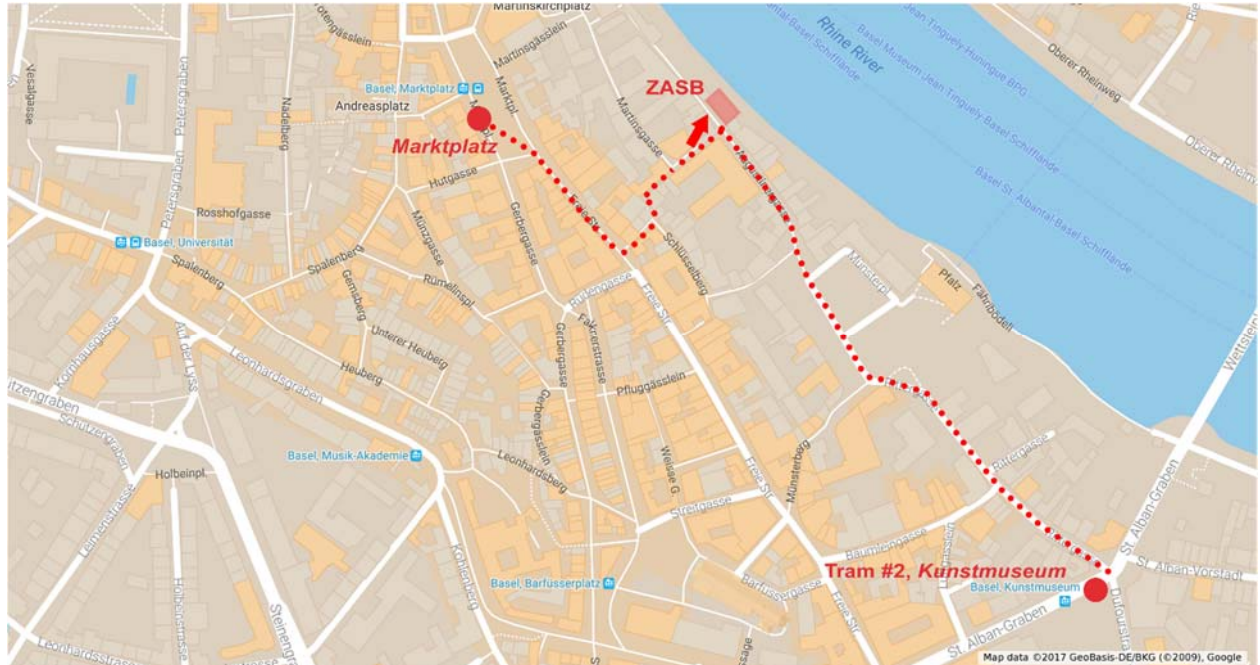
Connell, Raewyn. „Northern Theory: The Political Geography of General Social Theory“. *Theory and Society* 35, Nr. 2 (1. April 2006): 237–64.

Nagar, Richa. „Footloose Researchers, 'Traveling' Theories, and the Politics of Transnational Feminist Praxis“. *Gender, Place & Culture* 9, Nr. 2 (1. Juni 2002): 179–86.

Centre for African Studies Basel/Zentrum für Afrikastudien Basel

Rheinsprung 21, 4051 Basel, Switzerland

Room 00.004 (ground floor, right)



From the train station, take tramway #2 to “Bad. Bahnhof”/“Eglisee” and get off at “Kunstmuseum”. Walk up Rittergasse, Münsterplatz and Augustinergasse.



Participants

Adeniyan	Bernard		University of Ibadan	
Akissi Olga Danièle	Konan		Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques en Côte d'Ivoire	
Asamoah	Prince		University of Basel	
ASASIRA	SIMON RWABYOMA		OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA	
Cheruiyot	David		Karlstad University	
Greiner	Andreas		ETH Zurich, Chair for History of the Modern World	
Hansine	Rogers Justo Mateus		Bayreuth University	
Joanny	Belair		University of Ottawa	
Manqoyi	Ayanda		University of Cape Town	
Merron	James		Center for African Studies Basel	
Mtshemla	Sinazo		University of Fort Hare	
Muianga	Stelia Rosa		Universidade Pedagogica	
NARAME	Ernestine		Université de Lausanne	
Owoseni	Adewale Oluwole		University of Ibadan	
Sampayo	Melanie		University of Bern	
Scaglioni	Marta		University of Bayreuth/University of Milan-Bicocca	
Tadesse	Julian		Leibnitz Institut Moderner Orient /University of Basel	
Tiwa	Dany Franck A.		Universities of Kent, Hamburg and Utrecht	

REPORT: 3RD BASEL SUMMER SCHOOL IN AFRICAN STUDIES (BASEL, 21.–28.06.2017)

■ JULIAN TADESSE

Prior to the 7th European Conference on African Studies, the Centre for African Studies Basel held the 3rd Basel Summer School in African Studies from 21–28 June 2017 under the title “African Studies and Africanists: Whence the Gaze?”. The Summer School aimed at stimulating and consolidating a new perspective on African Studies with a focus on African Studies as “area studies.” It invited participants to engage with a new perspective on African Studies and thereby aimed to engage both conceptual and methodological questions related to “Africa as an object of knowledge and its contribution to general scholarship” as the call for applications stated. As such, questions revolving around scholar’s normativity and the conceptual basis as well as validity of research endeavors were posed as central themes of the Summer School.

