

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES



*The Politics of the  
Unprivileged*

*Fellowship Program  
2005—2006*

*Project On The Authority Of  
Knowledge In A Global Age  
(2004-2007)*



The International Center For Advanced Studies (ICAS) invites applications from scholars from any country to spend the 2005-2006 academic year at New York University. ICAS brings together a community of scholars to pursue research, writing, and intellectual exchange around a common theme. The community is international in membership, interdisciplinary and comparative in intellectual strategy, and global in scope.

There is an annual theme for the fellowship program. In **2005-2006** it is **The Politics of the Unprivileged**, which is the second year of the three-year project on "The Authority of Knowledge in a Global Age." This brochure describes both the annual theme and the larger project. ICAS fellowships provide a stipend of \$35,000, on an academic year basis, plus travel expenses. In some cases semester fellowships are also available. The application deadline is **January 6, 2005**.

### **Politics of the Unprivileged**

For most of the world, the rules of constitutional politics remain, at best, an abstract promise. Theories of democracy describe the aspirations possible for only a small number of people with privileged access to elite institutions.

On the actual terrain of politics, however, where local communities deal with the diverse powers of government, people are inventing new ways to negotiate how they should be governed.

Many scholars now study the politics of the unprivileged, but little of this work is known to orthodox social science. What can be learned from these new political forms? Do they repeat the traditional patterns of everyday resistance to power, or have the extensive policing and bureaucratic powers of post-colonial and post-socialist states produced new kinds of political subject, summoning up new subaltern strategies?

Should the existing categories of political analysis—democracy, civil society, interest groups, and so on—be expanded to include these contemporary political forms? Or should we recognize, as some scholars now argue, that the existing categories refer to a historically narrow set of arrangements (including elite politics in many

countries outside the West)? Instead of expanding those terms, can we learn from the politics of the unprivileged new concepts and categories for the study of politics? These questions are posed within the broader frame of the “Authority of Knowledge in a Global Age”.

## **The Authority Of Knowledge In A Global Age**

In the first decade of the twenty-first century new fears have come to haunt the politics of the West, unforeseen in the post-Cold War confidence of the 1990s. The project on “The Authority of Knowledge in a Global Age,” which ICAS is sponsoring for three years, 2004-2007, has as its starting point the current sense of unease about the future that haunts the politics of the West and the daily lives of most people in the global south. The twentieth-century promise of progress no longer provides a rubric for making sense of their lives, nor does it point to a viable political response.

This circumstance offers a profound challenge to the forms of social knowledge produced in the university. What kinds of critical thinking does the new politics of uncertainty call for and make possible? How do the established disciplines of social science and their methods of analysis frame significant issues for public debate? What are the powers and limits of these frames? What possibilities and risks arise from new interactions between governments and the academy, or between university experts and the lay knowledge of activists and concerned groups? Will American social science continue largely to export its forms of thought to the world, or are there new ways to learn from the political and intellectual debates of other regions?

The fate of the social sciences, both in the United States and abroad, has been the subject of wide discussion. Some argue that the production of knowledge is trapped in the disciplines, where the questions to be addressed are defined more by technical debates within increasingly specialized fields than by transformations in the wider world. The neglect of area studies, it is said, has isolated the social sciences from sources of knowledge outside Europe and North America.

Academics in many countries appear to be marginalized from the public sphere, whose nature has been transformed by the spread of political think tanks, the increasing privatization of intellectual property, and the growth of the internet. The division between the humanities, the social sciences, and scientific expertise challenges our ability to grasp contemporary events, in which the cultural and the technological combine to create new socio-technical worlds.

The project on “The Authority of Knowledge in a Global Age” will bring together an international community of scholars whose work examines the current global conjuncture through the study of particular crises, transformations, cultural forms, social innovations, and modes of contestation. While contributing to the understanding of local experiences of the present political condition, the goal of our collective discussions will be to consider the changed conceptions of the social world, new political vocabularies, alternative understandings of agency and personhood, altered representations of the past and the future, and new claims for justice that arise from these experiences and from our efforts to explain them. The project also seeks to better understand the production, circulation, and legitimation of social knowledge on a global scale.

The successive annual themes correspond to one of the classical divisions of social theory—the economic, the political, and the social. The intention is not to take these categories for granted, nor to reproduce the divisions between the disciplines of economics, political science, and sociology that were established in reference to them. Rather, it is to examine how the territory marked by each of these founding categories is being questioned or redefined, from within the social sciences and from outside. And it is to ask what new intellectual projects and innovative political understandings result from and contribute further to this process of redefinition.

