4th CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa

Theme: The Normative Order in African Studies

Venue: Dakar, Senegal

Date: 14-18 September 2020

Applications deadline: 17 July 2020

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and The Centre for African Studies in Basel (CASB) call for applications for their 4th Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa. The Summer School is offered with the generous support of the Oumou Dilly Foundation (Switzerland) in cooperation with CODESRIA and aims at strengthening the links between the CODESRIA community of scholars and scholars from the African Studies community in Switzerland.

The overall objective of the Summer School is to stimulate and consolidate interdisciplinary approaches to research on Africa, but also on other regions of the world undertaken from within the African continent. It focuses on African Studies as an instance of area studies and seeks to identify themes that are theoretically, conceptually and methodologically relevant to the reflection on the intellectual challenge of Africa as an object of knowledge and its contribution to general scholarship while inquiring into the relevance of the findings to African approaches to other regions.
The goals of the Summer School are the following:

- Give PhD students and emerging scholars the opportunity to engage critically with new theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in African Studies and enhance the relevance of the methods to their work under the guidance of senior scholars.
- Encourage PhD students and emerging scholars to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge on Africa to the task of improving theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools both in the disciplines as well as in interdisciplinary work.
- Foster among PhD students and emerging scholars a sense of belonging to a community of scholars in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship.
- Stimulate emerging 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 center of knowledge production.

**Concept note**

The Summer School 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 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 presently, when African nations are independent, have their own researchers and seek to produce knowledge themselves and for 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 in Africa 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?

Application procedures
The Summer School is open for PhD students and emerging scholars enrolled and working at Higher Education institutions in any country. Applications from PhD students registered in African and Swiss universities and in the following disciplines are highly encouraged: Social Anthropology, Sociology, History, Religion, Philosophy, Gender Studies and Political science. Travel, accommodation and meals during the Summer School will be provided for participants from African Institutions.
Those wishing to be considered for participation should submit a five-page concept paper which should highlight: (a) what they are working on (b) how their work relates to the theme of the Summer School;(c) their expectations from the Summer School should they be selected. In addition, applications must be supported by an application letter, a CV, two letters of recommendation from the candidate’s institution of affiliation and a copy of the applicant’s passport.

Applicants are requested to use the following link https://codesria.org/submission/ to submit their proposals.

For specific questions, please contact:
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