

---

## FORUM

---

### **Africa in the Globalizing World – A Research Agenda**

**Ulf Engel, Matthias Middell, David Simo,  
and Katja Werthmann**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Area Studies waren lange Zeit vorwiegend im globalen Norden institutionalisiert und fundierten die dortigen Weltbilder durch empirische Forschungen über andere Teile des Globus. Am Beispiel Afrikas diskutiert dieser Beitrag die Neuausrichtung einer Forschungsagenda unter der Bedingung eines anwachsenden Interesses an anderen Weltregionen in Afrika (ebenso wie in Asien und Lateinamerika). Afrika war lange Zeit eher das Objekt von global dominanten Kräften, denn ein Subjekt, dessen eigene Beobachtungen und Beziehungen wichtig gewesen wären. Dieser in der globalen Wissensproduktion nach wie vor anzutreffende Euro- oder Westzentrische Blick hat seine Grundlage seit langem verloren, aber er prägt nach wie vor in vielerlei Hinsicht die Position afrikanischer Intellektueller in der globalen Wissensproduktion. Afrika ist in den Datenbanken des sozialwissenschaftlichen Wissens der am stärksten unterrepräsentierte Kontinent. Afrikanische Autoren interessieren oft noch immer vorrangig als Auskunftspersonen für Afrikawissenschaften, die ihre Diskurszentren andernorts haben.

Dabei haben Intellektuelle in Afrika im Zuge der post-kolonialen Wende in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften längst alternative Perspektiven auf die Welt und Afrikas Rolle in derselben formuliert – etwa unter Stichworten wie „Southern theory“ oder „theory from the South“. Erst mit der Gründung afrikanischer Forschungszentren, die sich mit Weltregionen außerhalb Afrikas befassen, wird allerdings deutlicher, wie sich Afrika intellektuell längst *in der Welt* verortet.

For a long time, Africa has been the object, rather than a subject, of globally dominant forces that considered their own observations and relations to be paramount. African studies ranked prominently among the so-called area studies, which emerged in various steps

during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; during the period of high imperialism at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, when colonialism required further information about the colonized regions of the world; and during the Cold War, when the dominating superpowers organized knowledge in order to establish or maintain hegemony over the globe.<sup>1</sup> These various layers have not simply followed one after another; they have instead differed according to national variants of knowledge production about non-Western areas. Such a periodization suggests that area studies primarily follows a political agenda, and there is indeed some serious reasoning to bring this interpretation to the fore. However, more detailed analysis also demonstrates the tensions between political and scholarly intentions in the development of area studies; such analysis provides a much more nuanced picture, as Torsten Loschke has shown in his analysis of US-Latin America studies and the impact of the notorious Title VI programme.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding that the concept of Eurocentrism (or Western-centrism) – which can still be found in global knowledge production – lost its standing long ago, it still determines the position of non-Western intellectuals in such global knowledge production.

This is particularly true for African scholars. In social science databases, Africa is the least represented continent.<sup>3</sup> African authors are often only of interest as resources for African studies, whose hegemonic centres of discourse are situated elsewhere. This occurs despite the fact that in the context of the post-colonial turn in the humanities and social sciences African intellectuals for many years have already formulated alternative perspectives on the world and Africa's place within it – for instance under the catchword “Southern theory” or “theories from the South”. However, this knowledge order does not receive the necessary attention in the centres of knowledge production in the Global North. It is only with the recent establishment of African research centres that deal with other non-African world regions that it becomes clearer for non-Africans how Africans intellectuals are defining the continent's place in the world. The question now is whether the emergence of area studies outside the traditional West has an impact on the development of both area studies and social sciences or not, and how to make this challenge fruitful for a global community of scholars.

In the following short description of a possible research agenda, we are interested, firstly, in the “discovery of the world” from an African perspective by incorporating knowledge produced by area studies in Africa. Clearly, this endeavour has to go beyond the traditional subject of African studies, which in the beginning prioritized the investigation of languages, arts, culture, and literature, and later adding history and social sciences. What

1 J. D. Sidaway et al., Area studies and geography. Trajectories and manifesto, in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 (2016) 5, pp. 777–790; and D.C. Engerman, American Knowledge and Global Power, in: *Diplomatic History* 31 (2007) 4, pp. 599–622.

2 T. Loschke, *Area Studies Revisited. Die Geschichte der Lateinamerikastudien in den USA, 1940 bis 1970*, Göttingen 2017.

3 This was the not very surprising outcome of the first World Social Science Report, which was launched in 2010: “Knowledge divides” (<http://www.worldsocialscience.org/activities/world-social-science-report/the-2010-report/>)

is still lacking is the combination of classical linguistic and anthropological approaches (which remain important and fruitful) as well as the widening of perspectives with the newly developing practices emerging since the 1990s in history and the social sciences concerning the aims of going global. This includes the integration of African history into global history,<sup>4</sup> which reaches far beyond the colonial period.

