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# DISSERTATION

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Africa and the Rest.

Imaginations beyond a continent in African  
scholarship on human rights and development.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE DIFFICULT SEARCH FOR AFRICA

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*It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.  
For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.  
They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game,  
but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.*

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (1984)

*People are defeated or go mad or die in many, many ways, some in the  
silence of that valley, where I couldn't hear nobody pray, and many in the  
public, sounding horror where no cry or lament or song or hope can  
disentangle itself from the roar. And so we go under, victims of that  
universal cruelty which lives in the heart and in the world, victims of the  
universal indifference to the fate of another, victims of the universal fear of  
love, proof of the absolute impossibility of achieving a life without love.  
One day, perhaps, unimaginable generations hence, we will evolve into the  
knowledge that human beings are more important than real estate  
and will permit this knowledge to become the ruling principle of our lives.  
For I do not for an instant doubt, and I will go to my grave  
believing, that we can build Jerusalem, if we will.*

James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (1986)



What is Africa? As simple as this question might sound, it turned out to be one of the most important questions to be spun around in the context of this study. It turned out, moreover, not to be that simple at all, containing different dimensions, bearing a charged history, and leading to very diverse answers, depending on who is to be asked. All of these aspects constitute what might be called a discourse on Africa, the 'Africa discourse', one that tells as much about Africa as it obscures, and that reflects not only how those who create it see the world, but also how they would like to see themselves. To get more concrete: The basic assumption that permeated the work on this research was that in talking about certain issues – be it human rights and development, as in our case – *in or with respect to Africa*, those who talk (or write) do not do that just in relation to Africa *as such*. We might even go further and suggest that there is nothing like an 'Africa as such'. Rather, talkers and writers have different Africas in mind that shine out of the representations and images they use to refer to Africa. These sometimes reveal more about their understandings of what they see as right or wrong than their explicit ideas about particular rights or development strategies, which is the very reason why a study like the one at hand might be also useful for human rights and development theorists and practitioners. The Africa discourse and the human rights or development discourses respectively overlap, influence each other, and contain insights on more than just their actual subjects.

To make the link between these different discourses and discourse levels clear, it might be interesting to shortly recall the genesis of this research, outlining some turning points in both the conceptualisation and realization, which led to the present outcome as one of the possible ways to resolve the intellectual, political, and ethical challenges involved. In retrospect, the turning points seem to be rather necessary specifications of the initial plan than real changes of its direction. That this initial plan was to explore the meaning of rights-based (approaches to) development (RBD) in the discourses and practical work of different actors involved in Kenya's development field constitutes at first sight admittedly inconsequential information. This idea did, however, raise my interest, not necessarily in rights-based development itself, but rather in, first, the ideological influences that shaped the concept as it is being implemented in

its present (albeit contested) form, second, the question of the actual value of RBD as a new strategy for 'solving problems in the Third World', and third, its interaction with the 'African context'. Instead of a field research, the engagement with relevant texts proved to be more appropriate for finding the right path. This, furthermore, involved another issue that subsequently shaped the research framework and stemmed from a closer look at the scholarship published on RBD: authority in writing (about RBD) with respect to Africa.

Over the last years, RBD has been embraced by development practitioners and international actors as yet another ultimate solution to the dilemmas of development, combining two desirable goals - the pursuit of development and the fulfilment of human rights - that should be acted upon not only simultaneously but interdependently. Given the recentness of this already almost paradigmatic notion, its scholarly examination so far can of course not be compared to the vast literature existing on both issues separately. Nevertheless, a huge amount of literature has already been produced on the approach, ranging from a theoretical embedding (see the review digest on RBD by Bania-Dobyns et.al. 2006) to the possibilities of implementation (e.g. Kirkemann Boesen/Martin 2007) of the rights-based agenda, while there is a tendency in the according literature to neglect past discussions on similar intersections between human rights and development, such as the Right to Development<sup>1</sup>. That even the controversial policies of the World Bank have started to accommodate 'rights talk' (Nyamu-Musembi/Cornwall 2004, Horta 2002) should not cause irritations, as it just neatly fits into the changing global hegemonic development discourse, well-known for its habit to re-interpret formerly radical political keywords and wash them out into digestible elements of conservative policies (see e.g. Batliwala 2007). The focus here, however, is not on the policy level of development co-operation or on the human rights regime. It should not be argued whether certain interventions are more useful than others or whether projects work effectively enough. The spotlight is on some of the makers of the discourse - those who write about all these issues, asking why they do it in a

