

## **“Africa Multiple: Reconfiguring African Studies” Cluster of Excellence: Structures, Concepts, Themes**

The purpose of this document is to give an overview of the most important structures, concepts, and themes of the “Africa Multiple” Cluster of Excellence. It is designed to provide the necessary background information for researchers who intend to join one of the cluster’s research sections or to participate in the Academy of Advanced African Studies within the cluster. The appendix offers additional insights into the cluster’s general research objectives and theoretical approaches. The spokespersons of the cluster are Rüdiger Seesemann and Ute Fendler; the latter also serves as Vice Dean of Internationalization and Public Engagement (supported by Doris Löhr as Academic Coordinator). The other Vice Deans are Martina Drescher (Early Career and Equal Opportunity, Academic Coordinator: Christine Scherer), Erdmute Alber (Research), and Cyrus Samimi (Digital Solutions). The head of the cluster management is Franz Kogelmann.

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## 1 Summary

Building on four decades of internationally outstanding research in African studies at the University of Bayreuth (UBT), the “Africa Multiple” Cluster of Excellence seeks to work towards the reconfiguration of African studies, on both the conceptual and the structural level. The cluster is conceived as a transformative space within which to systematically advance the study of African and African diasporic ways of life and world-making via the pursuit of cutting-edge research and theory-building based on new inter- and transdisciplinary formats of research cooperation.

The cluster will stand on a broad and firm foundation in terms of the institutional structures and scholarly expertise at UBT. Since UBT’s establishment in 1975, Africa-related research has been a prominent part of the university’s activities, leading to the establishment of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at UBT in 1990. Widely recognised for its hugely successful training programme for doctoral students, and funded by the Excellence Initiative since 2007, the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) will be integrated into the cluster and there continue to offer its innovative formats to early career scholars at the doctoral level. Structures developed by the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies (BA), founded in 2012 with a grant from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, will also be adopted and expanded by the cluster, especially the fellowship scheme and the postdoctoral qualification programme. The internationally renowned Iwalewaha (founded in 1981), a vibrant centre for engagement with African arts, through exhibitions, documentation, research, and transdisciplinary working formats with artists, is a further cornerstone on which the cluster will build.

The cluster’s 25 Principal Investigators (PIs) come from fifteen different disciplines, ranging from climatology, geography, linguistics, literature, arts, media studies, history, anthropology, philosophy, religious and Islamic studies, through to education, political science, law, and economics (see the following link for a list of PIs:

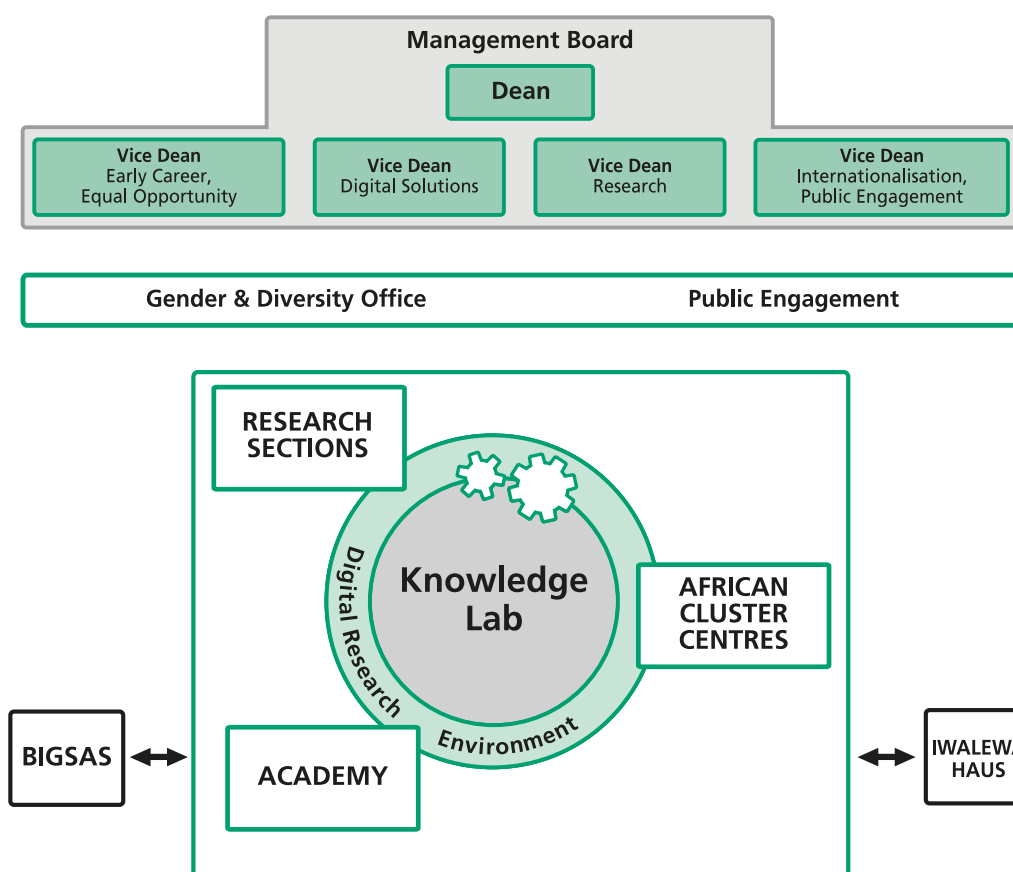
<https://www.uni-bayreuth.de/de/forschung/exzellenzstrategie/africa-multiple/index.html>).

All participant researchers are expected to create synergies in their collaborative work and generate new insights into the general theme of the cluster.

The planned establishment of four African Cluster Centres (see section 7 below) is one of the most important steps we seek to take towards the reconfiguration of African studies. The purpose is to build novel forms of research collaboration across regions and continents. The ACCs will be spaces for joint knowledge production by all of the researchers in the cluster, but they are also designed to become independent centres for theory building and reflection on knowledge production in their own right—that is, spaces where the cluster’s African academic partners can develop their own approaches and ideas. As such, the establishment of the ACCs is meant as a contribution towards changing the old pattern of research being conceptualised and funded in the “North”, and conducted in the “South”.

## 2 Structures

The “Africa Multiple” Cluster of Excellence features elaborate management and research structures. As it seeks not only to advance research, but also early career support, gender & diversity, digital solutions, internationalisation and public engagement, the cluster is run by a Dean and four Vice Deans in charge of the respective tasks, as in the following organisational chart:



Together, the Dean and the Vice Deans will be in charge of running the main research structures of the cluster. These include the Research Sections (see below, 4.), the African Cluster Centres (see below, 7.), the Academy of Advanced African Studies with its fellowship scheme. The Knowledge Lab (KL; see further below, 5.) will be the cluster’s intellectual core. Interlinking the research structures, it will serve as the focal point for connecting the cluster’s theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues, sparking debates and intellectual exchange, stimulating synergies and new theoretical advances, and generating a thriving research environment for the cluster’s researchers. Closely linked to the KL will be the Digital Research Environment (DRE; see further below, 6.), designed to facilitate new forms of research and exchange across continents and academic disciplines. Beyond providing a platform for digital communication, the DRE as the cluster’s IT-backbone will store and organise all of its accrued data—a task to be supported by professional data curators, who will help to transform the cluster’s repositories into fluid IT ontologies.

### 3 Concepts

African studies today is a contested field, characterised by many coexisting and sometimes contradictory ways of conceptualising and studying Africa. Attempts to dissolve “Africa” as a research object by exclusively focusing on global connections, or, on the contrary, to establish an essential “Africanness” by decoupling African knowledge production from hegemonic Western epistemologies, are two of the more extreme positions on this spectrum. As these positions underscore, African studies are facing profound conceptual questions, such as what constitutes Africa and whether Africa is to be posited as exceptional or not. At the same time, they highlight power imbalances that continue to characterise knowledge production with a focus on Africa, raising the question of who studies Africa, and how. The cluster is designed to develop new responses to the theoretical, methodological, and structural challenges the field is facing. To pursue the reconfiguration of African studies, we propose to develop a new conceptual framework highlighting multiplicity, relationality and reflexivity as three key concepts.

The title “Africa Multiple” stems from our proposition that Africa is neither unitary, nor isolated, but rather is, and always has been, constituted through its ever-changing relations, globally entangled and in flux. This understanding calls for a new conceptual framework that allows us to grasp the dynamic interrelationship of diversity and entanglement and to study “Africa multiple” in coherent and systematic research formats. We posit multiplicity as such a conceptual framework. Rethinking older notions of diversity or plurality and connectivity, the concept of multiplicity shifts the focus from diverse, discrete entities that *have* connections towards the continuous relational processes involved in their production. Transcending the limitations of both conventional area studies and global studies, our novel conceptual approach allows us to capture the simultaneity of heterogeneous and mutually influential African ways of life and world-making emerging in multi-directional and multi-layered processes of relating. Accordingly, the concept of relationality will serve as our primary analytical tool for the study and conceptualisation of multiplicity. As the corollary of relationality, reflexivity will constitute our second major analytical concept, enabling us to grasp the reflexive character of relations as they feed back into the contexts from which they emerge. It will also require us to reflect on our own positionalities as researchers, and the power relations that undergird them.

The three key concepts multiplicity, relationality and reflexivity are to be tested and refined throughout the course of our empirical and theoretical work. We will lay the foundation for this work in six thematic fields organised into Research Sections (RSs) and outlined in more detail in the next section. The six fields will allow us to study the expressions and constitution of multiplicity in our empirical research settings by employing relationality and reflexivity as analytical tools. As the main categories to conceptualise relations, the RSs will draw on the cluster’s four heuristic angles—modalities, medialities, temporalities, and spatialities—in order to analyse their findings and advance in our joint work on the cluster’s core concepts across disciplines and empirical fields. While the angle of modalities will help us to analyse ways of relating and their outcomes, medialities focuses on the media that constitute rela-

tions. The angles of temporalities and spatialities are closely interrelated. The former refers to the different time scales of relations; the latter asks about the spatial scales that relations traverse, and the spaces they produce. (Please refer to the appendix for details.)

## 4 Research Sections

The cluster will pursue its empirical and theoretical agenda in six thematic fields to be studied in our Research Sections (RSs): Moralities, Knowledges, Arts and Aesthetics, Mobilities, Affiliations, and Learning.

Each RS will be run by an interdisciplinary team of researchers, who are expected to develop subprojects that create synergies between the thematic fields and generate additional analytical value for the cluster as a whole. Initially, the RSs will comprise the 25 Principal Investigators, but they will later come to include other key researchers from the University of Bayreuth and the researchers based at the African Cluster Centres.

As the RSs will be of crucial importance for the collaboration between the cluster and the ACCs, the following sub-sections provide detailed descriptions of the themes and research questions pursued in each RS.

### 4.1 Moralities

*Principal Investigators:*

*Martina Drescher, Romance & General Linguistics*

*Eberhard Rothfuss, Social Geography*

*Rudolf Schüssler, Philosophy*

*Eva Spies, Religious Studies*

The objective of this RS is to study modes of “doing ethics” in contexts where questions of well-being and societal transformation are at stake, especially in fields characterised by transnational interactions such as development, social/religious movements or international justice. We understand morals or ethics not as given principles or rules, but rather explore the processes of how moral concerns, claims, and value judgements emerge, gain recognition or cause conflict. Here, we analyse processes of communicating, negotiating and practising moralities, and we study the different modes of relating, such as collaboration, rejection or non-recognition through which moral positions arise and take shape.