Secondly is the search for a new conjunction of theories about global processes as well as empirically as well as theoretically ambitious studies of the role African societies, people, and institutions play in these processes.<sup>5</sup> To this end, the interwoven nature between African discourses and European, Asian, and North and South American discourses should be addressed, together with the reactions from Africa towards its increasing co-presence in an ever more integrating world. To be clear, this integration is not free of conflict; it is quite to the contrary.

For us, the term co-presence addresses the experience created through an ever-increasing proportion of the world's population living closely together from other world regions as a result of migration processes, of stronger integration of production and value chains, and of a more integrated media system that brings news from faraway places almost in real time to our screens and the devices through which people communicate via social media. Co-presence draws attention to the fact that more and more people in their daily lives are becoming aware of something that has already existed for many decades, but often in a rather abstract understanding: the global condition.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to previous historical epochs where global entanglements were also at work, this global condition means that for more than 150 years or so individual societies have been no longer able to opt out of global interaction. Under such a condition, a new space of regulation – international space – has emerged that has become the arena for societies and world regions to negotiate their place in the world. Co-presence results in an intensification of negotiating values and norms. This intensification, furthermore, not only leads to “friendly” hybridizations and expressions of cross-cultural solidarity and friendship, but also to harsh debates, xenophobic reactions, and all kinds of stress with the “other” – perceived or real.

Area studies can be seen as one form among many others for organizing such collective reactions and for mobilizing the necessary knowledge production for such reactions. Interestingly, in some world regions the global condition has immediately led to massive

4 For overviews on the development of global history, see, e.g., J.H. Bentley (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of World History*, Oxford, New York 2011; D. Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History. Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*, Cambridge, New York 2011; M. Middell and L. Roura, *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York 2013.

5 “Globalization” has become a buzzword since the early 1990s and insofar it is difficult to identify the limits and borders of globalization theories. What becomes more and more clear is a confusion between serious research on global processes and a public discourse – if not an ideology – of an alternative-less telos in current world affairs. Both are using the same wording but give it a completely different meaning. No doubt, knowledge from area studies has enriched empirical studies in global process, but the majority of studies remains focused on the centres of the current world economy in North America, Western Europe, and East Asia.

6 C. Bright and M. Geyer, *The Global Condition 1850–2010*, in: D. Northrop (ed.), *A Companion to World History*, Malden, Mass., Oxford, Chichester 2012, pp. 285–302.

investment into the development of area studies, while other world regions – among them Africa – have been rather “defined” and “interpreted” by African studies located outside the continent. This does not mean that there has been no intellectual productivity or a lack of institutionalization in Africa. Quite to the contrary, research on African knowledge production demonstrates very well that knowledge addressing the challenges of the continent or its individual societies has been produced in Africa with great success, that is to say it successfully competes with less informed analysis produced outside of Africa. The point we would like to make here is not so much concerning the knowledge production itself, but the role this knowledge played, and still plays today, in the international space for the negotiation of norms and rules of global processes. Because things are changing, our proposal for a new research agenda tries to take these transformations as the point of departure for future rewarding research and reflection.

It increasingly becomes evident that African countries are not alone in developing their own area studies. Nevertheless, developments on the African continent are part of a broader trend that thrives at emancipating the very nature of area studies from its Western origins. It is no longer a privilege of the Western academe to have an institutionalized form of looking at the world and, step by step, “discovering” it. Area studies – or its equivalents – are recognized worldwide as a prerequisite in order to be prepared for confronting transregional and global entanglements. In this preparation, it does not matter whether this is an intentional dialogical process between the Global North and the Global South or whether it simply is imposed on traditional Western area studies.

## 1 Surveying the World from Africa

These days, African academes are characterized by at least one existing development: The establishment of knowledge orders based on area studies about other world regions. First, and in very general terms, the changing world order after the end of the Cold War<sup>7</sup> has paved the way for a wider reception of perspectives coming from post-colonial studies concerning the production of knowledge about world regions. Due to these changes as well as the spatial turn and its critique of methodological nationalism,<sup>8</sup> dominant epistemes have been challenged.<sup>9</sup> This has laid the foundations for the development of

7 J. Agnew, *Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics*, in: *Annals of American Geographers* 95 (2005) 2, pp. 437–461; G. Sørensen, *What Kind of World Order? The International System in the New Millennium*, in: *Cooperation and Conflict* 41 (2006) 2, pp. 343–363; S. Chaturvedi and J. Painter, *Whose World, Whose Order? Spatiality, Geopolitics and the Limits of the World Order Concept*, in: *Cooperation and Conflict* 42 (2007) 2, pp. 375–395; M. Middell and U. Engel (eds.), *World Orders revisited*, Leipzig 2010; and U. Engel, F. Hadler and M. Middell (eds.), 1989 in a *Global Perspective*. Leipzig 2015.