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<sup>1</sup> For contributions to the discussion on the Right to Development, see e.g. D'Sa (1984), Shepherd (1990), Obiora (1996), Sengupta (2002), and Ibhawoh (2011), who is particularly critical towards the recent emergence of RBD.

certain way with respect to Africa.

The last part of the sentence above, 'with respect to Africa', has a long history. Claims that Africa needs (or needs to reject) certain understandings of development or human rights *because it is Africa* are neither confined to the scholarship analysed here nor constitute a recent mode of argumentation. Only two examples should be mentioned here as an illustration. In 1979, Léopold Sédar Senghor used the following words to argue for a necessary particularity of an *African Charter on Human and People's Rights* during the meeting of African legal experts in Dakar that targeted at drafting the charter:

“Europe and America have constructed their system of rights and liberties with reference to a common civilization, to respective peoples and to some specific aspirations. It is not for us Africans either to copy them [Europe and America] or to seek originality for originality's sake. It is for us to manifest both imagination and skill. Those of our traditions that are beautiful and positive may inspire us. You should therefore constantly keep in mind our values and the real needs of Africa.” (Quoted in Ojo 1990: 116)

The link established between Africa's peculiarity and development in the following, more recent, quote is somewhat different from the above link between human rights and Africa. It points to a different relationship established between the concepts, one that is more widespread in the development discourse than in the discourse on human rights in Africa:

“(...) after nearly half a century of firm belief in and adoption of imported Western development ideologies and strategies in efforts to achieve modernization, it is painfully evident that Africa continues to be underdeveloped, poor, heavily indebted to its ex-colonial rulers, and struggling with insurmountable internal socio-economic problems.” (Abrokwa 1999: 646)

Just like Senghor in the quote above, Abrokwa argues that there is the need to refer to a *special* understanding of development because of the failure of 'imported Western development ideologies' that are not feasible in the African

context. The underlying assumption here is that Western concepts are not suitable for Africa, because Africa first, is *not the West* and second, because Africa *as Africa* is special in itself.

That there is a particular understanding of rights-based development necessary in the context of Africa does, however, not feature in the respective literature, at least not yet. Part of the explanation for the nature of argumentation and theory found there is certainly the deployment of particular theoretical concepts and the dismissal or neglect of theories and theoretical contributions formulated in Africa itself. Another part that accounts for this phenomenon can be, however, attributed to the authorship within the scope of the topic, which is dominated by Western scholars. Rights-based development as the combination of rights and development concepts has been receiving considerable attention from African scholars over the last years, yet compared to the enormous total amount of publications on the topic, their contribution/representation has been rather humble - confined to a number of journal articles, online publications and monographies (e.g. Olowu 2004, Tsikata 2007). In recently published anthologies (Hickey and Mitlin 2009a; Gready and Ensor 2005a), which might gain seminal character given the maiden-like appearance of the topic, African authors write only about the particularities of case studies (Okille 2005), co-write with other (African or European) authors (e.g. Duni et.al. 2009)<sup>2</sup>, while the theoretical chapters are to a great deal written by Western authors (e.g. Jonsson 2005; Ensor 2005).

While such a 'discovery' might seem to have very little explanatory power and should serve mainly as a thought-provoking impulse, it is still remarkable about the given literature that it does not reflect the debates on human rights that have taken place over the last decades among African scholars<sup>3</sup>. For instance, in the two above-mentioned anthologies, the respective introductory chapters (Gready and Ensor 2005b; Hickey and Mitlin 2009b; Archer 2009; Gledhill 2009) do not contain any reference to these debates. Surprisingly, the same holds for contributions about case studies focusing on human rights in particular Africa(n

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<sup>2</sup> Or, as in the World Bank publication (Alsop 2004), they are not represented at all.

