



Course Code & Title	LISS Knowledge Production in and about Africa		
Convenor(s)	Dr Portia Roelofs, King’s College London		
Institution	KCL	Department	DPE
Academic Year	2025-26	Term	Spring
Number of Sessions	4	Length of Session(s)	2 Hours
Day, Date		Start : End	Room Location
15/5/2026 29/5/2026 12/6/2026 26/6/2026		14:00 – 16:00	Bush House (SE) 2.05 , King’s College London
Enrolment Link:	Available to book on SkillsForge from 2 March 2026 . Click the course link to log in and register. Questions? Visit our Training FAQ here: Frequently Asked Questions - LISS DTP (liss-dtp.ac.uk)		

Course Description

The objective of this course is to both expand students’ contextual knowledge of research and academia in and about Africa, but also to equip them to think both critically and constructively about their own agency as a researcher, with practical tools and pathways for building denser connections with scholars, activists and fellow students on the continent and in the diaspora. It is by no means comprehensive nor does it present final answers to the challenges raised. Rather, through engaging with a mix of more critical and more aspirational readings, it aims to support students to engage proactively with issues of positionality, partnership and hierarchical relations throughout their research careers.

This is not a theory course, in the sense that it does not provide an immersion in the anti-colonial and critical theorists whose ideas have motivated much of the decolonising agenda (i.e. Franz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Kwame Nkrumah). Instead, it draws on theoretically informed critiques and innovations within academia to help students critically reflect on their own research methodologies and wider academic practice. In this sense it focuses on the ‘how to’ of doing research in and about Africa, in a way that takes seriously ongoing debates about how different steps in the ‘research supply chain’ could be done in more ethical, egalitarian and effective ways.

Institutions that have long been critiqued by scholars as upholding and reproducing problematic North-South relations - including university ethics committees, research council funding boards, conference organisers and journal editors – are increasingly demanding that researchers demonstrate sensitivity to these issues and competence at navigating them. For example, the British Government’s £1.5 bn Global Challenges Research Fund that ran from 2015-2021 required that applicants demonstrate how funding will result in ‘meaningful



and equitable relationships' between UK-based academics and partners in the Global South. The workshop will serve as a space for students to develop their skills and background knowledge, with an eye to meeting these emerging demands, whilst critiquing their limitations and the pathologies these new incentives can create.

The course concludes by examining contemporary concrete examples of African-led knowledge production and initiatives for UK-based academics to engage productively with African scholars and Africa-based research institutions. These workshops will also allow students to build a network of students studying Africa across LISS DTP.

Course Outline

Session 1: History and Theory

The course starts by situating today's research ecosystem within a longer trajectory of knowledge production in and about Africa. It offers students an opportunity to think about the history of their specific discipline's engagements with Africa, linking it to a wider understanding of the evolution of higher education in African countries and the origins of today's egregious inequalities of resources, access and prestige. It explores the agency of African scholars and their responses to major Western interventions such as colonialism, structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and overseas development aid, as well as domestic challenges such as authoritarianism. Students will get an introduction to key nodes of knowledge production on the continent such as CODESRIA and the re-establishment of the Makerere Institute of Social Research in Kampala (Mamdani 2018), and the way that these institutions connect past and future aspirations for the continent. Moreover, this historical review will furnish us with key conceptual tools: for example Tamale and Oloka-Onyango's (1997) idea of the 'export' of theory from the North to the South, and Paulin Hountondji's (1990) concept of the 'scientific dependency' of Africa on the Global North.

Session 2 and 3: Critically analysing the institutional landscape of knowledge production

For this session we will critically survey the institutional landscape of knowledge production through the different stages in the research supply chain: from 1) the emerging requirements that grants and funding should be applied for in partnership with global south institutions, to 2) the political economy of data collection and collaboration with 'locally-embedded' researchers, to the dissemination of research via 3) publication and 4) conferences and professional associations.

In preparation for these two middle sessions of the workshop students should sign up to focus on one of these four areas. They will work in groups to prepare a short presentation on the key readings in that area and present critical reflections on how the issues raised play out in their particular disciplines or thematic areas of research. The students are free to choose the form, medium and argument of the presentation (i.e. PowerPoint slides, structured dialogue, worksheet handout etc).

Session 4: New initiatives to re-centre Africa in the global knowledge production ecosystem and next steps for your own research

The final workshop of the course offers a survey of contemporary concrete examples of African-led knowledge production and initiatives for UK-based academics to engage productively with African scholars and Africa-based research institutions. We will think about how our current political-technological conjuncture opens up new possibilities for trans-national interactions, for example via hybrid events, whilst new challenges to international engagement are emerging in the form of increasingly restrictive visa regimes. Students will reflect on how to incorporate their learning from the course into their research plans going forward.



Pre-Course Preparation

Students for whom a critical or decolonial to studying Africa is completely new, will benefit from reading the following as an entry into this broader discussion:

- Wainaina, Binyavanga. "How to Write About Africa." *Granta* 92 (blog), 2006.
<https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>

General course readings:

- [Full article: Ethical?! Collaboration?! Keywords for our contradictory times](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13696815.2019.1635437) Intro and a couple of the short contributions according to interest
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13696815.2019.1635437>
- Kang, Alice J., and Peace A. Medie. "Global South Scholars Are Missing from European and US Journals. What Can Be Done about It." *The Conversation*, July 29, 2018.
<http://theconversation.com/global-south-scholars-are-missing-from-european-and-us-journals-what-can-be-done-about-it-99570>.
- Gebremariam, Eyob Balcha. "The Primacy of Epistemic Justice for a Transformed Knowledge Production Ecosystem in Africa." *Perivoli Arica Research Centre*, April 26, 2022.
<https://parc.bristol.ac.uk/2022/04/26/the-primacy-of-epistemic-justice/>.

Students may also wish to prepare for the course by familiarising themselves with some of the ongoing public debates centred on the continent:

African Arguments: <https://africanarguments.org/>

African Voices, African Arguments <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/african-voices-african-arguments-2/>

Africa is a Country <https://africasacountry.com/>

The Republic <https://rpublic.com/>

Students will be required to participate in all four sessions and read all essential texts in advance. Students should use Google Scholar and their University library search engines to access the readings. If your institution does not have access to a particular reading please e-mail the course convenor for PDFs. Students should be prepared to spend some time between sessions working independently and in groups as relevant.

Eligibility

This course is suitable for students at any stage of their PhD. It is aimed at students who are working on Africa in some way, whether through primary data collection or engagement with secondary sources.

The course is designed with a variety of student profiles in mind. For students who have little prior critical engagement with Africanist literatures, for instance who think of their work in thematic or disciplinary terms through which they 'just happen' to be engaging with African case studies, it will offer an introduction allowing student to situated their work in the broader sweep of epistemic relationships between Africa and the Western academy. For students who are already more familiar with various debates about the nature of colonial and post-colonial knowledge production the course will be an opportunity to engage close readings of some key texts and think constructively about options for meaningfully engaging African researchers and institutions in their research journey.



London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

Students are also very welcome to join even if their specific project does not directly engage with African case studies or literatures.

It is aimed at social scientists (politics, anthropology, geography, law, sociology, security and conflict studies, history) but would be of interest to students from other disciplines who will be doing archival work or fieldwork with human participants in Africa. Please note, the course will often use debates which are explicitly anchored in 'African Studies' however, this does not mean that students must themselves identify as being 'in' African Studies, as we will explore the relevance of these debates for social science at large.

Number of students

Min: 6

Max: 18