



Basel, May 2025

7th Basel Summer School in African Studies (8-12 September 2025)

Honouring Mudimbe: Rethinking Research through African Thought

The Centre for African Studies Basel ZASB calls for applications for the Basel Summer School in African Studies 2025. The Summer School aims to stimulate and consolidate a new perspective on African Studies, focusing on African Studies as an area of study. 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, making them relevant to their work under the guidance of senior scholars.
- Encourage PhD students to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge about 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 out a space for African Studies in the broader field of scholarship, thereby helping African Studies claim a central place in knowledge production.

The Summer School is organised by the Centre in Basel every second year, alternating with the ZASB-CODESRIA Summer School held Dakar, Senegal. The ZASB offers the Summer School in the framework of the activities of the Graduate Network African Studies Basel.

Concept note

The passing of Valentin-Yves Mudimbe marks the end of an extraordinary intellectual journey, but also presents a powerful invitation to think anew. As one of Africa's most incisive thinkers, Mudimbe left us not only a formidable critique of colonial knowledge systems but also a challenge: to imagine a different future for research on and from Africa, one in which African conceptual creativity plays a central role.

Mudimbe's legacy spans literature, philosophy, history, anthropology, and beyond. His concepts – most famously the “Colonial Library” and “*The Invention of Africa*” – expose the epistemological scaffolding through which Africa has been interpreted, disciplined, and constrained within global knowledge systems. Yet for Mudimbe, critique was not enough. His more profound aspiration was to open intellectual space for African thought to emerge as a resource for global scholarship.

This Summer School seizes the moment of his passing not to commemorate, but to respond. It invites a new generation of researchers to grapple with the foundational question Mudimbe raised: *How can African Studies contribute not only to better knowledge about Africa, but also to the renewal of the very tools through which we produce knowledge, namely concepts, theories, and methods?*



We will explore how African Studies can become truly generative and transforming disciplines from within by integrating African epistemologies, worldviews, and critiques into the heart of scholarly practice. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on their doctoral projects through this lens, asking:

1. How do inherited disciplinary concepts fare when applied to African contexts?
2. What do African critiques of knowledge reveal about the assumptions underpinning our methods?
3. In what ways can African intellectual traditions contribute to the reimagining of the social sciences and humanities?
4. What would it mean to work not just *on* Africa, but *with* African thought?

By grounding these questions in the work of Mudimbe and other African thinkers, the Summer School seeks to inspire a shift from African Studies as an object of critical inquiry to African Studies as a source of conceptual innovation. This is not simply a call for decolonisation in the abstract. It is an invitation to rebuild, to move beyond critique toward the challenging but exciting task of conceptual reconstruction. It is a call to imagine African Studies not as a marginal or auxiliary field, but as a site of theoretical production with relevance far beyond its geographic remit.

We hope to create a space where doctoral students feel empowered to experiment intellectually, to belong to a community of scholars committed to critical rigour and conceptual risk-taking, and to see themselves not only as researchers *of* Africa, but as thinkers *from* Africa—regardless of their location.

Advanced Study Skills workshop: How to write a book review

Through an introduction to the basics of 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). Participants submit a proposal for a book that they discuss in the Summer School and for which they draft a review article 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. Participants will give and receive peer feedback as well as receive feedback from the lecturer, thereby supporting them to create a first draft in a guided process. Those participants who wish to submit a review article to a scientific journal by the end of the year are offered individual support after the Summer School provided.

Application

The Summer School will have a maximum of 16 participants.

Participants will be selected based on the strength and merit of a motivation statement (max 7500 characters), in which, in addition to demonstrating how their work would benefit from participation, they propose a book they have read or would like to read for discussion at the Summer School. This proposal should explain the book's potential relevance for the participants' research and highlight the (expected) significance for current epistemic debates in African Studies and the Social Sciences and Humanities more broadly.

The selection criteria are:

- Originality and quality of the PhD project
- Applicant's ability to engage with the conceptual, theoretical and methodological key questions of the Summer School
- Academic and professional merits and potential of the applicant



Applications must be submitted via the online application form:

www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summer-school/apply

The deadline for applications is 6 July 2025.

Practical information

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

The summer school takes place on-site in Basel, Switzerland.

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 150.

Please note that we cannot offer travel grants for this summer school. PhD candidates enrolled at African Universities will have the opportunity to apply for a grant for participation in the CODESRIA/ZASB summer school scheduled for 2026.

Contact: veit.arlt@unibas.ch / pascal.schmid@unibas.ch

Website: www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summer-school