<sup>3</sup> For a compact and insightful overview of different positions, see Appiagyei-Atua (2000: 73-89).

countries) (Jonsson 2005; Brouwer et.al. 2005; Jones 2005; Okille 2005; Galang/Parlevliet 2005), which despite their rather practical focus contain references to other (non-African or Western) theoretical literature on human rights<sup>4</sup>, but not to African thinkers.

Why is it, then, that those ones who belong to the respective societies are not visible in theory that aims at changing these very societies? It is against the backdrop of this question that I finally decided to focus – from my own position as a (more or less) Western Africanist – exclusively on *African* scholarship on human rights and development. As Boele van Hensbroek puts it bluntly (1999: 7):

“[n]o comprehensive history of Europe or the United States, for instance, would fail to discuss the ideas of Locke, Montesquieu, Jefferson, Dewey, or Marx, but when it comes to Africa apparently one can do almost without African intellectuals. In those instances where African thought has been studied, expositions of metaphysical systems abound, whereas discussions of critical or theoretical thought belonging to individual Africans are quite rare. Within Africanist scholarship the African remains an anomaly.”

A seemingly paradoxical contrast relating to such an insufficient representation of Africans in research is given by the on the other hand very visible representations of ‘Africa’ when it comes to particular topics, genres, or worldviews (see, in a wider sense, Popke 2001), for example with respect to charity on the one hand (see Yrjölä 2009) and music and art on the other hand (see Brusila 2001). This contradiction is easily resolved by looking at the very limited representations that are being popularised. In other words, these selective manifestations of interest in Africa belong to the same underlying problematic as the disinterest towards it elsewhere. Not every ‘inclusion’ of African viewpoints, people, issues, or ‘voices’ necessarily serves the benefit of Africa. Many inclusions rest upon illusions.

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<sup>4</sup> For example: Donnelly (1989) in Jonsson (2005) or Galtung/Wirak (1997) in Galant/Parlevliet (2005). Ironically, Donnelly has been profoundly criticized by several African authors (see, among others, Marasinghe 1984: 42, Ahluwalia 2001: 87, Mutua 1995: 357)

Therefore, while a consequence of this study might be to contribute to the visibility of African scholarship outside of Africa, the most challenging aspect is the danger both of essentializing and patronizing. These two threats are not just 'somewhere out there', appealing to my own responsibility as a writer of this study. They underlie the very endeavour of writing and researching about the problematic that shall frame this study and its focus on the linkages and intersections between a number of rather fashionable but crucial concepts: discourse, power, location, representation, geopolitics, identity. If language or writing are postulated as powerful tools, the process of writing itself becomes contested, dangerous, and at times impossible, as sometimes – in the course of both differentiating and radicalizing the research focus - there seem to be simply no means of communication left that would *not* patronise or *not* essentialise.

The danger involved starts to manifest itself as early as with the selection of 'African scholarship' as the focus of the research and the rationale behind it suggested above. What is the expectation that guides such a selection? Consider the following reflections by Bilgin made in reference to Western and non-Western scholarship in the field of International Relations:

"(...) in search of 'difference', some 'Western' scholars have turned to 'Third World radicals' and found exactly what they were looking for: treatises on the various ways in which the strong have exploited the weak. (...) Without wanting to underestimate the significance of inquiring into such radically 'different' visions (...), it is nevertheless important to underscore one issue: the ways in which the current state of 'non-Western' IR [International Relations theory, the area of Bilgin's work] ('almost the same but not quite') is taken for granted and not problematised is in itself problematic. (...) [W]hen 'non-Western' scholars' writings do not exhibit such 'difference' but appear to be similar to those of their 'Western' counterparts, 'non-Western' scholars are represented as the robotic 'Stepford Wife' to 'Western IR', the engineer. (...) They are 'social science socialized products' of 'Western' IR who have 'thoroughly digested [its] norms and parameters'. Needless to say, such a stance denies agency to 'non-



Western' scholars and represents them as unthinking emulators"  
(Bilgin 2008: 13).