8 See J. Agnew, *The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory*, in: *Review of International Political Economy* 1 (1994) 1, pp. 53–80; Agnew, *Sovereignty Regimes*; and N. Brenner, *Beyond state-centrism? Space, territoriality, and geographical scale in globalization studies*, in: *Theory and Society* 28 (1999) 1, pp. 39–78.

9 A. Appadurai, *Globalization and Area Studies: The Future of a False Opposition* (= The Wertheim Lecture 2000), Amsterdam 2000; H.D. Harootunian, *Postcoloniality's Unconsciousness/Area Studies' Desire*, in: M. Miyoshi and

“critical area studies”,<sup>10</sup> in the form of dialogical and cooperative knowledge production as well as the questioning of some dominant epistemes. In Africa, existing traditions of self-narration in different scientific fields in the continent are now taken up in order to create African centres of area studies.

Second – and in response to the growing importance of relations between African countries and the emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (i.e. the original BRICs), as well as the “Next Eleven”<sup>11</sup> – African systems of higher education have started constructing knowledge of the world, namely other world regions such as Europe, Asia, and Latin America. It is only fairly recently, and outside of the humanities, that the various segments of area studies have been employed to respond to these themes. During the past decade, more or less, institutions have been set up in African countries to study Africa or other world regions more systematically. In this process, some regional hubs have emerged, such as Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Accra in Ghana, and a series of places in South Africa such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Stellenbosch.

A pioneer in this field has been the Centre for Chinese Studies, established in 1982 at Stellenbosch University.<sup>12</sup> This was followed by the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa, founded in 2007 at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.<sup>13</sup> Academics from various African universities are working with the collaborative research group on the Indian Ocean of AEGIS, the network of European African studies centres.<sup>14</sup> In addition, South African think tanks, such as the Johannesburg-based South African Institute of International Affairs or the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, are increasingly looking at the BRICS (now also including South Africa) and other “emerging” countries.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, existing metanarratives are being reassessed by looking at African societies through the lenses of other regions.<sup>16</sup>

H.D. Harootunian (eds.), *Learning Places. The Afterlives of Area Studies*, Durham NC and London 2002, pp. 150-174; and N.L. Waters, *Beyond the Area Studies Wars: Toward a New International Studies*, Dartmouth 2000. These processes are analysed by the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 980: “Transfer of knowledge from the ancient world to the early modern period” at FU Berlin. URL: <<http://www.sfb-episteme.de/konzept/index.html>> (accessed 16 June 2017).

- 10 This concept emerges in parallel to the arguments by Jie-Hyun Lim from Sogang University in Seoul on the necessity of critical global studies, which are different from mainstream global studies developed at North American universities: J-H Lim, *What is Critical in Critical Global Studies*, in: *global-e* 10 (2016) 16 (<http://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/march-2017/what-critical-critical-global-studies>)
- 11 See D. Wilson and R. Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs: The Path to 2050*, New York etc. 2003, p. 4. Just as the BRICs, the “Next Eleven” was also coined by Goldman Sachs’ chief economist J. O’Neill.
- 12 This had political reasons as the apartheid government diplomatically recognized Taiwan. It was only in 1996 that South Africa changed its allegiance towards the People’s Republic of China. See Stellenbosch University, Centre for Chinese Studies, <http://www.ccs.org.za> (accessed 16 June 2017).
- 13 See University of the Witwatersrand, Centre for Indian Studies in Africa, <http://cisa-wits.org.za> (accessed 16 June 2017).
- 14 See AEGIS Collaborative Research Group “Indian Ocean”, <http://www.aegis-eu.org/crg-indian-ocean-members> (accessed 16 June 2017).
- 15 See South African Institute of International Affairs (Johannesburg), <http://www.saiia.org.za> (accessed 16 June 2017). Either framed as the “Next Eleven” or the MINT countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey).
- 16 On Durban and Cape Town seen through the Indian Ocean perspective, see U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie et al. (eds.), *Durban and Cape Town as port cities – reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean*, special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42 (2016) 3.

In addition, there is a European Studies Association of Sub-Saharan Africa, based at the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation at the University of Pretoria, which is essentially financed with European money.<sup>17</sup> In May 2016, it was reported that the University of Ghana's Centre for Social Policy Studies is planning to establish centres for European studies, Latin American studies, and Asian studies.<sup>18</sup> Since the 1970s, philology departments dedicated to the study of European and American languages and cultures have been established in many African, especially francophone, countries, where they have been working to elaborate epistemological perspectives on these areas. This has led, for example, to the establishment of pan-African academic organizations in the field of German studies, such as the Südafrikanische Germanisten Vereinigung (South African Association of Germanists) and the Germanistik in Afrika Südlich der Sahara (German Studies South of the Sahara). Working together over the last ten years, these organizations have organized joint conferences in countries throughout Africa as well as in Germany.