### **Year 1 (2004-2005): The Rule of Markets**

The idea of the market represents an analytic model for understanding the world and a political project for its remaking. The dual role of the market concept, at the center of recent politics and recent intellectual endeavor, offers the opportunity

to explore the ways academic, technical, and political worlds interconnect.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of the self-regulating market became the centerpiece of global economic policy representing a universal rule and local discipline that no national government was supposed to escape. Understood as the mechanism by which competing individual interests are brought into equilibrium, the market also became a general social scientific metaphor. Its use spread from economics across a number of disciplines to explain almost any aspect of political and social life, from the rules of democratic politics to the calculus of family relations.

By the turn of the twenty-first century the neo-liberal political project had encountered a series of global crises and movements of opposition. In social science, equilibrium models have been challenged from within economics, and by other disciplines that have been able to show how markets are the product of specific histories, social networks, power relations, and cultural understandings. Scholars in science studies have examined how economic models help create the methods of calculation that make increasingly complex economic interactions possible. This opens up the question of how academic and techno-political worlds interact.

### **Year 3 (2006-2007): Reconfiguring the Social**

The possibility of something called “society” and its place as a dynamic element of human experience was once the founding problem of sociology. But the discipline came to take this object for granted as an underlying principle of intelligibility, and turned increasingly to study the numerous micro-sociologies, understood as manifestations of this underlying whole. Today, the social often appears only as the networks or strategies connecting individual agents, or as the “social capital” these individuals accumulate.

In many fields of study, however, the concept of the social has been reexamined. In social studies of science, the separation between the social and the technical, or the human and non-human, is a problem to be explored, rather than a boundary given in advance. In ecological studies, human actions form part of a larger eco-system, whose transformations reshape the social world.

Among anthropologists and historians, new questions have been raised about the understanding of the non-

secular: If social science is founded upon a commitment to the secular nature of social knowledge, what problems does this entail for understanding the majority of the world's populations, whose lives are experienced as interactions with the divine or other forms of supra-human agency? Must the boundaries of the social world coincide with the limits of the secular? In these and other ways, a variety of contemporary scholarship is reexamining the boundaries of the social asking how they are constituted, transgressed, and transformed.

## THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

ICAS fellowships provide a stipend of \$35,000, on an academic year basis, plus travel expenses. Fellows are eligible for NYU faculty housing.

**Center Fellowships:** Scholars and intellectuals at all career stages who hold a Ph.D. degree or equivalent professional experience are invited to apply for appointments as Center Fellows. The fellowship is for a full academic year, from September 1 through May 15, although on occasion semester fellowships are available.

**Postdoctoral Fellowships:** Scholars who have completed the Ph.D. degree within the previous three years are invited to apply as ICAS Postdoctoral Fellows. Postdoctoral Fellows are expected to teach one course during their residency. The fellowship is for a full academic year.

Application forms and further information are available on the Center website at [www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/icas](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/icas), or by contacting ICAS at the address on the back of this brochure. For 2005-2006 fellowships, **the application deadline is January 6, 2005.**

## Project On The Authority Of Knowledge In A Global Age

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## THE CENTER

The International Center For Advanced Study is located in a historic building on Washington Square, in the heart of Greenwich Village. The Center staff and fellows have their offices here.

ICAS welcomed its first year of fellows in 1997-98. Since then its residential fellowship program has supported more than one hundred yearlong fellows and short term visiting scholars. Email and return visits have sustained contacts among fellows, forming a rich, diverse, and growing international network of scholars. The Center's first two projects were devoted to "Cities and Urban Knowledges" (1997-2001) and "The Cold War as Global Conflict" (2001-2004).

The project on Cities and Urban Knowledges created an international community of scholars devoted to the interdisciplinary study of the city in a pluralized world, while the project on the Cold War as Global Conflict reexamined the dominant paradigms of the Cold War as an episode in national and international history. It questioned the usual chronology and geography of the Cold War as an East-West conflict that began with the end of World War II and ended in 1989, an interpretation that provided no way of understanding decolonization, national liberation, social revolution and civil war, development and underdevelopment, and the racial and ethnic conflict seemingly endemic to the international system that followed the Cold War. (See the ICAS website for fuller descriptions of these projects.)

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The Authority of Knowledge In A  
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