



Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique
Conselho para o Desenvolvimento da Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais em África

مجلس تنمية البحوث الاجتماعية في أفريقيا

Zentrum für
Centre d'Etudes
Centre for



Afrikanstudien Basel
Africaines de Bâle
African Studies Basel



Interdisciplinarity and Methodological Challenges in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa Summer School and platform to recruit PhD candidates Dakar, 1st to 6th September, 2014

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and The Centre for African Studies Basel (CASB) call for applications for the *1st CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa*. The Summer School sets out to stimulate and consolidate interdisciplinary approaches in 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. It is offered with the generous support of the Oumou Dilly Foundation (Switzerland) in cooperation with CODESRIA and aims at strengthening the links between the community of scholars organized in the CODESRIA community and scholars from the African Studies community in Switzerland.

The Oumou Dilly Foundation supports individuals from Africa in their longing for education, especially for higher academic education. The CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies serves as a platform for the foundation to identify potential candidates for a scholarship for PhD studies at the Centre for African Studies Basel.

Interdisciplinarity and methodological challenges in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa

More and more research funding institutions are demanding that research projects are designed in interdisciplinary ways. This seems to express the realization that traditional disciplines – in the social sciences and humanities as well as in the natural sciences – have become too small to accommodate within the questions which they traditionally ask all the aspects that phenomena in the real world possess. To be sure, this is an issue that has been at the centre of debate for over twenty years, if not longer. It was initiated in the humanities, where discussions over postmodernism led to a questioning of the Canon and, by implication, of the organization of knowledge production in the wake of the Enlightenment. The ball on this discussion was set rolling by Jean-François Lyotard's discomfort about "meta-narratives" which, as discussion came to reveal, drew much of their plausibility and strength from the belief that the project of Modernity, with its narrative of progress and reason, was self-evidently true. Many of those who seized the word to speak about the order of knowledge had been socialised in colonized societies, where the upbeat narrative of Modernity had always been viewed with a great deal of scepticism. They soon became suspicious of the structure of knowledge production itself. As Edward Said, just to name one, noted in "Culture and Imperialism", it was impossible to speak about the English language and, by extension, English literature, without a look at the historical conditions within which it had come to be a symbol of Nation and English culture (Said 1993). Colonialism was one of those conditions. Jemie Chinweizu, in literature, and Kwasi Wiredu, in philosophy, had earlier drawn attention to the need to decolonize the African mind. Their appeal to a more sovereign attitude towards knowledge production within the context of the African continent was echoed by Paulin Hountondji's call for the dismantling of the

international division of intellectual labour – which turned African scholars into producers of empirical material which European and North American scholars theorised about. It prefigured developments which later created a critical mass for the issues raised by Jean-François Lyotard. These insights sharpened the senses of scholars to the artificial nature of disciplinary boundaries as it dawned on many of them that disciplines did not only enable the organization of knowledge production in theoretically, conceptually and methodologically sound ways, but also helped mask historically engineered relations among cultures at the same time that they helped constitute them. The insights also made room for a more assertive stance from the rest of the world in matters pertaining to knowledge production not only about themselves, but also about what the knowledge produced in their contexts could contribute towards the improvement of theoretical and conceptual tools in the disciplines. Some of these issues were explored in greater detail in the volume edited by, among others, Valentin Mudimbe on Africa and the Disciplines (Bates, Mudimbe, O’Barr 1993).

Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Coloniality of Knowledge/Power approaches became important ways of questioning the authority of the Western Canon beyond a simple dichotomy of social/cultural sciences vs. natural sciences and the relative merits of disciplinary boundaries. In fact, such critical approaches raised questions about the soundness of knowledge produced within theoretical frameworks, which ignored the historical conditions that enabled the constitution of scientific objects, Africa being one of those objects. Indeed, against such a background it seems almost impossible to think of African Studies without reference to such concerns. By their very nature African Studies, and Area Studies in general, have always defied disciplinary boundaries, even if on the whole they are held afloat by the contribution of single disciplines. To ask a sociological question is to ask a historical one; to ask a medical question is to ask an anthropological one; to posit the possibility of economic growth is to suggest ways of interpreting history and how it has constituted geography. Area studies are an interdisciplinary endeavour, of which scholars are aware to different degrees.

In choosing this topic for the inaugural CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa we aim at placing these degrees of awareness at the centre of discussion. More specifically, we intend to enquire into the extent to which young researchers are aware of the interdisciplinary nature of their study, whatever disciplinary subject it has been formulated in, and how a better awareness of this may be beneficial to their work. From a theoretical point of view we are asking questions about the real scope of the theoretical framework within which researchers working on and from Africa formulate their questions and expect to have answers.

The aims of the Summer School can be broadly defined in the following manner:

- The Summer School allows PhD and MA students, under the guidance of senior scholars, to engage critically with new theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa in general and make them relevant to their work;
- stimulates PhD students to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge on Africa to the task of improving our theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools both for the disciplines as well as for interdisciplinary work;
- fosters among PhD students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship;

- encourages junior scholars to work towards carving a space for African Studies or Area Studies in Africa in general in the broader field of scholarship and in this way helping to place itself right at the centre of knowledge production.
- Serves to identify young scholars who wish to develop or finalise a PhD-project in the field of African Studies and Area Studies in general and to give them access to a scholarship in Switzerland to develop a relevant approach.

Summer School Director: Elísio Macamo (CODESRIA/CASB)

Workshops: Participants will engage in four workshops: Theory & Interdisciplinarity; Working with Concepts; Methodological Issues; Theory Construction. Each participant will be assigned to one of four working groups preparing inputs for discussion in one of the four afternoon-sessions. The members of each group will exchange by email and will hold a preparatory meeting on the weekend preceding the summer school.

Invited Speakers: tba

Application & Registration: Participants will be selected on the strength and merits of a five-page application in which they explain (a) what they are working on, and (b) how their work relates to the topic of the Summer School. Applications must be supported by a CV and two letters of recommendation. Please submit your application as PDF to to Aminata.Diaw@codesria.sn and veit.ardt@unibas.ch (until 22 June 2014).