In contrast, however, very few African universities maintain African studies programmes. Those few existing are often linked to politics or ideological claims to pan-Africanism. Thus, already in 1961 an Institute of African Studies was founded at the University of Ghana, which offered a master's programme.<sup>19</sup> At Addis Ababa University, in the city where the African Union, as well as its predecessor the Organisation of African Unity, is based, a master's programme in African studies was launched in 2007, followed by a PhD programme in 2016.<sup>20</sup> In South Africa, there are a number of recent African studies programmes, for example the Centre for Africa Studies (CAS) at the University of the Free State that was founded in 2007. The Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town was relaunched in 2012 after being inactive for ten years.<sup>21</sup> And, finally, there are academic journals focusing on Africa as a region – for instance, *African Studies*, which is edited by a group of people based at the University of the Witwatersrand and in 2016 celebrated 76 years of publishing.

## 2 A Research Programme – “Africa in the Globalizing World”

These dynamic developments are raising the question of how to engage with these newly established centres for the study of Africa and other world regions. On which scienti-

17 See University of Pretoria, Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, <http://governanceinnovation.org/esa-ssa/> (accessed 16 June 2017).

18 See Citifmonline, <http://citifmonline.com/2016/05/28/university-of-ghana-to-establish-centre-for-european-studies/>. See also Centre for European Studies, <http://coh.ug.edu.gh/centre-european-studies> (both accessed 16 June 2017).

19 See University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies, <http://ias.ug.edu.gh/about-us> (accessed 16 June 2017).

20 See Addis Ababa University College of Social Sciences, programmes in African Studies, <http://www.aau.edu.et/css/academics/african-studies/programs-in-african-studies/> (accessed 16 June 2017).

21 See see T. Nhlapo and H. Garuba (eds.), *African Studies in the Post-Colonial University*, Cape Town 2012. See also University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, <http://www.africanstudies.uct.ac.za> (accessed 16 June 2017).

fic terms can, or should, Western academics and institutions of higher education work together with these new forms of knowledge production in Africa? We call for a radical departure from traditional, Western-dominated approaches towards the study of Africa by systematically bringing Africa back into the world, and by looking at the world through Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than continuing conceptual Eurocentrism in seemingly new disguises, we want to take up post-colonial, Southern theory-inspired African scholarship, which has already fundamentally rethought the continent's place in the world, and bring this kind of scholarship into a dialogue with Western knowledge production. So far, knowledge about world regions and Africa's place in the world has been produced in the Global North, being mainly developed through a set of practices that have been labelled "area studies". By and large, present-day scientific knowledge and conventions are the result of the European Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup> Historically, today's dominant epistemes and knowledge orders<sup>24</sup> were institutionalized in many European universities around 1900 in newly established disciplines, such as anthropology, ethnology, and geography, with US universities following at the end of World War I.<sup>25</sup> These disciplines proved to be extremely powerful and long-lasting mechanisms for framing world views since they distinguished between disciplines specializing in the analysis of the West and those looking at the world beyond the West:

*Socially and conceptually, we are disciplined by our disciplines. First, they help produce our world. They specify the objects we can study (genes, deviant persons, classic texts) and the relations that obtain among them (mutation, criminality, canonicity). They provide criteria for our knowledge (truth, significance, impact) and methods (quantification, interpretation, analysis) that regulate our access to it.*<sup>26</sup>

Disciplines therefore territorialized knowledge production as they analysed different world "civilizations". In a division of labour between area studies and the rest of the humanities and social sciences (often called the "systematic" disciplines),<sup>27</sup> the role of area studies was to generate empirical knowledge based on Northern epistemes about non-

22 See R. Abrahamsen, Rita, Africa and international relations: assembling Africa, studying the world, in: African Affairs 116 (2017) 462, pp. 125-139.

23 See K. Sloan (with A. Burnett) (eds.), Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century, London 2003; P. Burke, A Social History of Knowledge. Vol II. From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia, Cambridge 2012; and H.F. Vermeulen, Before Boas. The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment, Lincoln, NE, 2016.

24 M. Foucault, The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, New York 1970 [1966].

25 See K. Naumann, Laboratorien der Weltgeschichtsschreibung. Lehre und Forschung an den Universitäten Chicago, Columbia und Harvard von 1918 bis 1968, Göttingen 2017.

26 See E. Messer-Davidow, D.R. Shumway and D.J. Sylvan, Preface, in E. Messer-Davidow, D.R. Shumway and D.J. Sylvan (eds.), Knowledges: Historical and critical studies in disciplinarity, Charlottesville VA, London 1993, pp. vii-viii.

27 In general, see H. Kuijper, Area Studies vs. the Disciplines. Towards an Interdisciplinary, Systematic Country Approach, in: The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Sciences 3 (2008) 7, pp. 205-216.; and on African studies see R.H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr (eds.), Africa and the Disciplines. The Contribution of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities, Chicago, IL 1993.

