



Basel, June 2021

**5th Basel Summer School in African Studies
(13-17 September 2021, online)
How Political is Knowledge?**

The Centre for African Studies Basel ZASB calls for applications for the Basel Summer School in African Studies 2021. The Summer School aims at stimulating and consolidating a new perspective on African Studies with a focus on African Studies as “area studies”. It addresses themes that are theoretically, conceptually and methodologically relevant to the pursuit of reflection on the intellectual challenge of Africa as an object of knowledge on the one hand and its contribution to general scholarship, on the other.

The goals of the Summer School are the following:

- Allow PhD students to engage critically with new theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in African Studies and make them relevant to their work under the guidance of senior scholars.
- Encourage PhD students to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge on Africa to improve our theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools both in the disciplines and in interdisciplinary work.
- Foster among PhD students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars to pursue knowledge and scholarship.
- Stimulate junior scholars to work towards carving a space for African Studies in the broader field of scholarship and, in this way, helping African Studies to claim a place right at the centre of knowledge production.

The Summer School is organised by the Centre in Basel every second year, alternating with the ZASB-CODESRIA Summer School held on the continent. The Centre offers the Summer School in the framework of the activities of the Graduate Network African Studies Basel (funded by swissuniversities).

Concept note

No serious scholar of African affairs can afford to ignore the role politics has played in shaping the language of science addressing Africa and the goals of the knowledge produced. It has been a staple of African critiques of knowledge production on the continent to suspect that such knowledge is consistent with discourses speaking to regimes of power and truth likely to represent Africa problematically. The question arising from this concerns the methodological implications for research in Africa.

There is a political economy of knowledge production in Africa requiring critical reflection. It raises general questions about the relationship between knowledge and politics. To address these questions, however, we have to reflect even more intensely on what it means to claim that knowledge is political. Does it mean that knowledge is a function of the exercise of power? What are the standards based on which we can validate knowledge? More broadly speaking, what is the basis of intelligibility in scholarly conversations?



The Basel Summer School in African Studies 2021 invites applications from doctoral students interested in exploring these issues as part of a larger framework of engaging with methodological challenges in African Studies. Applicants should challenge themselves to look critically into their work and ask themselves what role any of the issues listed below play in it:

1. What normative assumptions underlie your research?
2. What regimes of power and truth, but also resistance and contention, speak through your research?
3. What does the idea that “knowledge is political” mean in your research, and how do you go about it?
4. How “objective” are the standards for the validation of your research findings?

Applications should include a letter of motivation with a clear statement on how the applicant approaches the challenge of “objectivity” in the social sciences and humanities bearing on African Studies.

Advanced Study Skills workshop: How to write a book review

Through writing and submitting a book review to a scholarly journal, this Advanced Study Skills workshop focuses on participants’ writing habits, their competences, and output. It inculcates the write – review – revise cycle and combines this with the writing and talking about writing cycle (the latter divided into talk about the writing process and talk about the written text). Prior to the workshop, participants should submit a proposal for a book review they plan to submit to a journal. During the workshop, they will analyse the features of book reviews, paying attention to the overall structure of the genre as well as its most prominent linguistic features, such as condensation and evaluation that balances criticism and praise. During and after the workshop, participants will give and receive peer feedback as well as receive feedback from the lecturer, thereby supporting them to submit their review to a suitable journal, should they so wish.

Faculty

Conveners

- *Elisio Macamo*, Professor of African Studies at the University of Basel
- *Ralph Weber*, Professor of European Global Studies at the University of Basel

There will be further resource persons to facilitate specific sessions.

Advanced Study Skills

- *Stephan Meyer*, Deputy of the Director and Coordinator English, Language Center of the University of Basel



Application

Participants will be selected on the strength and merits of a two-page application letter in which they state how they approach the challenge of “objectivity” in the social sciences and humanities and what role the four issues listed above play in their research.

In addition, applications should include a CV of the applicant (via the upload link in the application form).

Applications must be submitted via the online application form:

www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool/apply

The deadline for application is 9 August 2021.

Practical information

The summer school is open for PhD students enrolled in Switzerland and abroad.

The summer school takes place online via Zoom.

For PhD candidates enrolled at a university in Switzerland or in Africa, the Summer School is free of charge. The participation fee for all other PhD candidates is CHF 100.

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