

African Studies Centres Around the World – A Network-Based Inventory

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the wide field of Area Studies has been subjected to critical scrutiny by insiders and outsiders of academia. African Studies were no exception.

Most of the debates about the past, present, and future of Area Studies seem to be conducted by scholars based in the Global North, i.e., Europe and North America. Yet, scholars in the field of African Studies in countries such as Brazil or Cuba, with their peculiar historical relationship with Africa and therewith their own ideas regarding the development of African Studies in the 20th/21st century, very often maintain different networks that intersect only partially with those in the Global North. As a result, these voices are not heard or recognized globally. The knowledge about African Studies centres in Asia is also scant, although some were established three or four decades ago.

This is due to the specific contexts in which African Studies (centres) were launched, very often entangled with the interests of the respective countries who promoted research in Africa to pursue their own political, economic, and academic agendas.

Parallel to the rise of critical Area Studies approaches in the Global North (e.g., Mielke & Hornidge 2017), the long-established African Studies centres in Africa were the bases of critical debates about academic knowledge production in regional or continental contexts, often-times with little involvement of their colleagues from other regions of the world. The connections with other centres on the continent, thus reinforcing, expanding, and intensifying the continent-based African Studies network, seems to be a more recent phenomenon in spite of the long-standing research done by centres like the Institute of African Studies (est. 1962) in Accra, Ghana, the Center of African Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (est. 1976, with first chairs estab-

lished as early as 1921), or the Center of African Studies at the University Eduardo Mondlane (1976) in Maputo, Mozambique. International interest also arose with the foundation of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) in 2012. The awareness of the different processes has reached the Global North only lately, so the lack of data is a self-produced knowledge gap.

Inspired by the strong wish to expand existing international and global networks, and to foster new forms of exchange and cooperation, the main objective of the conference “African Studies – Multiple and Relational” held at the University of Bayreuth in December 2017 was therefore to advance knowledge about the agendas and outlines of various African Studies centres, bringing together responsible voices from all continents. The present volume, “African Studies Centres Around the World,” gathers some of the contributions that can close this knowledge gap, at least partially.

In addition to casting a wider net by convening representatives of African Studies institutions from the continent and beyond, the conference also pursued thematic objectives and questions related to the field. How does the wide range of approaches to the study of Africa on a global level reflect the diversity of regional and multidisciplinary viewpoints? To what extent do methods and theories depend on regional or disciplinary contexts and on their particular relation to each other and to the African context? How does this affect research on and in Africa? Could the exchange support the critical revision of African Studies in each country and open up new ways of collaboration by creating synergies in joint research?

Taking into consideration comprehensive approaches to a complex field, we invited researchers in African Studies from different disciplinary backgrounds and different continents also to reflect on notions of multiplicity and relationality and to engage with these concepts and/or to put forward other concepts that can guide the search for new approaches in African Studies.

African Studies are an important and interdisciplinary research focus at the University of Bayreuth. This was already manifested in the founding deed of the university in 1975 and confirmed in the current university development plan. The Institute of African Studies (IAS), founded in 1990, forms the institutional umbrella for all specifically Africa-related institutions at the University of Bayreuth. These include Iwalewaha (where contemporary African culture is documented, researched, and

taught; founded in 1981), the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence (established in 2019), as well as the “Research Centre Africa,” which is currently being planned. Further interdisciplinary collaborative research takes place within the framework of the Bavarian Research Institute for African Studies (BRIAS). In addition, there are many other individual projects by members of the IAS and their working groups, such as two research programs funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and numerous projects acquired through the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Research Foundation (DFG). One of the milestones is the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS, established 2007). The work of the doctoral candidates is central to original and forward-looking Africa-related research on an international level. The Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies (2012-2019) is another hub for early career scholars that has become part of the Cluster. The Bayreuth Academy engages in academic exchange between Africa-related and other fields of research, with an intensive fellow program, outreach activities, and innovative working formats involving postdoctoral researchers.