Western world regions.<sup>28</sup> This knowledge was – and still is – then interpreted through analytical concepts and theories that are firmly based on conceptual Eurocentrism. Contingent historical observations in Europe were used for theory-building, which in turn was universalized and exported from Europe and North America as dominant knowledge production sites to the rest of the world, even when and where analytical concepts did not make sense and hid or distorted the study of social dynamics.<sup>29</sup>

Post-colonial studies have demonstrated the intellectual and political dilemmas and obstacles introduced by this tradition.<sup>30</sup> These insights led to a critical debate concerning the terms in which intellectual engagement with Africa makes sense.<sup>31</sup> First and foremost, Western science created a “fictitious universalism” through “othering”.<sup>32</sup> As shown by the post-colonial icon Edward Said,<sup>33</sup> amongst others, this particular scholarship has to be seen in the context of power relations that go far beyond academic representations: The way the West has framed Africa has always been part of creating, justifying, and upholding unequal political, economic, and cultural relations between the West and Africa. While the West looked beyond its own borders and “appropriated” the world in a reductionist universalism, at the same time this knowledge order produced the impression that non-Western academic cultures were not concerned with what was happening outside their own countries.

As a dominant academic practice until very recently, African studies in Germany, Europe, and the United States have “analysed” and “explained” Africa in more or less subconscious modes of paternalism. The dominant form of knowledge production about Africa is still practiced this way. These paternalistic practices have imposed a specific form of reasoning that is based on “writing history by analogy” and imposing universalisms that have established relations and attitudes of superiority and inferiority that continue to bind Africa and the Global North together in an unequal relationship.<sup>34</sup> It is evident that official development cooperation, which is based upon such practices and concepts,

28 D.L. Szanton (ed.), *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, Berkeley, CA 2014.

29 S. Amin, *Eurocentrism*, London 1988.

30 Iconic authors are E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978; G.C. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago IL 1988, pp. 271-313; H.K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, London, New York 1994; and D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ 2000.

31 See K.A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, New York 1992; R. Abrahamsen, *African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge*, in: *African Affairs* 102 (2003) 407, pp. 189-210; and G.R. Lewis, *What Fanon Said. A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought*, New York 2015.

32 P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Mediations*, Cambridge 2000, p. 65. With regard to African studies and traditional human geography, see also H. Melber, *What is African in Africa(n) Studies? Confronting the (Mystifying) Power of Ideology and Identity*, in: *Africa Bibliography* 2013, pp. vii-xvii; and M.W. Lewis and K.E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents. A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley, CA etc. 1997; on political science, see P. Chabal, *The End of Conceit. Western Rationality after Post-colonialism*, London 2012; on international relations theory, see J.M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics. Western International Theory, 1760-2010*. Cambridge 2012; on anthropology see J.-L. Amselle, *Globalization and the Future of Anthropology*, in: *African Affairs* 101 (2002) 403, pp. 213-229; and F.B. Nyamnjoh, *Blinded by sight: divining the future of anthropology in Africa*, in: *Africa Spectrum* 4 (2012) 2-3, pp. 63-92; and on history see J.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians*, New York, London 2000.

33 Said, *Orientalism*.

34 On the status quo in German African studies, see Wissenschaftsrat, *Empfehlungen zu den Regionalstudien*,



between countries of the Global North and their counterparts in the Global South risks failing not only due to a lack of appropriate analysis, but also because it is rejected by a new self-consciousness of African intellectuals and elites.

Within this context, African academic systems and intellectuals reacted early on to Western narratives about Africa's place in the world<sup>35</sup> – often outside traditional area studies. Scholars mainly from the humanities – that is to say the study of language and literature, philosophy, and history – contributed to this rich and often overlooked debate on Africa's place.<sup>36</sup> Defining Africa's place in the world, and that of the world in Africa, has been most vividly tested and exhibited in contemporary art.<sup>37</sup> This research and reasoning has translated into rich debates about pan-Africanism and Africa's place in world or global history,<sup>38</sup> post-colonial identities,<sup>39</sup> as well as a general critique of conceptual Eurocentrism.<sup>40</sup>

In the wake of post-modernist and post-colonial critiques of Northern theory-building, scholars inside and outside of the Africa continent have called for alternative perspectives based on “Southern theory” or “theory from the South”.<sup>41</sup> They employ concepts such as “provincializing”, “worlding”, “decentring”, or “reimagining” in order to disrupt established ways of “Northern” knowledge production.<sup>42</sup> The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell,<sup>43</sup> for instance, criticizes mainstream sociology, including other disciplines, for ignoring or marginalizing indigenous knowledge and the African renaissance. Amongst

Bonn, 7 Juli 2006; and S. Weiss, *Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft in der Globalisierung. Regionalstudien in Deutschland*, Berlin 2007.