Searches for transformation on the African continent are shaped by a high frequency of interventions by international experts and organisations of all kinds, as well as the many national and civil society initiatives to improve everyday life. Against this background, the RS wants to study how, in the course of such activities, different moral claims, concerns, and judgements emerge, and how they influence issues of public interest, and questions of societal transformation and future-making. We study the coexisting, sometimes overlapping and frequently conflicting moral demands, worries and evaluations as expressions of multiplicity, and thus set out to analyse the historical, contemporary, and potential, imagined and personal, national and transnational relations through which they take shape. We will focus on fields such as (inter-)national jurisdiction, (trans-)national social and religious movements,

and international development, investigating for example negotiations around the cooperation with the International Criminal Court, or religious practices seeking to heal the nation.

Moralities are frequently understood as given ethical principles or socially approved codes of conduct. The RS, however, conceives of moralities as continuously constituted in and through social and socio-material, often asymmetrical relations. In this sense, we want to study historical and ongoing processes of *doing ethics*, i.e. the relational processes through which moralities emerge. According to this praxeological understanding, our focus is on human activities that deal with evaluations and judgements—notions of fairness, well-being, and the right or wrong ways to act and live a good or bad life—as well as their recognition and/or rejection. As such, we want to explore the role that different modes of “doing ethics” play in shaping and influencing societal transformations and future perspectives. Here the RS is especially interested in conflictual modes of doing ethics in contexts of historical, contemporary and future agencies and (power) relations. Tackling these questions, we propose to elaborate our praxeological approach in order to contribute to a better understanding of the relational processes that are of key interest in the cluster as a whole.

### Objectives

Our notion of moralities as “doing ethics” mirrors our focus on the ongoing orientations, enactments and evaluations of human activity and character; i.e., on processuality and emergence. The RS pursues two central objectives: first, to describe and analyse modes of doing ethics, and second, to examine the ways these shape, and are shaped by, processes of social transformation and future-oriented perspectives.

In pursuit of our first objective, we will study processes of doing ethics in fields characterised by competing, overlapping or coexisting moral claims and judgements. By focusing on how people communicate, negotiate and practice moralities we aim to study how different modes of relating, such as cooperation, appropriation, rejection or disavowal, produce different moral concerns, criteria and judgements. Here we are especially interested in situations of disagreement, including claims of moral incompatibility and incommensurability; i.e., the impossibility of translating one’s moral criteria and practices into the categories of others. For example, the refusal to translate religious concerns into the bureaucratic and legal rules of the nation state or vice versa.

Our second objective is to scrutinise the connection between modes of doing ethics and social transformations, and to find out, for instance, how public moral claims and processes of exclusion or contestation relate to inequalities, changing power relations and emerging forms of alternative sociality. Thus, with a focus on contexts of transformation, we will be particularly attentive to the power relations from which moralities emerge, and which they might change.

Altogether, we aim to develop a joint, interdisciplinary approach to relational processes of emerging moralities within public discourses, institutions, and material practices.

### Work Programme

The work programme of our RS is guided by the combination of three methodological takes: communicating, negotiating and practicing moralities. Moreover, it is organised according to

our common focus on situations characterised by initiatives and interventions of new African and non-African actors, in which competing and overlapping moral claims and judgements emerge. In particular, we will study contexts affected by the interventions of trans-/ international agencies (e.g. individual actors, organisations, new judicial regulations or material infrastructures). Interdisciplinary teams will focus on conflictual relations wherein moralities shape, and, at the same time, are shaped by situations of change; and in which they thus tend to become explicit as they are contested, excluded, appropriated, and sometimes imposed and prescribed.

The perspective of communicating moralities starts out from the premise that morality is communicatively constituted. This approach will be of particular use in the study and conceptualisation of the role of speech (acts) in the sphere of public discourse, for example in studies on the communicative construction of health, sexuality and gendered moralities in the context of pandemic discourses, including (inter-) national sensitization campaigns.

The focus on negotiating moralities offers an original access to processes of doing ethics in institutional contexts, for example, courts of justice, reconciliation commissions or charity organisations. Here we are especially interested in the questions of when and how different stakeholders bring in and bargain over moral claims and judgements in these contexts, how these are made explicit and enforced, and at what points they influence public debates on transformation.

Practising moralities will provide access to the materiality and situatedness of doing ethics, and thus to actors and agencies, and the roles that bodies, objects, spaces and infrastructures play in producing and shaping tacit and more explicit moralities. Studying for example international development interventions or religious/social movements we ask how moral concerns, criteria and judgements are established and expressed in and through material practices which strive to bring about “the good life”, and/or change.

## 4.2 Knowledges

*Principal Investigators:*

*Eric Anchimbe, English Linguistics*

*Susan Arndt, Anglophone Literatures*

*Christine Hanke, Media Studies*

*Katharina Schramm, Anthropology*

The RS Knowledges will investigate knowledges and their global and local impacts. It will study the trajectories and politics of processes of knowledge, with respect to

- a) the un/doing of knowledges,
- b) the scopes and scales, and
- c) the politics of knowledges.

By contributing to the methodological framing and theoretical sharpening of the concepts of reflexivity and relationality, this RS challenges us to reflect on the situatedness of our own knowledge production in the cluster.

### Objectives

The main objective in this RS is to study the production, enactment, dissemination, and effects of knowledges. We draw attention to the relational ways in which knowledges are constantly formed and transformed, shape-shifting social and political configurations. Thus framed, this RS will investigate the multiplicity of knowledges along three interconnected lines:

a) First, in the (un)doing of knowledges, we will be interested in the ways various knowledges in and about Africa are generated, understood, classified, and (re)ordered. Emphasis will be on contingent practices: How are knowledges performed, stabilised and validated in concrete material relations and discourses? How are they unlearned, silenced or ignored, how are they made (ir)relevant? How do different forms of evidence-making, interpretation and knowing relate to each other? Which agencies do matter, and how?

b) Second, in analysing the trajectories, scopes and scales of knowledges, we will consider knowledges as ongoing projects brought forth in transregional and transtemporal encounters: What happens when knowledges migrate and relocate or are displaced? What is added, truncated or substituted to fit a new setting? How are knowledges translated, adapted, contested, unlearned and re-known in the processes of circulation? Why and under what circumstances are knowledges (not) mobilised or silenced?

c) Third, with respect to the politics of knowledge we will focus on forms of domination and contestation linked to the nexus of colonial and postcolonial perspectives, as intersected with, gender, queer and posthuman studies. The two main foci here are: to examine the co-production of epistemic and governmental orders in historical and contemporary settings, and to engage with nativist agendas of knowledges, such as the notion of indigenous/endogenous knowledge. How do such movements perform alternative epistemic strategies? What kinds of postcolonial ontological politics emerge in their wake?

### Work Programme

The research projects to be pursued in this RS will take up the lines of investigation as follows: First, they will explicitly address the (un)doing of knowledges. We will study how entangled historical and contemporary knowledges are produced, authorised and challenged through practices of collecting, classifying, mapping, and storage. Here, our interest is on the ways in which classificatory principles and categories of difference(s) (e.g. race, ethnicity, age, sex, gender, culture, species etc.) are established; how they materialise in scientific, literary and linguistic narrations, practices and models; how they are entwined with historical genealogies and political orders; how they connect these multiple elements, and how they are potentially dismantled and resituated.

Second, projects will engage with the trajectories, scopes and scales of knowledges that account for relational processes of translation, transformation and hybridisation. We will focus on discursive and material practices in and by which knowledges are articulated and circulated through time and space. With respect to the relationship between language and knowledges we will take into account how languages coexist, travel and change in processes of translation. We will trace knowledge trajectories in colonial and postcolonial texts and dis-



courses. We will investigate how these knowledge trajectories compete with other knowledges, how they are challenged, co-constructed and/or hybridised. The temporal and spatial circulations of archival objects appropriated and conserved during colonialism (including ethnographica, human remains, material specimens, catalogues and indexes) will be studied in relation to their impact on contemporary productions of knowledges.

Finally, projects will look at the politics of knowledge in Africa and African diasporas. We will pay attention to knowledges as products of nativisation, nationalisation, indigenisation and hybridisation in relation to complex processes of migration and globalisation. Western epistemologies have never encountered a discursive vacuum, but, rather, existing ideoscapes and knowledges. The translation of foreign texts and knowledge models into African (and other) settings often involves the amalgamation and change of both “foreign” and “local” knowledges, as well as new configurations of power; processes which have often had global impacts. Here, we will study literary and audiovisual narrations as reflexive sites for negotiating migrations and global knowledge encounters. Empirically, we will engage with the co-production of epistemic and political orders, employing “the future” as a category of analysis e.g. with respect to Afrofuturism and Afrofeminism.

In accordance with the cluster’s aim of reconfiguring African studies, the projects in this RS will reflexively engage with current debates about the decolonisation of knowledges and will develop new methodologies with respect to the epistemological and political challenges raised by these discussions in institutional settings in Africa and beyond.

We will take the lines of investigation as lenses through which we explore the multiplicity of knowledges both diachronically and synchronically. The approaches and frameworks are designed to both support and benefit from the transdisciplinarity of the RS, thus strengthening our joint contribution to the methodological framing, theoretical sharpening and empirical specification of the three core investigative concepts of the cluster—multiplicity, relationality and reflexivity.

### **4.3 Arts and Aesthetics**

*Principal Investigators:*

*Ute Fendler, Romance & Comparative Literature*

*Ivo Ritzer, Media Studies in Africa*

*Rémi Tchokothe, African Linguistics*

*Clarissa Vierke, Literatures in African Languages*

*Ulf Vierke, Art Studies Africa*

This RS addresses the multiplicity of artworks. Hence, instead of taking given unities in aesthetics for granted as our starting point, we will focus on ongoing processes of creation, mediation and interpretation as well as how artworks shape and are shaped by material and social conditions.

#### Objectives

The central objective of this RS is to provide a better understanding of the actual processes of making art(s) and their ways of relating to the world, by conceiving of artworks as multi-

layered, and as having their own ways of reflecting upon being in the world. The RS will approach (the) making art(s) and aesthetics through three interrelated lines of investigation:

- a) artists' practices and audience perceptions;
- b) circulation and configuration;
- c) the materiality of artworks.

Subprojects on artists' practices and audience perceptions within this RS will not focus on artworks as clearly defined objects, but will turn towards the actual multimedial and multilingual practices and repertoires of artists, including writers, musicians, filmmakers, DJs, performance artists, and dancers. How do artists relate to other artists and artworks, for instance through appropriating or rejecting ideas, repertoires of imagery, sounds or texts?

Subprojects on circulation and configuration will consider artworks as constantly drawing on and feeding into ever-changing flows of sounds, texts, images, which (re)configure in specific artworks and contexts. Going beyond concepts of unilineal distribution from the global North to the South or within one linguistic domain, we will consider multidirectional flows at various scales, across and beyond the African continent, for instance to Asia or Latin America, as well as the West.

Subprojects on the materiality of artworks will analyse the aesthetic characteristics and specific material gestalt that actually make up artworks. The mediums of artworks are not only vehicles of expression, but decisively shape their production, distribution and reception. Furthermore, depending on their materiality, artworks also relate to the world in specific ways: there are interactions between social experience and the forms of artworks, which make alternative existences sensorially perceptible. New materialist and speculative realist perspectives that highlight the agency of artworks themselves and relegate problematic idealist assumptions such as artists' intentions to the background will be important points of reference in this line of research.

### Work Programme

Our aim is to critically revisit established research practices that consider aesthetic practices separately, according to categorical, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Research within this RS will thus include a wide range of aesthetic practices and artworks (including film, literature, music and other visual arts/media).