As the central coordination point for the Africa focus, the IAS bundles and coordinates Africa-related research and teaching, stimulates interdisciplinary research projects, supports Africa-related third-party funding applications, and promotes cooperation with African universities and research institutions, with national and international Africa institutes, and other relevant organizations. Its more than 80 members, including around 40 professors, comprise 40 different subject areas like cultural studies, linguistics, economics, law, geosciences, biosciences, and engineering.

Since 2019, the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence has been the major research group of the IAS. The Cluster sees itself as a transformative space for the systematic further development of African Studies through innovative transdisciplinary research together with strong partner universities in Africa.¹

¹ See <https://www.ias.uni-bayreuth.de/en/The-Institute/index.html> and <https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html>

Outline

The volume at hand is a contribution to the dissemination of knowledge about the history of centres of African Studies as well as the research structures and foci based on first-hand information about African Studies centres and regional networks covering four continents.²

The dynamic and long-standing cooperation and exchange of networks of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Bayreuth is the basis of the interactions at the conference. The IAS, as a founding member of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), a research network of European Studies centres which aims to create synergies between experts and institutions, has long-standing established and institutionalized networks with its European partners.

The objective of this volume is not to give an overview of all existing institutes and partners, but rather to focus on some cooperation lines that could and were meant to stimulate new paths in the networks. Some of the partners joined the network more recently; not all of them were aware of existing institutions in their “neighbourhood.” Some of the directors met for the first time and used the opportunity for discussion.

The eleven chapters in this volume show the very diverse history of African Studies centres all over, subtly underpinning the need for more exchange and research on conceptualizations in African Studies. We are only able to show a small number of examples of the existing African Studies institutions. Not all contributions during the conference are in this volume due to various reasons.

We highly appreciated listening to the lecture of the Director of CODESRIA, Godwin Murunga. Furthermore, the Director of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, gave a highly insightful talk with reflections on the history

² We are aware of other existing publications in this field. The book of Jacob U. Gordon and Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong, *Trends in African Studies* gives an overview of Institutes of African Studies on the five continents. The book has big merits but has also leaves some gaps, as the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO) at the Federal University of Bahia is only mentioned in the list, as the Institute of African Studies at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul is not mentioned, neither the Institute of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth, the latter founded in 1990. Most publications on African Studies centres are incomplete. So the editors are confident that the volume at hand will still fill some gaps and serves in complementary usage to previous works.

of African Studies in Ghana and the valuable concepts and thoughts developed over five decades, insights that are too seldom taken into account in the ongoing discussions on and in African Studies. Some of these thoughts can be found in her article: “Re-viewing Studies on Africa. #Black Lives Matter, and Envisioning the Future of African Studies.”³ It was complementary to the talk by Lungisile Ntsebeza whose text is central to the volume at hand.⁴

Being aware of the limitations of these insights into specific regional and historical settings that influenced and orientated African Studies, it still testifies to the vision of possible changes that can evolve in processes of exchange and collaboration. The network, launched during the 2017 conference in Bayreuth, met again at a joint conference at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) in Seoul in 2018⁵ and at the Center for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), in 2019.⁶ While the pandemic interrupted the series of conferences, some workshops and webinars sustained the exchange between members of the growing network. With the new project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) within the framework of the German Excellence initiative, “Cluster of Excellence – Africa Multiple: Reconfiguring African Studies” in 2019, a new layer was created in the context of Bayreuth’s African Stud-

³ In: „African Studies Association, 2016, doi: 10.1017/asr.2016.34, 7-29.

⁴ We also highly appreciated the papers and discussions with the colleagues Giorgio Banti (University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Italy), Hui Jiang (School of Asian & African Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, China), David Doepel (Africa Research Group, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia), Carlos Fernandes (Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique), Yahia Abou El Farah (L’Institut des Etudes Africaines, Université de Rabat, Morocco), Jan-Bart Gewald (African Studies Centre, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands), Angelica Baschiera (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, Great Britain) and Godwin Muringa (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, Senegal).