- 35 See P.T. Zeleza (ed.), *The Study of Africa. Volume I: Disciplinary and interdisciplinary encounters*, Dakar 2007; and P.T. Zeleza (ed.), *The Study of Africa. Volume II: Global and transnational engagements*, Dakar 2008.
- 36 For English and Commonwealth studies, see N. wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Nairobi 1986; and W. Soyinka, *Of Africa*, New Haven, CT, London 2012; for German studies see C. von Maltzan, Editorial zum 50-jährigen Jubiläum / Editorial on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, in: *Acta Germanica* 44 (2016) 1, pp. 9-17; for philosophy see V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge*, Bloomington IN, London 1988; V.Y. Mudimbe, *On African Fault Lines. Mediations on Alterity Politics*, Scottsville 2013; and A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley LA, London 2001.
- 37 For two recent examples, see *Africans in America as well as AKAA: Also Known As Africa*, in: *ArtAfrica. What Really Matters?* (2016) 6, pp. 20–35 and 80–87, respectively.
- 38 See A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York 1955; K. Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*, London 1964; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World in Africa. An Inquiry into the Part which Africa has played in World History*, New York 1965; J.K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism*, New York 1968; and A. Cabral, *Resistance and Decolonization*, New York 2016.
- 39 See F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York 2008 [1952]; and F. Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York 2004 [1961]; Lewis, *What Fanon Said*; W.D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham NC, London: 2011; and S.J. Ndlovu-Gathenseni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa. Myths of decolonization*, Dakar 2013; S.J. Ndlovu-Gathenseni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity*, New York, Oxford 2013; and S.J. Ndlovu-Gathenseni, *The Decolonial Mandela. Peace, Justice and the Politics of Life*, New York, Oxford 2016. See also L. Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, New York 2015.
- 40 C. Aké, *Social Science as Imperialism. The Theory of Political Development*, Ibadan 1979; and Amin, *Eurocentrism*.
- 41 See, for instance, R. Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*, Cambridge 2007; and J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*, London, New York 2016 (2012).
- 42 D. Simo, *Postkoloniale Perspektiven auf Europa*, in: M. Borgolte et al. (eds), *Europa im Geflecht der Welt*, Berlin, Boston 2012, pp. 247–258.
- 43 Connell, *Southern Theory*, pp. 89–110.

others, she discusses African philosophers, such as the Beninese Paulin Hountondji, and states that Solomon Thekisho (“Sol”) Plaatje’s *Native Life in South Africa*, written in 1916, should be included in “classics of world sociology”.<sup>44</sup> The Basel-based, Mozambican sociologist Elísio Macamo asks why there has never been a genuine African sociology.<sup>45</sup> He explains that sociology as the study of modern Europe is implicitly predicated on an “other” – “traditional” societies – which by definition cannot be the object of sociological analysis. As a consequence, “African intellectual discourse has been, in fact, one long bitter, frustrated and pedantic monologue on European perceptions of Africa”, resulting in “the inability and failure of African intellectuals to develop conceptual and analytical tools to describe the experience of modernity by Africans”.<sup>46</sup>

While Connell and Macamo take issue with epistemology and canon-building in sociological theory, the South African anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff offer another angle with their book *Theory from the South* and its provocative subtitle “Or, how Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa”. They argue for a reversal of dominant perspectives on modernity and processes of globalization in the social sciences: “What if we posit that, in the present moment, it is the global south that affords privileged insights into the workings of the world at large?”<sup>47</sup> Exercising this thought experiment, they claim that “it is the south that often is the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labor are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north”.<sup>48</sup> From such a perspective, many social and political phenomena in present-day “Afro-modernity”, for example notions of subjecthood or of the political, are not ethnographic exotica but anticipations of what could also happen in the North, such as a rejection of a purely procedural democracy that is based on a different cultural model of governance, legitimacy, and accountability.<sup>49</sup>

In such approaches, “North” and “South” are sites (e.g. hegemonic centres of theory-building), intellectual positions (e.g. alternative epistemologies), or relations in a global pattern of power. One problem of these constructs lies in the fact that “the North”, by extending a relational definition, reifies “the South”. Moreover, the categories and concepts employed in these texts still originate in Northern centres of knowledge production, even though its authors may be termed “global intellectuals”.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, all “Southern” theory remains a reaction to “Northern” theory, or, as Macamo notes, a monologue.<sup>51</sup>

44 Connell, *Southern Theory*, pp. 110.

45 E. Macamo, *Social Theory and Making Sense of Africa*, in: M. Diawara, B. Lategan and J. Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Memory in Africa – Dealing with the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context*, New York 2010, pp. 13-26.

46 Macamo, *Social Theory*, pp. 19, 20.

47 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, p. 1.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

49 *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

50 J. Ferguson, *Theory from the Comaroffs, or How to know the world up, down, backwards and forwards*. The Johannesburg Salon 5, 2012. <http://jwtc.org.za/resources/docs/salon-volume-5/Ferguson.pdf> (accessed 12 June 2017).