Our focus on artists' practices and audiences' perceptions entails that we will make case studies of the actual production of artworks by particular artists, as well as of how audiences relate to them. More specifically, we will concentrate attention upon multimedial and multilingual practices and also address questions about the tacit experiential ways in which artists and audiences relate to artworks.

Our work on circulation and configuration will entail studying flows of texts, films, sound and imagery, while taking a critical view on the politics of circulation, as well as on definition, in keeping with the cluster's key concept of reflexivity. Here we will critically interrogate the politics of the categorisation of aesthetic practices and problematise the global vs. local dichotomy. We will seek to further develop perspectives on the far-reaching connections of artworks across linguistic and methodological boundaries. It is our aim to go beyond centre-

periphery models by considering various aesthetic practices in various languages and media from transregional and transcontinental perspectives. We will study the musical, literary and art “landscapes” of specific contexts, focusing, for instance, on the entanglements and co-constitution of French, Portuguese, English and Swahili literary productions in the Indian Ocean archipelagos. Here, our intention is to work out how actual aesthetic practices in various media and languages relate to each other, as well as charting the migratory flows of sounds, images and texts, studying them in different contexts and changing constellations.

Foregrounding material and form, we will focus on the media of particular artworks and ask how they come to take shape in form. Here, we will also ask how processes of transfer across media impact on the effects of artworks, such as, for instance, from theatre to film and television. Following the migration of texts, images, and sounds and their reconfiguration in specific artworks will allow for comparative analysis of the specifics of media and materials. The RS will delve into explorations of the artwork’s agency, as well as the tension between the artist’s subjectivity and the autonomy of artworks. This line of investigation will take inspiration from new materialist and speculative realist conceptions underlining the autonomous force of artworks. Here the RS greatly benefits from the discussions that arise between its more empirically oriented researchers in the social sciences, and those of a more hermeneutic-philosophical background in humanities.

Central to all of this RS’s subprojects will be the building of a dynamic archive, both to store audio, visual, and textual media and also to provide tools for discerning affiliations between texts, imagery and sounds. Exhibitions, both site-based and in virtual formats, offer both a means to present the findings of this RS, as well as a laboratory for transmedial research that will bring invited international artists together with resident researchers.

#### **4.4 Mobilities**

*Principal Investigators:*

*Ulrike Beisel, Anthropology*

*Martin Doevenspeck, Political Geography*

*Joël Glasman, African History*

*Cyrus Samimi, Climatology*

While mobility has increased dramatically around the globe over the last decades, a focus on the Global South and Africa in particular reveals selective and ambiguous mobilities. This RS empirically and conceptually interrogates these complex patterns of (im)mobility: the movements and blockages of people, things and ideas, within, towards and outwards from Africa. (Im)mobilities in Africa and its diasporas are closely tied to multiplicity: (im)mobilities can occur simultaneously at various locations, and in complex ways; they may affect, clash with, or contradict each other beyond the standard perspectives of South-North movements of raw resources and refugees out of Africa, and developmental ideas arriving onto the continent. This RS offers a grasp on multiplicity by focusing on various forms of (im)mobilities. It foregrounds the contingent relations established by and between multiple movements of people, things, and ideas on the African continent and beyond. The angles of temporalities and spa-

tialities take centre stage in the analytical approach. The empirical focus is on who and what moves where, when, how and why, namely on the reasons for movement or stasis, and on their attendant socio-political, socio-economic and socio-ecological formations. Three lines of investigation provide a broad empirical perspective on current and past mobilities, towards, from and within Africa:

- a) the (im)mobility of people;
- b) the (im)mobility of things;
- c) the (im)mobility of ideas.

Of great relevance for this RS are the theoretical advancements of “Mobilities Studies” that show how the interconnections of a variety of mobility practices constitute relations, and how mobilities in turn are constituted by these relations. The bulk of the empirical research that has taken such a relational approach has happened in the Global North. As a result, such studies have rarely considered, for example, the colonial and neoliberal forms of power with which many forms of mobility are imbued, perpetuating global inequalities. Work in this RS focuses on multidirectional movement to destabilise universalised notions of mobility and stasis built on Western understandings of mobilities and to bring the conceptual innovations of “Mobilities Studies” thus far into closer conversation with African scholarship.

### Objectives

Research in this section develops new transdisciplinary research questions and conceptual and methodological approaches to mobilities. This RS questions the drivers of differential mobilities, dwelling and place-making practices; the environmental impacts associated with, for example, physical transport; multiple concepts of resource and environmental management and perceptions of climate and ecological events. We investigate how mobilities are tracked, ordered and governed in the context of, e.g., migration control, or biometric citizenship. We understand mobilities as molded to fit the different historical contexts in and with which they emerge, and organised through specific constellations of uneven movements.

### Work Programme

This RS focuses on three lines of investigation to carve out the relationship between mobilities and immobilities, in Africa and beyond: (a) the (im)mobility of people; (b) the (im)mobility of things; and (c) the (im)mobility of ideas. These lines of investigation enable a broad empirical perspective on current and past mobilities, towards, from and within Africa. We propose to explore a specific dimension of multiplicity: namely, the spatial and temporal aspects of (im)mobilities on various scales.

*(Im)mobility of people:* the RS addresses various modes, practices and experiences of (im)mobility, within, from and towards Africa. Our studies of mobile and immobile subjects, embodied experiences of movement and stasis are aimed to reveal the politics of multiple and uneven practices and spaces of mobility by analysing movements, places, policies, programmes, effects, myths, and discourses of migration, as well as obstacles and coercive measures relative to it. We invite studies on how social practices are embedded in changing mobility patterns in the North are reshaping land use in Africa (e.g. copper and lithium mining for e-mobility); on internal and international migration from, within and to Africa; on represen-

tations of migration, flight, refugee camps and other spaces and places of (im)mobility and migration control; and on the technologization of border management.

*(Im)mobility of things and technologies:* subprojects on mobile (bio)materials, technical devices, and goods are invited to analyse the material-semiotic changes mobile objects undergo, and the socio-economic and infrastructural conditions they engender, whether deliberately so, or as a side-effect of globalised markets: the conditions of labour, health hazards for bodies, soils and souls, and their attendant social formations. We welcome interdisciplinary studies on the materialities of mobilities, their socio-material, economic and environmental costs and benefits. Topics may include: resource extraction and flows; the translation of new energy technologies; human / nonhuman entanglements, and invasive species; the expansion of virtual financial and informatic flows; biometric citizenship; the trade in bio-materials such as timber, ivory or organs; and changes in environmental or climatic conditions, their consequences and mitigation technologies.

*(Im)mobility of ideas:* This line is explicitly focused on the power of concepts, models and narrations of and in mobilities. We study how travelling concepts and narrations change the contexts in which they are introduced, as well as how concepts and narrations themselves change as they move from one context to another. We investigate the interactions and co-constitution of concepts and contexts. This includes travelling ideas or concepts of nature conservation and climate change adaptation. Topics of interest include the mobility of indicators such as the United Nations' "Sustainable Development Goals"; the mobilities of tropes and narrations in the arts; and the mobilities of statistics, data and algorithms, such as in international finance or insurance practices, or in relation to population control.

#### **4.5 Affiliations**

*Principal Investigators:*

*David Stadelmann, Economics*

*Alexander Stroh, Political Science*

*Ulrike Wanitzek, African Legal Studies*

*Volker Wiese, Law*

Today's African nation states maintain multiple, often overlapping, competing political, economic and social affiliations that change over time and redefine societal issues. In this thematic field we propose to analyse the tensions, obstacles and temporal evolution as well as the benefits and challenges connected with such affiliations, especially as they play out in regional economic communities (RECs).

Consider the recent Agreement on a Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) in Africa as an example for an emerging affiliation between the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Regional economic exchange, legal harmonization and political cooperation within and between the three participating RECs has been limited and it has been caught between the multiplicity of modes of collaboration and policies aimed at different degrees of homogenisation, such that internal potentials have not fully been realized. These

multiple affiliations and references to regional integration mechanisms reshape economic relationships and question existing borders, concepts of nation states, and legal understandings of diverse sets of affected African societies.

Beyond holding regional affiliations through RECs, African states are affiliated with global organizations. African relations are shaped by historical trajectories such as former colonial ties and migration networks. Simultaneously, a number of existing states in present borders struggle with their own sovereignty, concepts of national identity and ethnic diversity. In theory, affiliations in Africa are supposed to facilitate and redefine modes of exchange, and cooperation, and they even extend to understandings of rights which affect existing, fluid individual and group identities. Although regional integration is *en vogue* in Africa and affected by development optimism, actual results of integration on the ground often fall short of theoretically expected outcomes, pointing to the need of academic reflection on existing theories. Evidently affiliations in Africa are not limited to trade, legal harmonization and political integration but they have the potential to affect capital movements and migration issues, which in turn reshape existing trade relationship and require the evaluation and evolution of existing economic, legal and political settings.

### Objectives

We propose to explore the complexity and interplay of different affiliations and integration efforts by analysing (a) *Interacting Markets*, (b) *Decision Making*, and (c) *Human Rights*. A typical research question raised in the field of interacting markets relates to necessary prerequisites for regional integration to enhance social and economic welfare and to foster cohesion on the African continent. Economic co-operation of states within RECs and beyond implies cross-border movement of persons, capital, goods and ideas. Challenges arise because of sometimes confusing affiliations to overlapping RECs, but also due to the economic, legal, political and societal feedback mechanisms of policy changes in an integrating Africa, where national borders become fluent and where integration and interests of decision makers multiple in nature. Since interacting markets require and favour mobilities, this invites cooperation with the RS “Mobilities”.

Any process of integration connects and affects actors such as international, national and regional political decision makers, public administrators, courts, developmental agencies, and diverse interest groups, among others. When analysing decision making, we explore state-time dependent interests, incentives and intentions of decision makers in Africa to understand, evaluate and design potential policies that influence, extend, shape and promote mutually beneficial affiliations between actors with diverse interests. A typical research question here relates to the incentives of politicians, business leaders, bureaucrats, judges or NGOs to push or frustrate affiliations that tie countries to integrated decision making at various levels. Different cultures and traditions of dispute settlement, their indigenous and colonial past and their future role in modern Africa shape existing affiliations and engender new ones, thereby providing feedback mechanisms. Consequently, we consider decision making in the resulting multilevel set-up to depend at least as much on the kind of relations at play as on the individual characteristics of the many actors and organisations involved. This can be

achieved by means of analysing the institutional structures as well as the incentives of decision actors.

Existing institutions shape affiliations and affiliations transform institutions, thereby re-configuring understandings of peoples and existing states. Such transformation processes link to fundamental Human Rights. According to the classical, Western understanding, such rights are tied to the individual who are to be protected from the state. The alternative protection of various collective entities—African legal texts tend to speak of “peoples” or “national communities”—is not conflict-free as individuals may have to give up rights in the interest of the group or entity they belong to. Combining the tools of social science and legal studies with cultural analysis, we will ask whether the multiplicity in African legal provisions is relaxing the observance of clear but static rules in favour of mediation and consensus-building among different actors. The focus on Human Rights connects to debates in the RS “Moralities” and can also inform research about decision-making processes in general.

