Fieldwork Bursaries for registered PhD Students based in Gauteng, South Africa

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Deadline: 23:59 on Monday 20th October 2025

The Beyond Binaries project, a collaboration between the University of the Witwatersrand School of Social Sciences, IRD—the French National Research Institute, and IFAS-Research, invites current PhD students registered at Gauteng-based South African universities to apply for one of ten R10,000 fieldwork bursaries. These bursaries can be put towards expenses associated with fieldwork and ethnographic research – interviews, participant-observation, focus groups etc – to support the successful completion of doctoral dissertations. This is a fieldwork specific call, with the ultimate goal being to support the next generation of researchers who are doing innovative and original fieldwork in Africa. All disciplines within the Humanities, broadly conceived, are welcome here.

The Beyond Binaries project responds to the inadequacy of entrenched binaries—north/south, west/rest, civilized/uncivilized—in explaining today's interconnected challenges, from climate change and pandemics to authoritarianism and economic inequality. Instead, it explores global circuits of influence and exchange, where ideas, practices and solidarities circulate multi-directionally, disrupting deficit framings of Africa and Eurocentric knowledge economies. More information on the project is included below.

To apply for a fieldwork bursary you need to:

- **Complete an application form via this hyperlink.** Your fieldwork plan should include a rough sense of how you propose to spend the available funding. You should also outline how you intend address larger questions relating to research ethics and knowledge production as part of your planned fieldwork. If your fieldwork takes place in another African country you will also need to confirm how you will resolve any national requirements associated with getting your research officially approved.
- **Email 1) your current CV and 2) your ethics approval paperwork/certificate** to Beth (2987838@students.wits.ac.za) and Léa (Lea.Jobard@frenchinstitute.org.za).

Applicants must be:

- Prepared to complete your funded fieldwork by July 2026.
- Based in Gauteng and available to travel to Wits for events associated with the project, including a conference at Wits in September 2026 focusing upon ethics, extraction and knowledge economies.
- Prepared to draft a short paper which reflects upon your fieldwork experiences, and to contribute to events where these papers will be refined with a view to eventual publication in a special issue/collection (the project team will provide mentorship, training and editorial support to help develop your paper).

We look forward to hearing about your fieldwork! Successful applicants will be notified in the first half of November. If you have any questions, please contact Beth and Léa.

Beyond Binaries: Global Circuits of Influence, Exchange and Knowledge Production

This project is organised around three main themes:

- *Global circuits of influence and exchange* – moving beyond binaries to rethink power, hierarchy, solidarity and patterns of global influence.
- *Transformation and decolonization* – finding ways to integrate decolonial theory with decolonial praxis, and thereby prevent the reduction of decolonisation to a self-selecting theoretical abstraction.
- *Fieldwork, knowledge and partnership* – confronting extractive practices, the possibilities and pitfalls of partnership, imagining equitable collaboration, and interrogating funding streams and their effects.

This funding call is primarily focused on the third and final theme. One of the main areas where the rubber hits the road when it comes to decolonisation is fieldwork and ethnography. Within Africa, fieldwork often brings to mind the figure of the "native informant", who is typically positioned as an unacknowledged assistant/broker/translator for European experts who show up at "exotic" locations for short trips to ask locals questions and then return home to build their careers. In recent decades there have been numerous attempts to move from extraction to equity. These include projects focusing on training local researchers, paying researchers and respondents fairly, naming all researchers involved in published outputs, and structuring projects and outputs in ways that respond to/reflect local priorities and perspectives, such as participatory action research. These kinds of initiatives directly respond to decolonial models and critiques, but they have also repeatedly run up against entrenched power structures and hierarchies. Decolonising fieldwork is yet again one of those things that primarily treated as a discretionary choice. Some researchers try for equity. Others continue with extraction. Some researchers argue that it is best practice to materially compensate respondents for their time and expertise. Others respond with bewilderment when the issue of compensation comes up.

Fieldwork and research are often undertaken by teams and international networks, rather than singular individuals, which in turn raises difficult questions about the nexus between partnership and knowledge production. Partnerships come in many different forms. In the best possible scenario, parties come together as freely consenting equals over an agreed upon project in which they have mutual interest, and from which they can derive mutual benefit. Yet very few real-world partnerships actually align with this scenario. The key sticking points are once again power and position. Some partners invariably have a much larger voice than others when it comes to priorities, funding, project design, and outputs. As a general rule, international partnerships are organized along two main axes: 1) partnerships between academics in different corners of the globe, and 2) partnerships that reach beyond the ivory tower to include business, civil society, government, and/or international organizations. While these partnerships sometimes emerge organically, their overall design and operation tends to be strongly affected by both funding streams and institutional hierarchies. This has never been a straightforward meritocracy, wherein the most compelling ideas and proposals rise to the top of the pile, but instead needs to be understood in sociological terms.

