Trans-species Perspectives on African Studies

Background

In the last couple of decades an ‘animal turn’ has occurred in the social sciences.1 There is good reason for this: Scientific evidence abundantly and convincingly shows that humans and animals only differ in degree and not in kind. Animals, or non-human animals, are sentient beings with personalities; animals are persons and individuals that experience (social) realities. Like humans, animals are a ‘someone’ and not a ‘something’ and therefore exist within the sphere of morality.2 Consequently, it has become evident that ‘the social’ (in the social sciences), cannot be assumed to be uniquely human. This has led to a call to study and research social issues including animal perspectives. This is a huge intellectual challenge, theoretically, analytically and in terms of research methodologies: It requires every aspect of ‘doing the social sciences’ to be fundamentally rethought and redeveloped in the direction of trans-species approaches. It is high time for African Studies to join the chorus of minds contributing to these multilayered and multifaceted debates.

Goal and activities

By starting this new Collaborative Research Group, the ASCL will take the lead in thinking through this intellectual challenge. Its activities will focus on discussing what trans-species perspectives on African Studies could entail and how these perspectives would contribute to our understanding of socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political realities in African Studies, where the non-human animal is an unavoidable presence, physically, metaphorically, ideologically, spiritually and even in its silence and invisibility.

The CRG should be a space where curiosity reigns, where participation does not require expertise, but an openness and willingness to be intellectually challenged, if not shaken, and an eagerness to fundamentally rethink some of the general and cherished assumptions within African Studies regarding the in- or exclusion of non-human animal in its research, theorizing, methodological choices and analyses.

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