

**REMINDER CALL FOR PAPERS: ISTR AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY RESEARCH NETWORK
CONFERENCE**

**Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa
23-27 August 2011**

NEW DEADLINE AND NEW INFORMATION ON TRAVEL GRANTS

NEW DEADLINE In response to requests from members, the deadline for submitting abstracts has been postponed to **29 APRIL**.

WANT TO BE PART OF THIS CONFERENCE? Read the attached description of the theme for the conference and submit an abstract (maximum 500 words) to **Prof Ebenezer Obadare** (Department of Sociology, Kansas University) at obadare@ku.edu Please provide contact details (at least an email address and telephone nr) and your institutional affiliation.

VENUE The venue for the conference is the prestigious **Stellenbosch Institute for Advance Study** (STIAS). The conference venue is renowned for its excellent food and hospitality. It is located on the scenic Mostertsdrift farm in the heart of Stellenbosch and is a walking distance from the university and the historic centre. Additionally, Stellenbosch is only a short drive from Cape Town International airport (30minutes) and Cape Town (50 minutes).

CONFERENCE FEES A generous grant from Stellenbosch University will cover the cost of the venue and the lunches so there will be **no conference fees**. We want to thank Stellenbosch University for their support!

TRAVEL GRANTS Travel grants are available for a limited number of participants. Please indicate when you send your abstract that you would be interested in being considered for the travel grant so that we request additional documentation as required.

SPEAKERS Renowned experts **Adam Habib**, **Alan Fowler** and **Mark Sidel** will speak at plenary sessions.

SPECIAL SESSIONS Researchers are also encouraged to submit proposals for special sessions consisting of 3 to 4 presentations. In such case we will need the abstracts and details of each of the presenters as well as a one page description of the theme for the sessions. For instance, there have been suggestions that "African Philanthropy" and "Civil Society NGOs, and the Crisis of the State?" would be important topics to explore in more depth.

WORKSHOPS We are planning a one-day workshop on recent experiences with NGO regulation. We are also planning focused workshops around one or two specific themes and will circulate a list of potential topics to the distribution list.

CIVIL SPACES IN AFRICA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Past and present narratives of civil society in Africa have been, by and large, about 'space' - political, material and symbolic. Inspired by stirring Eastern European examples of anti-state mobilization, the earliest discourses focused on the modalities of reclaiming space for civic agency from authoritarian state forces. Hence the interest, variously, in thematics such as 'expanding', 'opening up' or 'liberating' 'democratic space'. In these early, even heady, articulations, the goal of civil society was envisaged as a simple one: to contest and open up the public arena (one that, until then, the state had largely monopolized) as a way of embedding modes of participation crucial for civic renewal and political regeneration. In a sense, the history of civil society agitation and organizing in Africa over the past three decades is in fact the unfolding of this particular struggle. It invited an inevitable reaction by state elements reluctant to relinquish many of the advantages carried over from colonial governmentality.

Yet, contestations for space are, by definition, always ongoing. Thus, gains and losses are hardly ever permanent, with strategic positionality always subject to the thrust and parry of local, regional and, increasingly, transnational political, cultural and economic forces. Current developments in various parts of Africa provide a vivid illustration of this complex. They create a backdrop for much needed reflection on the current history of space, spaces and space-making in African contexts. Moreover, because of the external normative characteristics of much research on the continent, they also invite a more careful examination of the endogenous nature of civil society and civic agency.

It is against this background that we invite papers that attempt to deepen scholarly understanding of African civil spaces in their cultural, social, demographic, economic and political pluralities and particularities. Original, conceptual or empirically-grounded contributions are welcome from a variety of social-oriented disciplines - including, but not limited to: history, sociology, economics, demography, geography, cultural studies, literature, and political science.

Papers may be guided by the following questions, though creative subversions are strongly encouraged: What characterizes civil spaces in Africa? What, if anything, is distinctive about such spaces? How have spaces metamorphosed within globalizing geo-political movements and dominant economic processes? How have these forces encouraged or thwarted the production of governable and/or ungovernable spaces across the continent? How can we understand fundamental and emergent forms of civic mobilizing - in primary associational life, in social movements, in mutuality, in charity, in philanthropy? How do we measure their presence and effectivity on the social landscape? What are forms and contours of the new spaces of assertion dominated by anti-state forces? How do we account for their emergence against the background of state retrenchment? In what ways do virtual and material spaces interact, and how do they reinforce or contradict one another? What are the implications of the virtualization of politics for the understanding of state praxis and citizenship? What roles are women, underprivileged and oppressed groups playing in the marking and delimitation of new socio-economic and political spaces? How do new forms of sociality enable us to comprehend the distinctions between private and public spaces, and how tenable are those distinctions?