On a higher level of abstraction and even broader interdisciplinary collaboration, this RS contributes practical observations to approach reflexivity as a key concept of the cluster. The Tanzanian-German Centre for Eastern African Legal Studies (TGCL) in Dar es Salaam has built strong relations between the research topic “regional integration” and the legal practice of regional integration by training, among others, lawyers beyond the legal framework of the East African Community (EAC). The ambition of this RS in “applied reflexivity” draws on the careers of researchers and former TGCL students from all six Partner States of the EAC and beyond to find the effects of research and teaching interventions on the outcome of interest itself. Reflexivity here invites the analysis of the ways in which TGCL has co-shaped debates on regional integration. This includes self-reflection and empirical evaluation of its activities and results so far, and continuous reflection and monitoring accompanying research on affiliations, such as those of regional economic communities and international and regional human rights regimes, and the translation of education into national and local discourses.

#### **4.6 Learning**

*Principal Investigators:*

*Erdmute Alber, Anthropology*

*Iris Clemens, Education Science*

*Susanne Mühleisen, English Linguistics*

*Rüdiger Seesemann, Islamic Studies*

This RS seeks to realise an understanding of multiple and interrelated processes of learning in Africa and their connectedness beyond the continent, with particular reference to—and relevance for—the cluster’s key concepts of multiplicity and relationality. Our different but nonetheless related disciplinary perspectives will contribute to a joint understanding of the many roles that learning plays in the making of subjectivities, life-stages and gendered bodies, and the ways that these are framed through the unequal distribution of educational opportunities. We will also seek to analyse how learning itself is relationally constituted by —

and at least partly co-constitutes — institutions, worldviews, communications, infrastructures, and transnational and transcontinental connections. Our understanding of learning goes beyond research approaches that limit their focus to formal educational settings such as schools or universities. Rather, we will address learning in a wider sense, encompassing all of the ways and processes in which knowledge and skills are transmitted, acquired and (re-)produced, regardless of institutional borders. We include private homes, schools, markets, media, streets, farms and international organisations in our considerations. We are interested in multiple learning processes and their inherent temporalities: in learning by doing; as a bodily practice; as a form of appropriation or mimesis, and as a mode of communication. Blurring the boundaries between artificial dichotomies such as formal / informal, institutional / non-institutional, modern / traditional, literate / illiterate, we will direct our interest to the interplay between various learning spaces and media. This relational perspective on learning processes in Africa and elsewhere will allow us to highlight their multiplicity and to analyse their entanglements, mutual coexistence, conditions of emergence, and the multiple ways in which learning processes combine in peoples' lives. In order to get a sense of the manifold interrelations within the highly heterogeneous African educational landscape, we see a particular need for studying learners as embedded in their specific environments, and at the same time as producers of these environments through their networks of relations.

### Objectives

We will organise our research along three lines of investigation: (a) communication, (b) biographies of learning, and (c) travelling concepts and practices.

Africa's linguistic multiplicity constitutes both a challenge and a resource for the creation of learning spaces, whose concepts of education and knowledge acquisition are either those intrinsic to global networks stretching from Europe, the Americas and the Middle East, to South and Southeast Asia, or embedded in processes of adaptation and transformation within specific African contexts. This situation invites research into the conditions and challenges of communication as a constituent part of learning processes in multilingual settings, where the gap between the mostly European languages of formal instruction and the multiple African languages of socialisation requires acts of translation, adaptation and appropriation.

In our second line of investigation, biographies of learning, we will trace the multiplicities of learning processes via a focus on the learning trajectories of individuals. This is based on the understanding that individual life trajectories are always shaped by combinations of different modalities of learning (for instance apprenticeships, Qur'an schools, informal learning in the household), whether sequentially or simultaneously. Until now, less attention has been paid to the ways in which individuals move between different paths and modes of learning, and thus different epistemic orders, for example by simultaneously attending "secular" and religious schools. Here we will take inspiration from approaches that lay stress on processes of "timing", particularly in relation to education.

In our third line of investigation, we will relate processes of learning and educational experiences in Africa to globally travelling concepts and practices that shape and produce varied formations and reformations of learning settings. The global "trading zones of



knowledge” and the worldwide flows of educational concepts, ideas, and knowledge invite us to study the specific ways in which learning processes and settings emerge and change, and how travelling educational concepts and practices are negotiated in, and adapted to the African context.

### Work Programme

With regard to our first focus, processes of communication in multilingual African learning spaces will provide challenges with regard to language choice, elaboration and corpus planning in institutional learning contexts. We will seek to investigate language choice in environments where the relationship between one or several ex-colonial as well as African languages are in competition or in parallel use for learning purposes. Another question relates to appropriations and adaptations of communicative practices in informal learning situations, such as advice-giving in both private and media contexts, which is based on the attribution of expert vs. learner/user roles in communicative interaction where norms and conventions are negotiated.

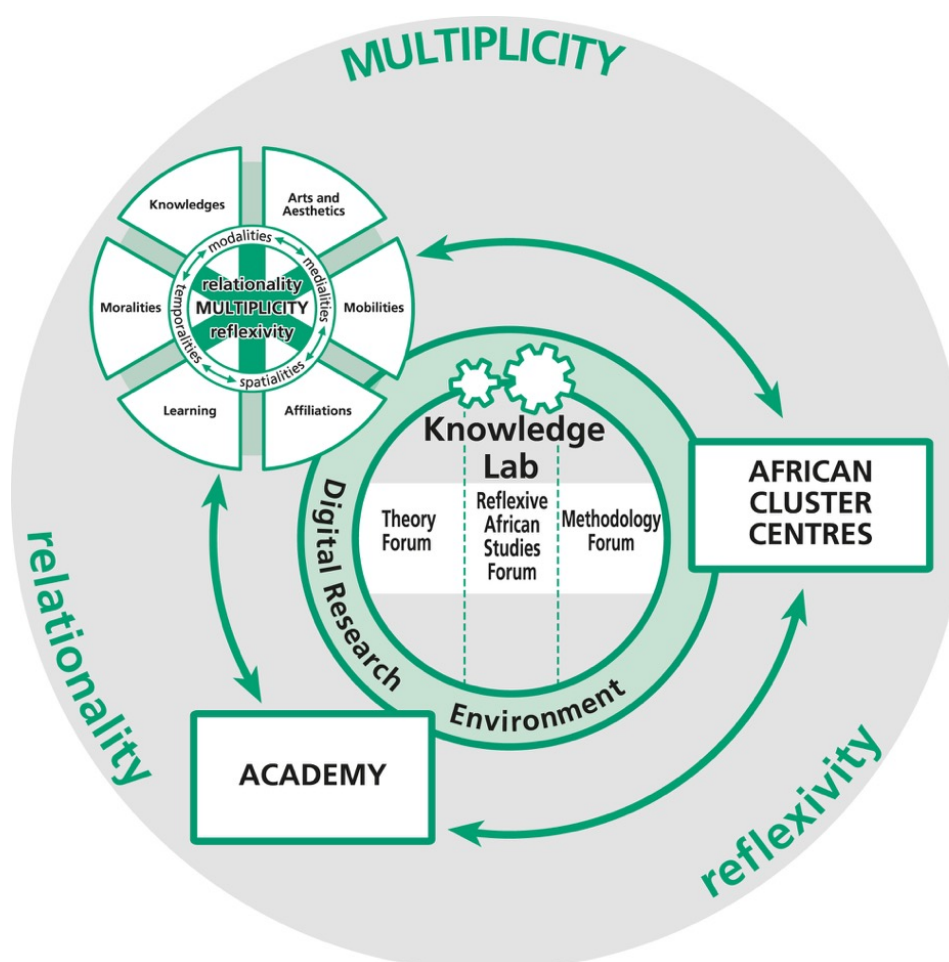
Methodologically inspired by the principle of “following the people” and by relational ethnography, we propose to explore individual biographies of learning. We will follow the directions and temporalities of the life paths of young individuals towards adulthood, and their multiple connectivities with learning processes. Here, instead of following conventional approaches to the study of life courses, we will view them as being constantly made and remade in relational ways. Taking a processual and praxeological perspective, we aim to combine theoretical debates on learning in Africa with those concerning the life course, gender, kinship and work.

Those of our subprojects that are to explore travelling concepts and practices of learning will take a particular interest in global relationalities, and the ways in which the tension between the implementation of Euro-North-American models of schooling and more recent projects of “decolonising” education plays out in different national contexts, taking into account comparable processes in Asia and Latin America. Another key line of research pursued by this RS will be that of the rapidly changing landscape of higher Islamic education south of the Sahara. Over the past two decades, Muslim educationists and entrepreneurs have entered the booming private educational sector in all African countries with a sizable Muslim presence, producing new and highly gendered trajectories of learning that frequently merge “secular” and “religious” subjects.

## **5 Knowledge Lab**

The findings of our work in the Research Sections will flow into the Knowledge Lab (KL), located at the centre of the cluster’s research activities. The KL serves a variety of purposes: As the cluster’s structural node, it interlinks the three main research structures: the ACCs, the Academy, and the RSs. The KL will offer a variety of meeting formats—from the *ad hoc* to the regular and formal—that will facilitate and inspire academic debates. As the locus of these meetings, the KL will assemble the cluster’s academic members and their research projects in various venues to exchange ideas and methods and to engage in discussions and

systematic reflection. Coordinated by the Vice Dean (VD) of Research, the KL will generate a thriving intellectual and interdisciplinary research environment that will also include non-academics (such as artists and activists) and stimulate transdisciplinary synergies and research. The KL will be crucial in connecting the cluster's theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues. Accordingly, it will be subdivided into three interlinked spaces for debate and exchange: The Theory Forum, the Reflexive African Studies Forum, and the Methodology Forum.



### The Three Fora

The Theory Forum is where our joint theory-building will take place and where the cluster's researchers will bring their work to theoretical fruition. Assembling all members of the cluster and their various projects, the Theory Forum will host the cluster's more abstract, yet empirically grounded theoretical debates. Dedicated to exploring the cluster's key theoretical concepts of multiplicity and relationality, debates in the Theory Forum will at once allow researchers to relate their projects to the joint research agenda and to operationalise these concepts for their own projects in turn. Grounded in the cluster's ongoing research, the Theory Forum will work towards the identification of common theoretical concerns, to be further developed through the various activities of the KL.

The Reflexive African Studies Forum has the (self-)critical reconfiguration of African studies as its focus. In this forum, cluster members will engage in critical and systematic re-

flection on the terms and premises of academic knowledge production. In particular, this forum seeks to reconsider the “African” in African studies on various levels: by including and collaborating with African colleagues in debates and research; by questioning the ways in which our positionalities as researchers are grounded in our respective localities and disciplines; by rethinking “Africa” as a descriptive and analytic concept and as an “area”; and by generally putting “Africa” into question. Furthermore, this forum will serve to devise and develop the cluster’s research and publication ethics.

The Methodology Forum will provide a laboratory for the honing of methodologies across disciplines. Comparing methodological approaches will allow us to identify the limits and possibilities of our respective methods, to improve our collaborations, and to create synergies. In this forum, we will debate methodological exchanges and the emergent issues that arise in our inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations and research structures. The ultimate aim of this forum is to cultivate and reflect on methodological approaches to transdisciplinary research that will inform our reconfiguration of African studies.

### Working Formats

The KL will provide the cluster with a portfolio of formats at the outset, to be developed and expanded in the course of ongoing research and debate, allowing formats to be tailored to suit specific projects and their needs, including those of research partnerships. Alongside academic lectures and seminars, we will develop interactive formats and include performances and other artistic production as part of the KL’s portfolio, as well as joint writing and reading sessions, the Method Studio, policy-relevant formats, and “Clashing Theories Seminars”. The DRE will allow for virtual participation in ongoing sessions as well as store and provide access to lectures and seminars. Lectures will be live-streamed and archived, while selected seminars may be streamed as webinars, and live workshop sessions may also be offered online. The DRE will thus allow the KL to bridge spatio-temporal distances, enabling all cluster members’ continuous access to the cluster’s activities and working formats. The Digital Research Environment will further enable the KL to develop and experiment with new formats of academic collaboration. The KL will thus create a vibrant research environment and allow for the virtual participation of researchers across the globe, facilitating transdisciplinary and transcontinental debate and exchange within and between research projects. This will stimulate multidirectional flows of theoretical and reflexive debates, as well as empirical findings, thus refining methodologies and driving conceptual advances.