The following is not meant to be a minute account of the proceedings of the Summer School, but rather a more general reflection on the (im)possibility of finding a new perspective on African Studies. The pursuit to rid African Studies of outdated perspectives and (neo)colonial tropes as such is not new or novel but remains important as ever, however the question remains if African Studies as an area study can correct externally imposed narratives or if it is as much implicated in reproducing Africa as the other, deviate, failed, incomprehensible etc. In this vein African Studies has been diagnosed with being in continued state of crisis, its representational politics has been questioned and its implication in the imbalance of power in the production of knowledge about Africa has been asserted.

The Summer School was held at the new premises of the Centre for African Studies on Rheinsprung 21 (picture: Mbaraka Matitu).

The 3rd Basel Summer School aimed to critically interrogate questions of locality of the researcher and its relation to her or his gaze on Africa, and thereby can be understood as contribution to the aforementioned debates around representational power in African Studies. In total 18 participants, largely—but not exclusively—from African countries were selected through a competitive application process to discuss their work in relation to the Summer School’s theme with their peers and a panel of senior researchers consisting of: Rose-Marie Beck, Sophie Oldfield, Mamadou Diawara, Elísio Macamo, Giorgio Miescher and Noor Nieftagodien.

The wide range of research topics presented by the participants with case studies about the relation between humans and animals among the Yoruba, how to explain changes in fertility rates in urban Angola, the complications of family obligations in



South Africa and instances of mob justice in Lagos, to mention a few, reveal the disparate nature of African Studies. The aforementioned research projects make important contribution to disciplines such as Philosophy, Population Studies, Anthropology and Criminology, so what is the benefit of subsuming them under the umbrella of African Studies?

What precisely constitutes African Studies has been topic of numerous at time contentious debates which cannot be summarised here, suffice to say as an area study its main endeavour is the interdisciplinary research on the people and societies of Africa. In its contemporary practice African Studies are more often than not studies of Africa “conducted elsewhere by non-African scholars and often in their genesis rooted in earlier colonial trajectories” as Henning pointedly summarises in a footnote of an essay discussing the question “What is African in Africa(n) Studies?”. It is then perhaps not surprising that some African scholars argue that African Studies is a largely Eurocentric endeavour. For example, Adebayo sustains that “mainstream African Studies has constituted itself into a tool for mastering of Africa by others whilst offering very little by way of how Africa might master the world and its own affairs.” Taking such criticism seriously, it is perhaps necessary to examine the structural reasons that hinder scholars of African origin to be a vocal participant in knowledge production on Africa.

While locality of the researcher—central to the call for applications for the Summer School—did not feature as a main point of discussion in the workshop itself, conversations with my colleagues based at universities in African countries reminded me again of the privileged position of scholars in the North vis-à-vis their colleagues in the South. In many African universities the basic resources to conduct proper research, like access to academic literature and appropriate working spaces is more often inadequate. Furthermore, many of the participants hailing from African countries were enrolled in PhD-programs at European universities. While the individual achievement is commendable, it also points towards the insufficient availability of graduate programs



Participants with faculty member Prof Rose Marie Beck of the University of Leipzig (picture: Mbaraka Matitu).

at African universities and the reality that degrees conferred by European-American universities are in general more highly regarded. The latter in turn highlights the hegemonic position of the global North in the overall knowledge production complex, including the circulation of academic knowledge in academic journals, at international conferences and in workshops. Thereby scholars based at academic institutions in the North, enjoy a much more powerful position to determine what “Africa” constitutes as an object of knowledge and what scholarship on Africa should be about.

Given these enormous challenges, what can a summer school under the banner of a new perspective on African Studies contribute to alleviate such crucial issues? While a

summer school alone of course will not be able to dismantle the structural imbalances outlined above, it nevertheless can serve as a place for dialogue and inspire critical thought among participants. Thereby it can also be taken as an argument in defence of African Studies, which as an interdisciplinary endeavor allows crosscutting dialogue more readily than the disciplines themselves. Further what constitutes African Studies is not solely determined by structural forces, but also by its practitioners, including junior researchers as they represent the next generations of scholars. In an increasingly competitive realm of academia, scientific careers depend also on how well we talk in public—this is also a crucial skill in communicating our ideas to our colleagues and the wider public. In this context it should be noted that outside of scholarly debate and exchange, the Summer School also included an Advanced Study Skills module which allowed participants to enhance their academic presentation skills under the guidance and input of professional coaches.

All participants of the Summer School were required to submit a paper for presentation at the European Conference on African Studies (ECAS), held in Basel from 29 June–1 July 2017. As all papers were accepted for presentation at ECAS on their own merits, participants could not only put their newly honed presentation skills to the test immediately, but also present their ideas to a large academic audience. Certainly, their individual presentations have contributed to bringing forth new perspectives in African Studies.

Julian Tadesse is a research fellow at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin and PhD candidate at the Centre for African Studies, University of Basel. Contact: Julian.tadesse@unibas.ch.