



Basel, June 2019

4th Basel Summer School in African Studies (9-13 September 2019) **The Value(s) of Science. The normative order of African Studies**

The Centre for African Studies Basel (CASB) calls for applications for the Basel Summer School in African Studies 2019. 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:

- Give PhD students the opportunity 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 the task of improving our theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools both in the disciplines as well as in interdisciplinary work.
- Foster among PhD students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars in pursuit of 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 CASB-CODESRIA Summer School held on the continent. It is offered in the framework of the Graduate Network African Studies Basel (funded by swissuniversities).

Concept note

The Basel Summer School in African Studies 2019 addresses the issue of the normative order in African Studies. According to received wisdom, values would appear to play no role in science. At any rate, it is assumed that the role played by values should be a limited one. The epistemological background to this assumption is the perennial distinction between objectivity and neutrality. In this connection, it is argued that proper knowledge production is only possible if researchers and scholars prevent their values and interests from influencing their work. The best way to accomplish this consists in adhering to strict standards of objectivity making the validity of scientific claims a function of methodology and logic, rather than a function of the normative commitments of knowledge producers. Yet, it is fair to argue that debates in the methodology of the social sciences over the past two hundred years have revolved around these assumptions. Debates between opposing fields, i.e. those who claim that science should be value free and those who counter that science is never value free on account of how science has been deployed to pursue the interests of some over others have fired the imagination of those participating in the discussions.

African Studies is a field where this issue is of particular interest. The field came into being as part of the European colonial project. In this sense, knowledge production on and in Africa has always been tied to the political, economic and cultural interests of the nations funding it. Even in our days, when African nations



are independent, have their own researchers and seek to produce knowledge themselves, it appears to be the case that values and interests continue to play a role. The requirement, for example, that research is made relevant to policy in the context of development concerns seems to secure a place for the values and interests of dominant nations in that development is a concept conjuring up normative expectations concerning the right way to live. The grand narrative of the Enlightenment bearing on how reason could ensure progress and human improvement lurks beneath the call for policy relevance.

There is a sense in which calls for the decolonization of the African mind are reactions to how Africanist scholars perceive the role of values in science. When African scholars doubt whether scientific knowledge drawing from what they assume to be a “Western” epistemology is able to render African worlds intelligible, they may be expressing a discomfort with the extent to which the knowledge produced might be speaking to a normative order laid down by “European” values. While this may sound ideological, there possibly is a methodological argument behind it. Accounts of the world are as much about concrete phenomena as they are about unspoken aspects of those phenomena. The key finding, for example, that corruption undermines African development is an apt description and explanation of state fragility in Africa. At the same time, however, it suggests that – all things being equal (i.e. global structural conditions) and the history that constituted most African countries as developing nations – without corruption things might look different. Alas, it is clear that no comprehensive understanding of Africa’s development challenges is possible without taking history into account. The *ceteris paribus* clause does not hold much water, either. The methodological challenge here is that the conceptual categories through which we seek to retrieve the world direct our attention to the data lending them substance when the challenge in fact is to critically engage with the categories themselves.

Engaging with conceptual categories means to uncover their normative foundations. Science is a highly normative enterprise in that its ultimate goal, producing knowledge to render the world intelligible, constitutes a broad commitment to some notion of a better world. Part of the challenge of doing African Studies, therefore, should be a commitment to uncovering the values underlying science not to dispose of them, but to harness them to even better research. The title of the Summer School is cast purposefully in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, it speaks to the fundamental value of science and, on the other hand, to how interests come together to lend legitimacy and purpose to science.

Key questions

The basic goal of the Summer School is to address this ambivalence by inviting proposals which look into “the value(s) of science” from several angles:

- Which values underlie development research and how do they affect methodological choices?
- How do ethical commitments shape how researchers frame their research?
- Is there a politics of Western epistemology and, if so, what would be a scientific African Studies’ approach to problematize it?
- What is the precise methodological argument behind decolonial calls for delinking?
- How do the values of science inform its value?
- What role is played by ideological commitments in the validation of knowledge?
- How do ideas of a better life or world inform research projects?



Advanced Study Skills workshop: Composing Attractive Abstracts

To draw readers to publications or gain access to conferences, writers need to compose attractive abstracts that spark interest in their research. The Advanced Study Skills workshop offers guidance on the content, structure and language conventions of conference and research article abstracts in the social sciences and humanities. At the end of the workshop, participants are expected to have gained independence in writing ready-to-submit abstracts for conferences or journals.

The Advanced Study Skills workshop covers:

- Content: how to organize information
- Conciseness: how to meet the word limit
- Cohesion: how to guide readers from opening to conclusion
- Claims: how to sound objective and believable.

In addition to these core points, issues identified in participants' own writing may be addressed.

Faculty

Conveners

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

Additional resource persons who will facilitate specific sessions.

Advanced Study Skills

- *Stephan Meyer*, lecturer for English for academic purposes and Deputy Director of the Language Center of the University of Basel

Application

Participants will be selected on the strength and merits of a two-page application in which they choose one of the key questions listed above and explain how their research relates to it. In addition, applications should include a CV of the applicant.

Applications must be submitted via the online application form:

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

The deadline for application is 15 August 2019.

Practical information

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

The fee for participation is CHF 100. It includes snacks and lunch at the course days. Transportation and accommodation is not included.

Contact: pascal.schmid@unibas.ch

Website: www.zasb.unibas.ch/en/summerschool