

## 8th of May 2014: Introduction for WG C

The organizers of the working group, all members of sub-project 2 ("Visions of Nature"), gave an overview on relevant conceptions of nature, understandings of nature, cultural distinctions and interrelations, and related questions on future and African landscapes. They put forward a broad epistemological view of nature understood as ecology, resource, image and discourse. Transformation processes for possible futures take place within, not despite, nature. The second part of the session focussed on organisational suggestions for WG C's programme of interdisciplinary and cross-issue dialogues on nature and time in area studies, as well as how to integrate the expertise of academy fellows. The third part of the session was a screening and discussion of the documentary "Second Nature" from 1996. The documentary is based on the research of Melissa Leach and James Fairhead, who investigated the theory of landscape degradation in African savanna-forest transition zones. They examined contested readings of the forests surrounding each village within the savanna. The narrative, which is still accepted in the fields of national environment administration and international development aid, is that local inhabitants destroyed the formerly rich biodiversity of the savanna. The two scientists and the local elders read the landscape as having been enriched by the people living there who planted the trees. This alternative landscape knowledge offers very different options for future development, meaning that population growth in forest-savanna transition zones can be enriched by sustainable landscape management. This perspective is relevant for working group C in the sense that humans' interaction with the forest is based on traded knowledge and previous experiences and thus interaction represents a progression over time as ideas of cultivation and land use develop. Past and present vegetation and landscape in Africa tell us a lot about possible future society-nature relations. Nevertheless the participants of the session criticised the locally-concentrated perspective of the study and the idea of equilibrium as generating a universalistic and generalised idea of sustainable development.