51 Macamo, *Social Theory*.

And, undoubtedly, there is also a danger of assuming that Southern theory is morally superior and politically correct.<sup>52</sup>

In combination, post-colonial approaches, the Southern theory debate, and the repositioning of Africa in the world after the end of the Cold War by Africans make us very interested in African traditions of self-narration and the production of knowledge of the world and related academic observations of the self and the “other”. In our opinion, it is therefore necessary to develop an approach that explicitly goes beyond disciplines as well as traditional notions of interdisciplinarity.<sup>53</sup> We are looking at a newly emerging field of studies that is linked to the way that the spectrum of area studies in Germany has been enlarged after the end of the Cold War by establishing the fields of global studies<sup>54</sup> or international studies,<sup>55</sup> or by defining new forms of transregional or transnational studies.<sup>56</sup> This approach could be built on a disciplinary alliance within the humanities and social sciences that involves cultural studies, area studies, new political geography, and global history. Methodologically, we favour the systematic investigation of connections between world regions – and their comparison across time – and utilize the perspective of reciprocal comparison in order to not take Europe as the benchmark as well as and recognize the “other” at both ends of the comparison in its own right.<sup>57</sup> We have a strong interest in historicity with regard to the social construction of knowledge and the establishment of competing and unequal knowledge orders (e.g. African studies, European studies, etc.). Furthermore, would like to promote a culture of academic reflexivity concerning the positionalities involved in the construction of knowledge on Africa.<sup>58</sup>

These problems of knowledge production concerning the world at large highlight the need for the investigation of times and spaces outside of established academic cultures,

52 M.C. Rosa 2014. “Theories of the South: Limits and perspectives of an emergent movement in social sciences”, in: *Current Sociological Review* 62 (2014) 6, pp. 851-867, at 862. Rosa’s claim about the “internal colonialism within the social sciences” can easily be substantiated by examples such as the group of Ivorian academics who formed the group *Cellule universitaire de recherche et de diffusion des idées et des actions* du président Henri Konan Bédié (CURDIPHE) and thought up the concept of *Ivoirité*, which became an integral ideological element of the xenophobic politics that culminated in pogrom-like killings of “foreigners” and civil war. See K. Werthmann, *Wer sind die Dyula? Ethnizität und Bürgerkrieg in der Côte d’Ivoire*, in: *Afrika Spectrum* 40 (2005) 2, pp. 221-240.

53 D.F. Brysecon, *Discovery and Denial. Social Science theory and Interdisciplinarity in African Studies*, in: *African Affairs* 111 (2012) 443, pp. 281-302.

54 See T. Dederling, *Reflections on World History and African Studies*, in: *South African Historical Journal* 50 (2004) 1, pp. 249-267; J.N. Pieterse, *What is Global Studies?*, in: *Globalizations* 10 (2013) 4, pp. 499-514 and M. Middell, *What is Global Studies About*, in: M. Herren et al. (eds.), *Potentials and Challenges of Global Studies for the 21st Century*, Basel 2014, pp. 38-49.

55 See A. Acharya, *Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds. A New Agenda for International Studies*, in: *International Studies Quarterly* 58 (2014) 4, pp. 647-659; and U. Engel, *International Studies*, in: K. Loeke and M. Middell (eds.), *Global Studies. A Reader*, London 2017 (forthcoming).

56 K. Mielke and A.-K. Hornidge, *Area Studies at the Crossroads. Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn*, Basingstoke, New York 2016.

57 See K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton NJ, Oxford 2000; and G. Austin, *Reciprocal Comparison and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa’s Past*, in: *African Studies Review* 50 (2007) 3, pp. 1-28.

58 See, for instance, P. Chabal and J.-P. Daloz, *Culture Troubles. Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning*, London 2005; and Chabal, *The End of Conceit*.

infrastructures, and epistemologies in order to devise more inclusive and innovative ways of theory-building. In our view, the following topics merit particular attention:

**“The presence of Africa in world literature”:** We begin our enquiry into this issue by looking at literature since the roots of the underestimation of African perspectives on the world can be found in literary and historical studies during the long nineteenth century, which reflected the separation of a “high culture” in Western societies (including their own contributions to world literature) from exotic folklore produced outside the West.<sup>59</sup> Mainly drawing on English and Commonwealth studies, as well as on German, Portuguese, and French studies, it is important to reflect upon these respective fields in regard to the mapping of how Africa has been inscribed on the world, both in past and in contemporary literature. This includes a new emphasis on Africa’s multilingualism and the resulting connections with literature in many languages. At times of co-presence, as defined above, these multilingual situations more and more become the rule than the exception.

**“From post-colony to Southern theory”:** The new look at the world has taken its departure not simply from empirical observations of other world regions but also from a conceptual debate within which critical anthropologists, philosophers, and sociologists as well as other scholars enquire into current debates on the chances and limits of developing non-Western epistemologies.