## **6 Digital Research Environment**

The cluster’s Digital Research Environment (DRE) will be led by the Vice Dean of Digital Solutions and supported by four data curators. The DRE will build and maintain the multidirectional links between the Knowledge Lab and the Research Sections, the ACCs and the Academy, and provide them with digital solutions. Communication between the ACCs, UBT, and other partners will largely be digital. The DRE’s facilitation of webinars, the live-streaming of lectures and live workshop sessions and conferences will also be of tremendous importance, enhancing the cluster’s outreach and connectivity with colleagues, stu-

dents, and the public. Besides communication, the DRE will be responsible for all of the cluster's data management. One of the important ways in which all of the cluster's researchers, including the Academy fellows and the ACC members, will work towards reconfiguring African studies will be through their contributions to the cluster's common database.

The creation of this database will be a major undertaking, especially given the cluster's transdisciplinarity. The disciplines involved in the cluster have highly diverse academic traditions, with highly disparate approaches to and current states of digitisation. The concepts, practices and ideas of non-academics, which we seek to integrate in our research, will be only more so. Hence the DRE's task will be to integrate highly heterogeneous analogue and digital data, both qualitative and quantitative (e.g., printed maps, texts, statistics, digital geographical data and remote-sensing data, as well as information provided through social media), into a common digital research platform that will be accessible to all researchers involved. The following figure gives an overview of the various tasks to be fulfilled in the cluster's transdisciplinary data management.

Usually in IT systems, storage is organised into relational and hierarchical databases and often follows pre-set classification protocols, based on fixed "ontologies", here referring to the modes by which knowledge is articulated, expressed, interpreted, and formalised, and thus organised into a structured system. While this procedure is feasible in contexts where similar types of data are generated by uniform methods, the cluster's research data will be more varied. Moreover, the structures of conventional databases emerge out of academic abstractions with roots in Western knowledge traditions. Rather than mirroring the fluid and dynamic aspects of actual lifeworlds, they tend to be static and ignore other forms of knowledge production. Our challenge thus lies not only in conjoining the epistemes of different academic disciplines, but also in bridging these and other kinds of knowledge production. To ensure the sound handling of data, data curators will play a strong role in the cluster. Under the supervision of the VD of Digital Solutions they will "communicate" between the KL, the RSs, ACCs, the Academy, and the data repositories, facilitating interdisciplinary data use beyond just offering technical solutions. The data curators will also ensure that the internal databases are linked to relevant external data sources, also through data mining.

The cluster's non-confidential data will be made publicly accessible, mainly through data archives like DEVA ("Digitisation, Editing, and Networking in African Studies"). The database will hence be more than a simple repository, offering tools that will allow us to share data and provide working formats reflecting the heterogeneity, complexity, and dynamism of the cluster's research through the establishment of innovative and fluid IT ontologies that will generate new research topics, knowledge, and concepts. Thus, the collaborative involvement of the DRE will substantially aid the reconfiguration of African studies, driving advancements in African studies and transdisciplinary research, while the cluster's reflexive practices of digital knowledge production will foster fundamental reflection, research subjects, and methods in cluster members' respective disciplines as well.

## 7 Role of the African Cluster Centres

The objective of the creation of the four African Cluster Centres (ACCs) is to create new spaces that extend and deepen our cooperation with African colleagues. Within the cluster, the Vice Dean of Internationalisation and Public Engagement will act as the main liaison to the ACCs. We see the ACCs as a crucial component of our endeavour to reconfigure African studies, designed to overcome existing power imbalances in the production and transmission of knowledge in African studies. The ACCs will significantly deepen our long-standing collaboration with African universities and open up new avenues for innovative forms of research. They will be the cluster's research partners, facilitating the exchange of ideas; the mobility of researchers; the collection of and access to data; and above all offering a platform for reflexive research on the continent itself.

The ACCs' main tasks will include initiating and conducting research projects linked to one or more of the Research Sections of the cluster; facilitating mobility between its members and the rest of the cluster network; organising and hosting international conferences; and providing platforms for academic exchange at doctoral and postdoctoral levels. As intra-African mobility is often missing in North-South joint research projects, the cluster and the ACCs will facilitate such mobility and provide reciprocal meeting points and research destinations, especially through hosting conferences and workshops and through offering research fellowships.

The ACCs will be prominently represented in the governance structure of the cluster and constitute strong nodes in our shared network. To strengthen these nodes, each of the cluster's Research Sections will feature at least one subproject attached to one of the ACCs. Faithful to our transdisciplinary goals, the RSs will be encouraged to conduct subprojects that are attached to more than one ACC. In order to create space for original approaches to be taken by, and with, African scholars, the cluster's Management Board, in conjunction with the ACCs' Academic Directors, will annually solicit proposals for innovative fellowship projects that connect with the concept of multiplicity and engage with one or several of our research formats. Selected fellows from African institutions will be in residence at their host ACC for up to six months (one per ACC/year), mirroring the fellowship scheme in the cluster's Academy. In addition to pursuing their respective research, the fellows will be invited to contribute to the organisation of an international workshop to be held at the ACC, either during the fellowship period or later. Papers emanating from the workshop will be published in prestigious international and regional journals. We aim to increase the accessibility and visibility of research output in the ACCs' regions via the Digital Research Environment and through collaborative involvement of diverse public groups.

To buttress the training of young academics, the ACCs will play a crucial role in recruiting doctoral students, who will be attached to the cluster's partner institutions while pursuing their degrees through the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS). Their recruitment, under the auspices of the cluster's Vice Dean of Early Career and Equal Opportunity, will follow the procedure put in place by BIGSAS, while the latter's doctoral degree requirements will also apply. The cluster will provide funding for these ACC ac-

tivities. The overall aim is to promote a generation of young academics whose objective, like that of the cluster, is to reconfigure African studies through transdisciplinary approaches to the study of multiplicity in Africa and its diasporas. These doctoral students will join the virtual classroom established by the Methodology Forum. Their joint enrolment, study and supervision at two universities will be a privileged format, linking the ACCs, the cluster and the existing BIGSAS Partner Universities' network. Cluster members based at the University of Bayreuth will be involved in the ACCs' activities through workshops, international conferences, the co-supervision of doctoral students, the realisation of collaborative subprojects, and through cooperation with the ACCs during fieldwork for their respective research projects and visiting lectureships. Further exchange between the ACCs will be developed through conferences where members and affiliates from all ACCs and from the University of Bayreuth will convene to foster academic exchange on theories, epistemologies, and methods in African studies. Ideally, each ACC will organise a biannual international conference.

Moreover, the ACCs will function as virtual nodes in the cluster's Digital Research Environment. The technical equipment will be provided by the ACC institutions with financial support from cluster funds, allowing researchers at the ACCs to have full and integrative access to the cluster's digital platforms and data archives, enabling the practice of pioneering forms of collaboration with researchers in Africa and beyond. These virtual nodes will be coordinated by the Vice Dean of Digital Solutions together with the data curators, who will ensure the connection between the cluster's structures and the Digital Research Environment. Beyond granting access to data and digital platforms, the objective is to achieve a highly connected and interactive virtual network that will enable researchers to realise common goals in communities of practice.

While the precise structure and criteria of membership may vary according to the respective academic and institutional context in which the ACCs will be established, in each case, the managerial priority will be to guarantee the smooth and reliable handling of the various administrative, organisational and academic requirements of engagement in collaborative exchanges with cluster members and facilitators at UBT and the other ACCs. Each ACC will be run by an Academic Director (to be relieved of other administrative and teaching responsibilities) and supported by an Academic Coordinator. The latter will be expected to take on the daily administration of the ACC. An institution that aspires to be an ACC needs to offer office space for the Academic Coordinator and her/his assistants; provide constant internet access, so that the ACC remains connected to the Digital Research Environment; facilitate cooperation between the cluster, the ACC and their university's facilities such as libraries, archives, conference infrastructure, e-learning and e-depository systems, and other research facilities; guarantee space for the installation of digital and other archival equipment; and resolve issues relating to national copyright clearances. The ACCs' host institutions will also be expected to facilitate visa application procedures for foreign researchers and assist them in all mobility related matters. While acknowledging the language barriers that continue to obstruct academic exchange among African scholars, the ACCs will connect African sub-regions and hence act as hubs for regional cooperation and encourage direct exchange between colleagues from different parts of the continent, with different languages.

## Appendix 1: Research Objectives and Theoretical Approaches

### Overview

African studies today is a contested field, characterised by many coexisting and sometimes contradictory ways of conceptualising and studying Africa. Attempts to dissolve “Africa” as a research object by exclusively focusing on global connections, or, on the contrary, to establish an essential “Africanness” by decoupling African knowledge production from hegemonic Western epistemologies, are two of the more extreme positions on this spectrum. As these positions underscore, African studies are facing profound conceptual questions, such as what constitutes Africa and whether Africa is to be posited as exceptional or not. At the same time, they highlight power imbalances that continue to characterise knowledge production with a focus on Africa, raising the question of who studies Africa, and how.

The “Africa Multiple” Cluster of Excellence is designed to develop new responses to these challenges the field is facing. Building on the long tradition and exceptional strength of African studies at the University of Bayreuth (UBT), our overarching aim for the cluster is no less than the reconfiguration of African studies through the development of new and innovative conceptual, methodological, and infrastructural frameworks for our field.

Africa is neither unitary, nor isolated: Africans engage actively and productively within a globalised world, which they themselves co-constitute. We understand Africa as multiple in the sense that it is, and always has been, constituted through its ever-changing relations—not as a given, but a reality constantly in the making, globally entangled and in flux. This understanding calls for a new conceptual design that allows us to grasp the dynamic interrelationship of diversity and entanglement and to study “Africa multiple” in coherent and systematic research formats. We posit multiplicity as such a conceptual framework.

Our usage of multiplicity goes beyond earlier concepts of diversity or plurality and connectivity by shifting the focus from discrete entities that *have* connections towards the relations involved in their production. Rather than focusing either on connections *or* forms of diversity (or plurality), our understanding of multiplicity draws on both these notions and transcends them by foregrounding the multi-layered and multi-directional processes of relating, which together produce the simultaneity of heterogeneous and mutually influential ways of life and world-making in Africa and its diasporas. The wide array of contemporary African literatures may serve as an illustration here: it is only intelligible by considering the confluences of literary genres and media, colonial power relations and language policies, economic exchanges at (inter)national book fairs, diasporic imaginations of belonging and familial bonds etc. Hence, our emphasis on multiplicity points to the formation of the phenomena under study in and through current, historical, and future relations.

Accordingly, the concept of relationality will serve as our primary analytical tool for the study and conceptualisation of multiplicity. As the corollary of relationality, reflexivity will constitute our second major analytical concept, enabling us to grasp the reflexive character of relations as they feed back into the contexts from which they emerge. It will also require us to reflect on our own positionalities as researchers, and the power relations that undergird them.