⁵ We herewith acknowledge the generous funding of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation for most of the participants outside of Asia. Some of the conference papers were published by Yongkyu Chang and Eun Kyung Kim (eds.), *African Politics and Economics in Globalized World*. Kim’s co-authored work presented at the 2018 conference is forthcoming as a scholarly article in *African Spectrum*.

⁶ The conference papers will be published.

ies. The cooperation with the four African Cluster Centres⁷ who – besides existing collaborations with other centres of and for African Studies – will definitely bring in new perspectives and dynamics in the discussions on African Studies on and from the continent in international exchanges.

The eleven contributions of the proceedings of the conference “African Studies – Multiple and Relational,” contain one from University of Cape Town, the oldest centre on the African continent, three from Europe, two from the United States, three from Central America, the Caribbean, and Brazil, and two from Asia.

It is an eclectic introduction to some aspects of the ongoing critical reflections on the historical and political development of African Studies at various institutes of African Studies on four continents.⁸

The contributions are mainly intended as a review of and insights into the history of African Studies (centres), and do not represent the respective countries. The articles are organized alphabetically by author instead of by region.

1. Akintúndé **Akínyémí** (University of Florida): Gazing into the Past to Transform the Future: Fifty Years of Teaching and Research on African Studies at the University of Florida
2. Aparajita **Biswas** (Centre for African Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mumbai, India): African Studies in India: Evolution and Challenges

⁷ The Centres are located at the Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), the Institute of African And Diasporic Studies at the University of Lagos (Nigeria), at Moi University in Eldoret (Kenya) and Rhodes University in Makhanda (South Africa), see <https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/african-cluster-centres/index.html>.

⁸ During the poster session, 12 institutions used the opportunity to present their structures and research foci. These were: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (South Korea): “The Past, Present and Future of IAS”, Legon (Ghana): “IAS at 50 and beyond”, SOAS, London (Great Britain): “African Studies”, Centre for History, University of Lisbon (Portugal): “African Studies”, Center for Global Studies, Universidad de Costa Rica: “African Studies”, Sciences Po, Bordeaux (France): “Les Afriques dans le monde”, University of Cape Town (South Africa): “Rethinking Africa”, Indiana University, Bloomington (USA): “African Studies Programm International School”, The „Fernando Ortiz“ African Cultural Center, Santiago de Cuba (Cuba), Università L’Orientale, Napoli (Italy): “African Transitions - Linguistic and cultural areas of transition in Africa”, Center for Afro-Oriental Studies, Salvador da Bahia (Brazil), IAS, University of Bayreuth (Germany): “30 Years of Africa-related research at IAS”.

3. Rina **Cáceres Gómez** (Chair for African History, Universidad de Costa Rica, San José, Costa Rica): Decolonizing Images and Representations about Africa and its Descendants. The Case of Central America and Costa Rica
4. Yongkyu **Chang** (Institute of African Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea): The History of African Studies in Korea: Forty Years of Its Academic Development
5. Marta **Cordiés Jackson** (Centro Cultural Africano Fernando Ortiz, Universidad del Oriente, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba): The African Presence in the Caribbean: Some Considerations
6. John H. **Hanson** (Indiana University, Bloomington): The African Studies Program at Indiana University -- Bloomington (U.S.A.)
7. Lungisile **Ntsebeza** (Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa): African Studies at UCT: An Overview
8. José **da Silva Horta** & Carlos **Almeida** (Centre for History of the University of Lisbon, Portugal): Historicity: The Primacy of Contexts, Connections, and Networks - The Case of the International Project “African Ivories in the Atlantic World”
9. Livio **Sansone** (Centre of Afro-Oriental Studies of the Federal University of Bahia, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil): Challenges and New Possibilities: African Studies in Brazil
10. Petr **Skalník** (Philosophical Faculty, University Hradec Králové, Czech Republic): African Studies in East-Central Europe
11. Céline **Thiriot** (Les Afriques dans le Monde, Université de Bordeaux, France): Is there a French Touch to African Studies?

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We hope that the network will expand and contribute to more exchange.

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