

# Call for Panels / Round Tables VAD 2020

## *Africa challenges*

**Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, 22. – 25.9. 2020**

Africa is challenging to the rest of the world: it challenges notions and concepts of development, modernization, capitalism and democracy. Africa also has historically presented and continues to present a challenge to academic practice, to established academic routines as well as to entrenched disciplinary perspectives. This conference explores the challenging nature of Africa in the past, the present, and in possible futures from multiple perspectives.

In the first place there are challenges of everyday life in the context of rapidly increasing global entanglements, which pose unprecedented and specific problems to African populations. We invite contributions which explore a variety of different challenges and their histories: educational systems which are failing the masses of young people, non-functional administrations, tax systems and legislation, an extremely uneven distribution of wealth mostly favouring urban elites, rural populations facing unpredictable climatic conditions, massive rural-urban migration as well as the fastest urban growth worldwide that generates issues concerning security, governance, adequate living conditions, and many others. In addition we invite contributions that show that Africa is not only a victim of circumstances but comes up with unexpected solutions for its multiple problems, be it the adoption of new mobile technologies, coping with the health crisis, or accommodating high numbers of refugees.

Secondly, we invite panel proposals dealing with the challenges created by the new multi-polar world order. How have these challenges emerged historically, and which impact has the proliferation of role models and conflicting norms had in Africa? Will concepts like democracy, human rights, the free market economy and the sustainable use of natural resources remain relevant in the future, or do we witness the re-emergence of the developmental state under a more autocratic rulership inspired by China? Africa also challenges Western notions of religion and faith, and many see Africa as the world leader of Christianity in the coming decades. Much to the dislike of many European leaders, Africa challenges common approaches to migration and “brain drain” by explicitly promoting the exodus of skilled migrants who send back substantial remittances. The networks of people and companies within and beyond the continent form an economy of extraordinary dimensions and thus challenge Western ideas that Africans should be trained primarily to build up their home countries while staying there. We invite contributions from a wide array of disciplines that explore the manifold challenges outlined above.

Finally, the conference also asks if and how African studies worldwide have been able to address the fundamental problems African countries face. Africa has been a challenge to the question of how to provide a coherent narrative about the multifaceted nature of the continent. Beyond academic debates, Africa often remains represented in false dichotomies. But Africa is also a challenge to the issue of knowledge production, and to how and where and by whom this takes place. Given the widespread popular image of a continent that “cannot be understood” – what is the role of scholarship on and in Africa to counter this exceptionalism?

Delegates may only convene one panel, although they may also make one presentation or be a discussant in another panel. No panel may run for more than two sessions of 90 minutes. For organizational reasons panel convenors must have secure funding for their own conference attendance.

Proposals must consist of:

- a panel /round table title
- name, institutional affiliation and email addresses of panel convenor or convenors
- a short abstract of less than 300 characters
- long abstract of less than 300 words

**Deadline: 15.11. 2019**

Please send your proposal to [info@vad-ev.de](mailto:info@vad-ev.de)