Multiplicity, relationality and reflexivity are thus the three key concepts of our proposed cluster, to be tested and refined throughout the course of our empirical and theoretical research. In working towards our objective of reconfiguring African Studies, we will:

- develop relational and reflexive approaches to study expressions of multiplicity in Africa and its diasporas, with the aim of further elaborating the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of multiplicity;
- build an inter- and transdisciplinary research context involving scholars from fifteen different disciplines at UBT as well as individual and institutional academic and non-academic partners in Africa and elsewhere;
- advance African studies as a site for joint and multiple knowledge production through new formats of collaborative research, designed to respond to the imbalances in academic knowledge production in African studies.

We will take three major interconnected structural and infrastructural measures to support the objectives of our cluster. First, the cluster will fund cutting-edge research on a project-by-project basis, to be undertaken within Research Sections (RSs) organised into six thematic fields. Second, we plan to build new and innovative research infrastructure, most notably our Knowledge Lab (KL) and the Digital Research Environment (DRE). Third, our work will be conducted in academic cooperation with other individual and institutional partners, especially those based at our African Cluster Centres.

In the next subsection, we give a cursory outline of the trajectory of African studies to date, highlighting some of the critical junctures that have inspired our cluster's agenda. This is followed by a more detailed exposition of the key analytical concepts that are to take centre stage in our theoretical and methodological approach: multiplicity, relationality, and reflexivity. Next, we introduce the four heuristic angles that we intend to employ in our analyses, to further refine our conceptual approaches. Finally, we summarise the (infra)structural steps we intend to take at UBT towards the reconfiguration of African studies.

### **The study of Africa: area studies, the global turn, and African perspectives**

In choosing multiplicity as the framing concept of our cluster, we are seeking to respond to ongoing changes and challenges to the research approaches, theoretical paradigms, structures and hierarchies that have characterised the field of African studies for more than a century. In many ways, the field is itself an expression of multiplicity. Thus, by viewing these various and contradictory narratives as relational and co-constitutive, we propose to approach the subject of study, that is, "Africa", as a reality in the making.

African Studies is the agglomeration of many academic disciplines (Zeleza 2006), which follow their distinct methodologies and theories while being united by their focus on "Africa"—whatever "Africa" means for them (Macamo 1999). As Mudimbe has demonstrated in his seminal work *The Invention of Africa*, the unified concept of "Africa" emerged as the result of the confluence of European political interests and epistemic practices (Mudimbe 1988). In the process of colonial conquest, the vast heterogeneity of African modes of being and becoming was subsumed under a single representational frame that constituted Africa as the



“Other” to a European “Self” (Said 1978). This Manichaeian, colonial order of knowledge (JanMohamed 1983) has had wide ramifications for the perception of Africa within and outside academia, in both Western and African settings.

In the aftermath of World War II, changing geopolitics shifted the framework within which Europeans and North Americans pursued the study of Africa. The political division of the world into spheres of influence of the West and the Eastern Bloc went hand in hand with the systematic designation of distinct parts of the world as “areas”, studied as such for strategic purposes by interdisciplinary, mostly institutionally organised academic communities in the Global North. Little concerned with deconstructing colonial images of Africa as the West’s “Other”, area studies employed modernisation theory as its major conceptual lens. Here, Africans only figured as objects—not only of Western political and economic domination, but also of modernisation and development (Robinson 2004). Simultaneously, the intellectual production of many influential African scholars at the time was being strongly influenced by Pan-Africanism, which—although promoted by prominent politicians such as Kwame Nkrumah—was much more than a political project. In their search for African identity, scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1954) embarked on new intellectual paths that diverged from the modernisation narrative and eventually partly inspired the formulation, in the United States, of Afrocentric theory (starting with Asante (1980)). This intellectual movement was also a factor in the establishment of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana at Legon in 1961, which continues to be at the forefront of critical African studies (Owoahene-Acheampong 2013).

In the 1980s, when the fallacy of some of the basic assumptions of both the modernisation paradigm and Marxian dependency theory became evident, postmodern perspectives offered new ways of looking at the world. An emphasis on ambiguities over certainties replaced teleological views of Africa. Critical postmodern attitudes towards the premises on which modernity was built entailed rejecting the hegemony of Western narrations of the world, creating space for the narratives and needs of the “subaltern” (Spivak 1988; Chakrabarty 2000), whose claims to be heard resonated in the newly fragmented and pluralist postmodern world. Challenging the validity of Western knowledge production about the rest of the world, as well as the static character of areas, postmodern and postcolonial approaches left an indelible mark on the Western canon of African studies. Simultaneously, African intellectuals, especially those engaged in the formulation of African Philosophy, were debating the “Africanness” of knowledge produced by Africans (e.g. Hountondji 1983; Kama-lu 1990; Oruka 1990).

Following the end of the Cold War, accelerated globalisation and neoliberalism brought a brief revival of the modernisation paradigm. Widely viewed as constituting a neo-colonial project, these developments gave a further boost to postcolonial studies, whose proponents set about deconstructing the power relations that continued, and continue, to subject people in the Global South to marginalisation (e.g. Connell 2007, Sousa Santos 2014; see also Mignolo 2011 on decoloniality). The initial, rather teleological paradigm of globalisation was soon followed by approaches that viewed the “areas” of area studies as parts of the “global village” (McLuhan and Powers 1989), highlighting global interdependence and rapid trans-

formation in a connected and ever “smaller” world.

Global studies subsequently emerged as a new framework within the Western canon of the humanities and social sciences. One influential research trope was a focus on “glocalisation”, i.e., the entanglement of global and local influences (e.g. Mintz 1985; Robertson 1992, as well as the following collaborative UBT publications: Adogame, Echtler, and U. Vierke 2008; Loimeier, Neubert, and Weißköppel 2005; Neubert and Scherer 2014; Probst and Spittler 2004). As the multi-sited, multivalent, and interactive character of local-global dynamics appeared to dissolve the boundaries of areas, academic foci shifted to flows, scapes, crossings, and networks (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Werner and Zimmermann 2006), as conceptual devices deemed more suitable to grasping the complex forms and processes of mobility, connectivity, and power structures shaping people’s everyday lives and worlds. Scholars also employed concepts such as creolisation, translation, and appropriation (e.g. Hannerz 1996) in their attempts to capture these new dynamics.

Many African scholars have remained critical of the continued predominance of Western narrations of Africa, describing African studies as an “intellectual enterprise of producing knowledge based on a Western epistemological order in which both educated Africans and non-Africans are engaged” (Zezeza 1997, v; Arowosegbe 2014)—a critique applied not only to classical area studies but also the conceptual framework of global studies. The Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA, established in Dakar in 1976) have each taken a leading role in the search for alternative narratives (CODESRIA 2002), as has—though under very different circumstances—the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (Nhlapo and Garuba 2012).

Meanwhile, a new generation of African academics has embarked on changing the terms of the politics of representation that have, up to now, reproduced imbalances in the production of knowledge about Africa (Murunga and Diagne 2008). Committed to “the rediscovery, development, recognition and validation of African epistemologies in the creation and transmission of knowledge” (Mwangola 2008, 14), some protagonists now seek to centre African scholarship (Anyidoho 2008, 34). Notable African and Africa-based scholars have produced collective volumes promoting agendas concerned with “Africanizing knowledge” (Falola and Jennings 2002), and “Africa-centred knowledges” (Cooper and Morell 2014), attesting to the continuing importance of the interfaces of identity, epistemology, and knowledge production in the formulation of alternative narratives of Africa and African studies. However, as Macamo has highlighted, these intellectuals still grapple with the predicament that their agenda of rebellion against the misrepresentation of Africa “can only be articulated and rendered intelligible within the framework laid down by the conceptual language which misrepresents and oppresses [Africans]” (Macamo 2018, 4; Hountondji 2009).

Thus, our own agenda for reconfiguring African studies is designed to transcend the limitations of both conventional area studies and global studies, while acknowledging the pursuit of alternative narrations of Africa. Based on the idea of studying Africa as continuously constituted in and through multiple diachronic and synchronic relations that converge in often asymmetrical configurations of power and identity, our proposed cluster’s structure is further

designed to support the full collaborative participation of African scholars and institutional partners. While we will draw on the insights of global studies regarding the connections between areas (as emerging from interfaces of perception, imagination, negotiation, and webs of relations; see Appadurai 2000), our own research trajectory will not stop at the premise—common in global studies—that areas are constructed and globally connected. Instead we will direct our attention to the particularities of the actual processes through which areas emerge and change, zooming in on their continuous construction *and* identifying their underlying historical and spatial references (Koch 2016). Empirical research based on area expertise has the potential to accentuate the significance of such references and to establish differences and similarities between areas (Doevenspeck and Verne 2014). The field of African studies is particularly well-suited to expanding the partial focus of classical area studies, given Africa's diasporic connections with Europe, the Americas, the Black Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean, as well as the transnational and transcontinental interrelations of people, ideas, goods, and images (Schramm 2008) that are constitutive of African and African-diasporic narrations of the world (Arndt 2011).

### **Africa: multiple, relational, and reflexive**

Like lifeworlds around the globe, African lifeworlds too grow more diverse and complex. The ongoing proliferation and acceleration of connections and exchanges cut across the scales of the local, national, regional, and global, permeating all fields of socio-cultural life, whether religious, linguistic, political, legal, economic, or environmental. But what makes multiplicity particularly illuminating and relevant to the study of Africa—and vice versa—is the fact that African lifeworlds have always been characterised by a high degree of diversity (e.g. Olupona 1993). The processes of standardisation, bureaucratisation, and state control enforcement which have arguably reduced the degree of diversity in other parts of the world have led to different results in many parts of Africa, as exemplified by the linguistic and religious diversity that co-exists on the continent with forms of legal, normative, and political pluralism. Hence, contemporary African lifeworlds are built on the conjuncture of the continent's own long-standing diversity and the new global “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007) that is characterised by multiplying connections and uneven power relations.

This high and growing density of multi-layered relations prompts us to rethink older notions of diversity and connections. Whereas the latter notions build on the idea of pluralising “entities” (such as political systems or languages) and of connections as rather singular, unilineal, established ties that connect given entities, our conceptualisation of multiplicity seeks to break new theoretical ground: Multiplicity, understood as constantly updated products of processes of relating, opens up new avenues for studying the multiple ways of life and world-making as they pertain to Africa. Instead of positing Africa as diverse and possibly exceptional, we direct our analytical focus to the context-specific relations and relational constellations that index Africa as multiple. Given the state of the field as outlined in the previous subsection, we foresee many ways in which the three concepts of multiplicity, relationality, and reflexivity can move our scholarship on Africa beyond static categories that confine Africa to

a contact point in global networks or essentialist territorial models that juxtapose Africa and the West, thus transcending the limited binary logic of earlier, analytic models such as coloniser vs. colonised; North vs. South; modern vs. traditional; global vs. local; same vs. different.

Again, although we will take an empirical approach to expressions of multiplicity in our thematic research fields, our use of this concept does not simply evoke the existence of diverse ways of life. For us, multiplicity is not synonymous with concepts of plurality or diversity wherein given entities are viewed as parts that comprise a whole, or, vice versa, as general categories composed of individual iterations or sub-forms. Multiplicity refers to the relational and reflexive production of multiple phenomena and forms of being that are multiple because they are themselves produced by multiple relations. Thus, relationality and reflexivity are the analytical tools that will allow us to analyse the processes that constitute Africa and its diasporas as multiple.