**“The development of area studies in Africa – comparative perspectives”:** A third step that is important for our agenda is to map out how African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other sites of knowledge production have institutionalized, or are currently institutionalizing, their own versions of area studies and related epistemologies. Based on the conceptual conflicts stemming from African area studies, one can assume that foreign models can only play a marginal role in promoting fruitful cultural transfer. At the same time, a comparison with regions such as East-Central Europe may be of intriguing to analyse since such regions developed less under the impact of a colonial past and they see their own submission under former empires – such as the Habsburg, the Romanov, the Prussian, or the Ottoman empire – as part of a global post-colony.<sup>60</sup>

**“Beyond conceptual Eurocentrism”:** Evidently the critical turn of area studies in Africa against mainstream intellectual knowledge production from what is called “systematic disciplines” by necessity not only represents a controversial engagement with Eurocentrism as expressed by Western scholars, but also a sort of self-criticism vis-à-vis the dominant paradigms at social science or humanities departments of African universities, which have been heavily influenced by what is often perceived as universal standards of scientific nature.

59 For an alternative interpretation of world literature referring back to concepts of the late eighteenth century: D. Simo, *Die Erfahrungen des Imperiums kehren zurück. Inszenierungen des Fremden in der deutschen Literatur*, Leipzig 2002.

60 S. Marung & K. Naumann (eds), *Vergessene Vielfalt. Territorialität und Internationalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 2014.

**“Africa and international organizations”:** As already argued, the emergence of an international space is the consequence of the global condition, which without a doubt has not bypassed Africa. However, the originality of African participation in the United Nations (e.g. the Africa Group and the A3 in the UN Security Council), the interests of African Union member states, and the changing terrain of “international partnerships” between the African Union, on the one hand, and the United Nations or regional organization such as the European Union, on the other, has so far been rather neglected, though it directly corresponds with the need for more knowledge about other parts of the world and issues such as trade and development, peace and security, and climate and environmental change.

**“Africa and emerging economies”:** What has turned the people of Africa away from the long – both positive and negative – fascination with the West has been the discovery that emerging economic powers such as China and Brazil are exploring opportunities for enhanced cooperation with African countries, often with a view to exploit the continent’s immense resources. The question now is how do economic African stakeholders in academia, the corporate world, and rating agencies position Africa vis-à-vis countries that are described as emerging economies, that is to say countries of the Global South that Western observers consider to have become strong competitors, such as the BRICS as well as the “Next Eleven”, which includes Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey, South Korea, and Vietnam.

**“Africa and digitalization”:** As public and academic notions of globalization processes are undergoing change – currently with an emphasis on digitalization and the role of the Internet and other technologies<sup>61</sup> – this issue will not only contextualize African positions in the emerging economic and social landscapes of digitalization but will also address the conditions under which African area studies work and gain access to the knowledge production elsewhere.

**“Africa and human mobility”:** In the West, African migration has become a major issue since the mass exodus to Europe in 2015. However, the majority of migration movements are still within and between African countries, commonly connected to violent conflict and the consequences of climate change. There is as well the migration of African people to destinations outside the continent but other than the West. This might be particularly effective as a mirror to look at area studies knowledge production, which is, at the same time, inspired by the demand for more specific information about such regions and enriched by knowledge migrants, who in turn contribute to the stock of information available in Africa.<sup>62</sup>

**“Pan-Africanism and its futures”:** Africa has already been connected to many parts of the world and global processes for a very long time. This has been channelled by different organizations, cultural movements, as well as diasporic communities such as pan-African

61 See McKinsey & Company, *Digital Globalization. The New Era of Global Flows*, London, San Francisco, Shanghai 2016.

62 D. Simo (ed.), *Constructions identitaires en Afrique. Enjeux, stratégies et conséquences*, Yaoundé 2006.

movements, which have many historical layers in the Americas and Western Europe, as well as Commonwealth countries, La Francophonie<sup>63</sup> or Lusophony. Evidently, the different directions of such entanglements inspire different foci in the development of area studies. What is striking, however, is whether this leads to a sort of regionalization of pan-Africanism or to the reintegration of such contacts and connections by mechanisms of a pan-African synthesis not only in literature and philosophy, but also in the politics of, for instance, the African Union.

These are important but certainly by far not all dimensions of the new trend towards growing interest in area studies recently launched in Africa. We are convinced that this process will not happen just in Africa; it merits comparison with similar developments in other parts of the world as well. And while we have insisted throughout this brief introduction on the emancipation of African area studies from Western interest in world regions, it is also evident that this emancipation will not happen in isolation. On the contrary, area studies in the West are changing themselves and may be inspired with regard to their own transformation by related processes in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>

63 A. Mbembe, *Provincializing France?*, in: *Public Culture* 23 (2011) 1, pp. 85-119.

64 M. Middell, *Area Studies Under the Global Condition. Debates on Where to Go with Regional or Area Studies in Germany*, in: *ibid.* (ed.), *Self-Reflexive Area Studies*, Leipzig 2013, pp. 7-57.