The vast majority of funding for international partnerships comes from wealthy countries. And this is also where funds tend to be administered and audited. As Loren Landau has argued, this creates incentives for research partners based in Africa to gravitate toward short-term "piece work", where researchers are commissioned or subcontracted to execute a small piece of a larger project, yet have little or no capacity to influence the design of the whole. This, in turn contributes to "a global division of labour where southerners become data collectors while northerners produce knowledge and offer scholarly and policy critiques" (Landau 2012, 563). And since this "piece work" is frequently short term, there are further incentives to produce results that align with expectations since this is the most likely route to future commissions. Anything which appears as "radical" or "unconventional" to funders is unlikely to find favour.

By zooming in on practices of knowledge production, particularly about the African continent and research on Africa writ large, we want to open space for discussions around ethics, methods, and knowledge economies which speak to decolonial priorities in practical terms. By emphasizing the importance of situated knowledge and cultural context, we want to explore possibilities for sharing best practices and mutual learning across disciplinary, institutional, national and continental boundaries. We do not expect to be able to transcend existing hierarchies and power structures anytime soon, but we do hope to be able to expose their effects and to identify alternative pathways to partnership. By providing funding support to the next generation of scholars and inviting them into a conversation regarding best and better practices when it comes to fieldwork we seek to seed the ground for larger reflections and reforms when it comes from (hopefully) moving away from extraction and toward greater equity and ethical integrity.

Some further readings

Horn, L., S. Alba, F. Blom, M. Faure, E. Flack-Davison, G. Gopalakrishna, C. IJsselmuiden et al. 2022. "Fostering Research Integrity through the Promotion of Fairness, Equity and Diversity in Research Collaborations and Contexts: To- wards a Cape Town Statement (Pre-conference Discussion Paper)." OSF Pre- prints, May 16. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/bf286.

Kalinga, C. 2019. "Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place: Navigating Global Research Partnerships in the Global South as an Indigenous Researcher." Journal of African Cultural Studies 31 (3): 270–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019 .1630261.

Landau, L. B. 2012."Communities of Knowledge or Tyrannies of Partnership: Reflections on North–South Research Networks and the Dual Imperative." Journal of Refugee Studies 25: 555–70. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fes005.

Makana, S. 2018. "Contested Encounters: Toward a Twenty-First-Century African Feminist Ethnography." Meridians 17 (2): 361–75. https://doi.org/10.1215/ 15366936-7176516.

Marchais, G., P. Bazuzi, and A. A. Lameke. 2020. "'The Data Is Gold, and We Are the Gold-Diggers': Whiteness, Race and Contemporary Academic Research in Eastern DRC." Critical African Studies 12 (3): 372–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 21681392.2020.1724806.

Moosavi, L. 2020. “The Decolonial Bandwagon and the Dangers of Intellectual Decolonization.” International Review of Sociology 30 (2): 332–54. https://doi.org/10 .1080/03906701.2020.1776919.

Nyamnjoh, F. 2012.“‘Potted Plants in Greenhouses’: A Critical Reflection on the Resilience of Colonial Education in Africa.” Journal of Asian and African Studies 47 (2): 129–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909611417240.

Nyenyezi, A., A. Ansoms, K. Vlassenroot, E. Mudinga, and G. Muzalia, eds. 2020. Bukavu Series: Toward a Decolonising Research. Leuven, Belgium: PUL Presses.

Phadi, M., and N. Pakade. 2016. “The Native Informant Speaks Back to the Offer of Friendship in White Academia.” In Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friend- ship in South Africa, edited by S. Walsh and J. Soske, 288–307. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Smith, L. T. 2012. Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. Lon- don: Zed Books.

Vogel, C., and J. Musamba. 2022.“Towards a Politics of Collaborative Worldmaking: Ethics, Epistemologies and Mutual Positionalities in Conflict Research.” Ethnography. First published online, April 21. https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381221090895.

Zavala, M. 2013.“What Do We Mean by Decolonizing Research Strategies? Lessons from Decolonizing, Indigenous Research Projects in New Zealand and Latin America.” Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 2 (1): 55–71.