Postcolonial scholarship on the logics of identity and difference (e.g. Bhabha 1994; Chakrabarty 2008 [2000]) has argued that entities such as religion or politics are constructs, informed by power interests and grounded in (academically) defined (Western) categories. Such master categories deny difference and incommensurability by subordinating the multiple to “the one” (category or principle), and thus reduce the multiple to comparable examples or sub-forms of “the one”, or to parts of a larger unit. Our understanding of multiplicity resolves this problem on two interrelated levels, as it (1) helps us to view phenomena in terms of their relationality and reflexive qualities, and (2) transcends the limits of thinking in fixed units and categories, creating space for conceptual flexibility—without, however, neglecting the powerful discursive presence of such categories.

Other than notions of connectivity or contact that tend to invoke movements where one entity is connected to another, taking a relational perspective allows us to avoid presumptions about the substantive nature of the phenomena under study. Relationality refers to the dynamic, multidirectional, simultaneous, continuous, and reflexive processes of relating and the emergent character of the results they generate. By the term relations, we refer to social, personal, conceptual and material relations that may variously involve individuals, social collectivities, other-than-human beings, objects, infrastructure, ideas, atoms and, in some cases, gods or ancestors. As an analytical tool, relationality thus apprehends the wide array of ways of being in the world, while acknowledging power structures and inequalities. The modes of relating that will figure in our empirical work will include hierarchy, parallelism, adaptation, convergence, acceptance, appropriation, rejection, and resistance, through to forms of non-relation such as detachment or withdrawal (Spies and Seesemann 2016).

Our analytical grasp of instantiations of multiplicity will be further enhanced through the systematic employment of four heuristic angles—modalities, medialities, temporalities, and spatialities—that we see as especially relevant to refining our conceptualisation of the multiple dimensions of relations as they play out in our empirical research settings. The application of these angles will constitute an important methodological step in our endeavour to analyse the relational constitution of the phenomena under study.

As the corollary of relationality, reflexivity works at several interconnected levels: first, it

points to the self-referential character of relational processes; second, it alerts us to the politics of relations between the worlds people make, and the scholars who study them; and third, as a necessary complement of any research in the humanities and the social sciences, it calls upon us as researchers to reflect on the power relations in which we are entangled.

In the first sense, reflexivity is a central dimension of relational processes: referring backward and forward in time is an inseparable feature of social worlds, as of the actors and agencies that create them (cf. Giddens 2000 [1996], 38–39). This type of reflexivity constantly modifies the conditions of the emergence of relations, implying the dimension of temporality. Thus, the continuous production of new configurations goes hand in hand with constant reflection on the past, and the evaluation of future potentials.

On another level, reflexivity requires us to critically engage with the epistemological premises and the categories we use in our research and theory-building. We see it as crucial to question clear-cut hierarchical distinctions between the concepts ordinary people use to make sense of their worlds, on the one hand, and the analytical frameworks that academics develop to interpret these realities, on the other. Here, we follow authors such as Brubaker (2013) and Chidester (2014), who—without denying the differences between quotidian and academic knowledges—have highlighted how categories of practices and of analysis, or “local knowledge” and “universal theory”, intersect and mutually influence each other. Thus, rather than merely juxtaposing the purportedly incommensurable logics of academia and everyday life as such, we will use the notion of reflexivity to describe and analyse the “looping effects” (Hacking 1995) through which such categories of analysis and practice constitute each other and affect each other’s frames of production.

On a third, related level, reflexivity refers to our responsibility as researchers to reflect upon the power relations and premises of academic knowledge production. As scholars, we become part of processes of world-making, and are therefore permanently required to reassess the methods and theories that guide our research. Thus, with African scholars such as (Anyidoho 2008, 34–35; Mama 2007), we share a sense of responsibility for narrating Africa, and for integrating this awareness into our research processes and structures. This task of reflection is of the greatest significance in the study of Africa, framed as it is by past and present power imbalances (Mbembe 2015; Mudimbe 1988; Zeleza 1997), and will be crucial to our conduct of collaborative research with our African academic partners.

Our research will thus proceed on both theoretical and empirical levels. As the cluster’s intellectual core, the Knowledge Lab will feature three fora to facilitate debates about theory, epistemology, and methodology, thus tying the empirical work conducted in the RSs to our collective work on the cluster’s key concepts. In elaborating these concepts and further developing our relational, reflexive approaches to the study of multiplicity we will draw on a number of wider academic debates, introduced in the cursory outline below.

#### *Approaches to multiplicity and relationality*

Cultural philosophy has played a pivotal role in advancing the conceptual model of multiplicity as a compelling alternative to models based on binaries, hierarchies, or spectrums. In the view of Deleuze and Guattari (2015 [1980]), for instance, multiplicity possesses both a phe-

nomenological and an ontological dimension. As a phenomenological category, the concept can be put to use in articulating the relational character of social realities. In the ontological sense, “multiplicity” refers to a substantial condition defined by no other predicate than its multiplicity (Badiou 2005). As a consequence, every attempt to limit such a situation to a “one” constitutes a reductive perspective, according to these strands of cultural philosophy. These considerations will provide useful starting points for our critical engagement with conceptualisations of Africa built on notions of “the one and the many”, as exemplified in any derivative of dichotomies such as global-local, centre-periphery, modern-traditional, or North-South.

Debates about multiplicity have received some of their impetus from science and technology studies, wherein the core argument is that reality itself cannot be anything other than multiple, because it is enacted in and through a variety of relational practices that are historically, culturally, and materially located (Mol 2002). In this view, practices and performances multiply reality and deprive the emerging components of their enduring character (Hanke 2014). As Strathern (1991) has argued, a multiple world made up of relations cannot be dissected into “the one and the many”, but only be studied through looking at “partial connections” that emerge from and constitute lived experiences. This research approach is backed up by intersectionality studies (as developed, for instance, by Black feminists studies; e.g. Crenshaw 1991), that show how processes of relating also determine what becomes dominant or marginal and why. Thus, multiplicities come into view as complexities governed by power relations.

Our choice of multiplicity as the conceptual framework for our study of Africa does not imply that we all, as a group of researchers coming from diverse disciplines, necessarily subscribe to the radical ontological premise that all being is multiple and ephemeral. Rather, by developing relational and reflexive approaches to the subject, we will open up an array of epistemological as well as ontological perspectives on the status of multiplicity. Engaging with relationality will be of crucial importance. We will thus take a number of different stances, drawn from cultural studies, the social sciences, and theories of new materialism, as simultaneous starting points from which we develop our heuristic angles (see below) and bring the relational character of our African and diasporic research settings into view. This approach will enable us to analyse the ways in which diverse ideas and practices relate to, and reflect (on) each other.

As the previous references to works by anthropologists and historians foregrounding exchanges, encounters, connections, and flows indicate, our focus on relations owes much to the hermeneutic and discursive traditions in the humanities, which have also been influential in previous collaborative research in African studies at UBT (such as Collaborative Research Center 560 “Local Agency in Africa in the Context of Global Influences”). These traditions foreground the relational co-constitution of the self and the other and, by extension, of life-worlds and discourses. Earlier scholarship has expressed this interrelatedness in concepts such as conversation (Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff 1991), translation (Fuchs 2009), resistance (Taussig 1980), or power and knowledge (Foucault 1969, 1976), which have provided important input for the elaboration of our conceptual framework.

In refining our analytical grip on relationality, we can take further inspiration from strands of philosophical thinking and literary theory. For instance, Glissant (1990) foregrounds the process of “coming into relation”; accordingly, in his “Poetics of Relation”, context and the moment of contact take centre stage. Writing at around the same time, Pratt (1992) introduced the idea of the “contact zone”, and Bhabha (1994) developed the notion of the “third space”, notions emphasising the role of relations in the processes of the formation of a specific situation or space. Scholars such as Žižek (2006) and Massumi (2002) have argued for radical relational perspectives on the human and the material alike, the latter replacing the notion of interaction between discrete entities with that of “ontogenesis”, as “the becoming of culture and the social” (Massumi 2002, 9). These authors draw our attention to a broad range of modes of relating (including appropriation and moments of resistance, rupture and ignorance) and show us the importance of space and time as they pertain to relational processes.

Contributions to the thinking of relationality in the social sciences are many and various, and the cluster as a whole will not privilege one over another. Rather, cluster projects and RSs will draw on different strands and stances that share an emphasis on relationalism over substantialism in the analysis of the social world (Donati 2010). These include scholars such as Bourdieu (1996) and proponents of actor-network theory (e.g. Latour 2005) and historical semiotics (Law 2008), as well as relational sociology (e.g. Donati and Archer 2015; Emirbayer 1997; Powell and Dépelteau 2013). The latter, from its outset, has rejected the use of discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as starting points for sociological analysis, prompting a turn “from units to context, from attributes to connections, from causes to events ... from substances to networks, from essences to relations” (Abbott 1995, 93). From this perspective, society is not an arena where relations play out; rather, it is the very fabric of relations. Thenceforth, relational thinking in the social sciences has given primacy to configurations of relations, not to groups, entities, or places (Desmond 2014). Especially relevant for our approach is the idea that as relations transgress scales, according to “radical relationism” (Powell 2013), they also transcend dualistic notions of individual-society, local-global, or micro-macro.

Among those taking a radical position with regard to the ontological status of relationality are the protagonists of new materialism (Coole and Frost 2010), a recent and heterogeneous field of inquiry whose founding premise is neatly summarised in Barad’s proposition that “relata do not pre-exist relations” (2007, 140), while acknowledging the material affordances that allow for the formation of social and cultural realities. In this view, “relata” do not refer to any prior entity, but appear as the result of co-constitutive intra-actions between meaning and matter. Even the acting human self is constituted in and through relations that connect relata such as other human beings, as well as, for example, objects, atoms, gravity, or animals. It is thus this field of thought that will oblige us to acknowledge that relations are not limited to the social realm, in the narrow sense of connections between human agents—whether as individuals or groups—or between humans and social institutions. Rather, they extend to non-human beings, objects, and ideas, all of which are made up of relations and can therefore participate in relational lifeworlds, thus becoming “actants” alongside human agents (Latour 1999)—or, as Appadurai recently put it, “mediants” (2015) in the distribution

of agency across human and non-human entities. From this we can take inspiration for how to deal with the question of how (material) media figure in processes of relating.

Thus, when compared with the conceptualisations of multiplicity and relationality outlined above, the novelty of our approach lies in combining perspectives, methods and epistemological premises from a wide range of academic disciplines, with the objective of exploring and analysing the multiple, relational, and reflexive ways in which the phenomena under study intersect and co-constitute each other in specific research fields in Africa and its diasporas.

### Heuristic angles

So far, we have introduced relationality and reflexivity as key categories for the analysis of empirical expressions of multiplicity in our thematic fields. The four “angles” of modalities, medialities, temporalities, and spatialities will further facilitate our methodological access to relationality and reflexivity and, through it, to multiplicity. As heuristic categories, the angles will help us to operationalise relationality and conceptualise relations as they emerge in our empirical research, and thus enable us to refine the three key concepts multiplicity, relationality and reflexivity on empirical as well as on theoretical levels. Figure 1 shows how the cluster’s three core concepts, the four heuristic angles, and the six thematic fields of the RSs intersect.

Whereas the angle of modalities zooms in on processes and ways of relating and their outcomes, medialities focuses on the media (in the widest sense) that constitute relations. The angles of temporalities and spatialities are closely interrelated. The former refers to the “multiple durées” (Mbembe 2001) of relations; the latter asks about the scales that relations traverse, and the spaces they produce.

These angles will provide the cluster’s projects with shared tools with which to initiate conversations and exchanges across the RSs. As such, the angles will provide a coherent conceptual structure for our research

(though not all angles will be equally relevant to all RSs) and enhance the generation of transdisciplinary synergies in our joint theoretical and methodological work. They will also allow us to draw on preliminary work conducted in earlier major collaborative structures within African studies at UBT. We will, however, remain open to new heuristic perspectives that may emerge over the course of our research and within our critical interrogation of concepts, as pursued in collaboration with international fellows at UBT and the African Cluster Centres (ACCs). As the cluster’s intellectual core, the Knowledge Lab will devote regular, joint work-

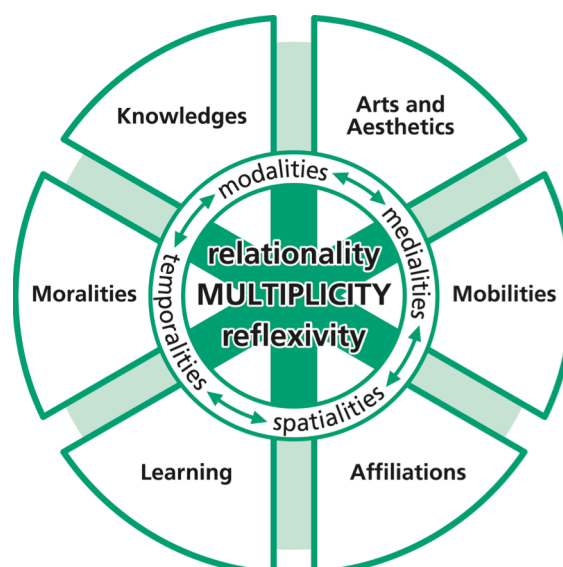


Figure 1. Core Concepts, Heuristic Angles, and Research Sections



ing formats to each angle, thus tying the empirical work conducted in the RSs to our collective work on the cluster's key concepts.

### *Angle # 1: Modalities*

By “modalities”, we refer to different ways, or modes, of relating, the various forms and qualities of relations, and the multiple outcomes of processes of relating. Ranging from relating to non-relating, the modes of relating that we seek to analyse include, for example: exchange, acceptance, influence, dependence, conflict, competition, inclusion, cooperation, struggle, hierarchisation, rejection, resistance, or denial (Spies and Seesemann 2016, 136). Thus, processes of exclusion, abandonment or disavowal are included among the modes of relating.

From the angle of modalities, we will also ask how to qualify the properties of relations. Depending on the observer's position, relations might appear imagined, symbolic, conceptual, personal, physical, material, or affective; they might also be direct, indirect, concrete, actual, potential, historical, present or future-oriented; they might be enduring, brief, symmetrical or asymmetrical, and more or less imbued with power (Powell 2013).

The angle will also allow us to conceptualise the products of processes of relating, that is, the emerging relata, (temporary) phenomena and the orders they form. Multiple relations might form entanglements (Hodder 2012; Mbembe 2001; Nuttall 2009), networks (Latour 2005; White 2008 [1992]), assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 2015 [1980]), meshworks (Ingold 2011), or enmeshments (Mol and Law 1994). Our analyses will benefit from the comparative analysis of possible formations, keeping in mind that processes of relating may align elements “without necessarily turning them into a comprehensive system or a complete overview” (Mol and Law 2002, 16). The angle thus invites our acknowledgment and discussion of recent thinking that posits processes of relating as infinite, and relations as often partial, fragmented and discontinuous, sometimes creating exclusion and blockages, such as within Africa, or between Africa and the rest of the world. The angle will thus push us to question the seeming stability of phenomena such as, for example, religious traditions, and to ask what relations are needed to maintain their perceived fixity.

As with all of the angles, this angle will allow us to approach relations with concepts and methods from different disciplines. We will jointly compile a glossary of modes of relating to serve us in the cluster as more specified analytic tool. Modalities will take centre stage among the four angles, as a way to systematise our study of relations within research projects, thus advancing our understanding of relationality and multiplicity. This angle will also add to the self-reflexivity of our research, as it requires us to consider the relational modalities of our positions as researchers, called upon to describe and analyse relations without playing the “God trick” (Haraway 1988)—that is, without forgetting that knowledge is situated.

### *Angle # 2: Medialities*

By “medialities”, we mean to emphasise the mediated character of relations, all of which take specific material forms (Krämer 2015; McLuhan 1964). We will draw from philosophy, media studies and insights of the material turn, and consider media in the broadest sense, not only referring to technological mass media, like radio, television or the internet, but also to “prima-

ry media”, like language, images, sounds, numbers, and all “extensions of the body” (McLuhan 1964), or material objects, like cars, weapons, clothes, or mobile phones. Accordingly, the role of media is more fundamental than “just” transmitting data or expressing a previously defined relation. Medialities refer to the necessary material conditions for any form of exchange to take shape: media constitute relations, and relations are brought into being through and by media (Debray 2000; Leroi-Gourhan 1993). Furthermore, media come with their own effects and meanings, transforming and modifying what they constitute in the first place (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012; Ritzer 2015).

In the context of the cluster, taking the angle of medialities will invite us to pay attention to the specific roles, characteristics and effects that media have in the constitution of relations. This angle will demand that we explore the material and technical conditions of relations, and consider their media as particular apparatus that shape relations; their modes, temporalities and space of reference, without falling into some kind of hardware-determinism (Kittler 1999). While material mediations allow social, economic and cultural realities to permanently change throughout history, adapting to the material and technical resources available, media do not predetermine relations exclusively, but they are also historically framed and interpreted. Thus, the interrelationships of the material, the social and the cultural will be a key concern in the pursuit of this angle.

The angle of medialities will also allow us to stress the processual and performative character of phenomena under study. Furthermore, considering materiality also urges us to think how form and material create affect in the sense of evoking an experience that does not easily translate into language, but nonetheless produces meaningful “non-representational knowledge” (Griffero 2014; Gumbrecht 2004; Thrift 2007). With regard to reflexivity, the angle will also help us to consider how certain media impose and reproduce power relations by channelling flows of goods and knowledge, prioritising specific epistemologies and marginalising alternative perspectives at the same time.

### *Angle # 3: Temporalities*

As relations occur in time and space, temporality is an important category within which to critically examine the dynamics and processuality of relations, as well as the simultaneity of multiple options and orders in the world. “Temporalities” is thus an angle from which to analyse phenomena not in terms of finished products of processes, but rather as processes themselves, and also in terms of their simultaneity with other phenomena (Atmanspacher and Ruhnau 1997). Treating phenomena as constituted in and through relations necessitates a conception of time not as a linear sequence of past, present and future, but rather as “an interlocking of pasts, presents and futures” (Hodder 2012, 98), in which “past and future resonate in the present” (Massumi 2002, 200). Concepts such as “polyrhythm” (Deleuze and Guattari 2015 [1980]; Lefebvre 1992) are also useful for engaging with the emergent and multiple character of time as a non-linear phenomenon, focusing on moments of rupture, pause and repetition as well as the coexistence of different rhythms at different rates. Accordingly, this angle also urges us to consider the mutual production of time and space (May and Thrift 2001).

Examining expressions of multiplicity from the angle of temporalities thus impels us to capture the temporal dimensions of the emergence of relations, the specific dynamics and speeds of relations, and the simultaneity of different temporalities that we find in relational constellations in the field. Furthermore, the angle of temporalities will also be key to refining our perspective on reflexivity, since relations may project themselves into the future and / or repeat or refer back to previous relations. Thus, beyond reductive notions of continuity or cause and effect, the angle of temporalities will require us to consider the recursive entanglements of relational processes that comprise multiplicity. Our own reflexivity as researchers also demands us to critically consider the imposition of temporalities on Africa, such as the epistemic denial of Africa's coevalness in certain strands of African studies (Fabian 2002 [1983]).

#### *Angle # 4: Spatialities*

The angle of "spatialities" will help us to analyse relations as concrete connections, positions and processes in space, and to understand how social and material interrelations constitute lifeworlds through "the production of space" (Lefebvre 1991). Since the so-called "spatial turn" of the 1990s, space has been conceived of as more than merely the physical backdrop to social life, but rather as integral to, and interwoven with it (Soja 1989). From this angle, space may be understood as constituted through relational actions, from everyday practices to broader constellations, such as political decision-making or environmental conditions, and as such imagined as a web of socio-material practices (Massey 2005). Space, as a precondition for the existence of multiplicity, is where different relational processes coexist, on various—often mismatching—spatial and temporal scales. The angle of spatialities thus helps us to analyse social interactions, as they do not exist on a neutral material plane, but are intimately connected to, and mediated via, the social and material conditions, connections, and processes present in their localities. This will enable us to apprehend, for example, the co-presence of multiple practices, materialities and ideas in one place, or to analyse transcontinental relations that materialise in space and produce spatial effects, such as inequality, boundaries, migration or domination.

Thus, the angle of spatialities also affirms a shift of emphasis from pre-given scalar and territorial entities towards relational processes as a category of analysis (Krüger and Samimi 2017). With reference to critical area studies, this angle invites a shift of focus from the (blurring) boundaries of nation-states and territories (Engel and Nugent 2010; Ette 2012) to the relational processes of construction through which "areas" emerge and change. This will enable us to cast a fresh view on, for example, African interconnections (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008), the dense presence of Africa in the world (Gilroy 1993; Loimeier and Seesemann 2006), and of the world in Africa (Bodomo 2016). Understanding space as a product of complex socio-material interrelations adds to our reflexive approach as it enables us to go beyond binary models of a connected world, wherein each relation is only seen to connect one point in Africa with another point somewhere else.

## Towards the reconfiguration of African studies

The originality of our proposal lies in positing multiplicity as a conceptual framework for the reconfiguration of African studies. Employing relationality and reflexivity as analytical tools, our *empirical* work on expressions of multiplicity in African and African diasporic research settings will allow us both to draw on, and at the same time to transcend previous conceptual frameworks, as discussed above. Such a perspective promises significant insights into the workings of relational processes that constitute the phenomena under study and thus of multiplicity more generally. Moreover, it will allow us to challenge historically and currently still powerful views and narrations of Africa, within and beyond the field of African studies. By analysing the relational and reflexive processes that constitute “Africa multiple”, we will be able to study Africa without reproducing binary models, including the “Global North” and the “Global South”, and notions that conceptualise Africa as fixed, unitary, marginalised, or exceptional—and here, by “we”, we mean together with our African academic partners.

The Knowledge Lab will be central to all of our theoretical, reflexive, and methodological endeavours, bringing all cluster members together for regular debates on the cluster’s three core concepts, four angles, and methodology, as well as on questions of epistemology and research ethics. As the main space where the empirical and theoretical findings of the cluster’s research projects coalesce, we will use the KL’s working formats to develop inter- and transdisciplinary synergies and generate additional analytical value. Most of the cluster’s research projects will be interdisciplinary, in the sense that the disciplines represented by the participating researchers will interact and possibly combine, thus leading to new questions and conceptual advances. At the same time, we are committed to a collective transdisciplinary effort, which is crucial for the creation of new and higher insights into the multiple, relational, and reflexive constitution of our research settings. Here, our usage of transdisciplinarity pertains to research contexts concerned with an overarching conceptual framework that is relevant for different disciplines (cf. Hirsch Hadorn et al. 2008) on the need of transdisciplinary approaches in complex settings). At the same time, our engagement with transdisciplinarity will go one step further, as it will transcend the boundaries of academia by involving non-academic actors, such as artists, NGOs, activists, or farmers, into the research process (Holzer, Carmon, and Orenstein 2018; Kassam et al. 2018). Such formats—which have been successfully tested in African studies at UBT—will be practiced in several of the cluster’s research projects as well as in the KL. This engagement with the non-academic public will also enable us to work towards policy-relevant outcomes.

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