I have quoted Bilgin here extensively not only because he makes a strong argument, which, despite its different context of origin, applies to many other areas of scholarship. In a way, it frames the focus of my study with its inherent contradictions in a very blatant manner. As Mbembe argues, "[i]n placing too much emphasis on the themes of identity and difference or economic marginalization, a number of analysts have conferred on Africa a character so particular that it is not comparable with any other region of the world" (Mbembe 2001b: 1). Thus, the restriction to African scholarship should not lead to the perpetuation of the image of Africa as the place of darkness and 'shadows' (Ferguson 2006) or to what Mbembe calls the 'new nativism' (Mbembe 2001b). It should also not involve the 'nailing down' of 'Africans' to certain positions in a deterministic manner, which Diagne criticises in his elaboration on human rights:

"[T]he alternative between *clash* or *dialogue* is a pitfall, since both clash and dialogue share the same premise, which needs to be reassessed: cultural identity as destiny. That said, it must be emphasized that what makes the illusion of "identity as destiny" function is (...) the implicit acceptance of that representation by *other* intellectuals, who adopt, in principle, an anti-Western posture and undertake the symmetrical task of defending and illustrating *another* identity, which entails, for example, advocating *another* philosophy of human rights." (Diagne 2009: 9-10, original emphasis)

Accordingly, in dealing with African perspectives on human rights or development, the intention is neither to identify concepts as 'Western' or 'African' nor to find out whether supposedly 'Western' concepts have been appropriated by 'African' scholarship or vice versa. Edward Said's words can serve as a warning against such efforts, saying that "[t]o prefer a local, detailed analysis of how one theory travels from one situation to another is also to betray some fundamental uncertainty about specifying or delimiting the field to which

any one theory or idea might belong” (Said 2000: 197, quoted in Bilgin 2008: 19).

In a similar manner would the comparison of a global development discourse with an African discourse do no justice to the latter, as first, it would rest on the assumption that there is no African discourse included in the global one (and that whatever is African is not ‘global’) and second, it would actually negate the hegemonic character of certain discourses, even if the aim was precisely to question it. A global hegemonic discourse is equally shared and rejected by African scholars who (re-)construct development (or human rights) as a concept, be it strategically or not. Finally, as stated above, only because a position comes from Africa it does not necessarily need to serve the interests of Africa or Africans (however they could be identified in such an unequivocal manner), and it is the aim of this study to cope with these interdependencies and contradictions and still bear in mind how different the interpretations of ‘Africa’s interest’ are.

After elaborating on those traps that I tried not to fall into, it is adequate at this point to provide a rejoinder to the question raised above: What is the expectation of the selection of African scholarship and, accordingly, what is the main reasoning that substantiates the research at hand?

In the light of the contradictions outlined earlier, the relevance of *African perspectives*, not only as perspectives of those coming from different African countries, will be raised as an issue - through analysing the logic and conditions of development and human rights as *African* concepts. As suggested, this approach does not foreground an essentialised understanding of *Africa* but rather a conscious exploration of what an *African perspective* on human rights and development can mean, with a particular emphasis on the question what exactly is meant by Africa in this respect and why. This endeavour does not rest on the belief that African scholars are the only ones legitimised to speak or write about Africa (cf. Melber 2009: 190) but should, instead, argue for the validity of difference within Africa itself:

“For one, it should be understood that in all matters related to the study of Africa – theory, method, concepts, evidence, and interpretation – there are no homogenous African positions exclusive to Africans or unified European responses exclusive to Europeans. Indeed, if anything, positions and responses are diverse within both intellectual spaces/universes and tend to be shared across the North-South/Africa-Europe divide that is implied in the sub-title. Moreover, these positions also tend to interpenetrate and overlap in complex ways that make a rigid, binary opposition of perspectives difficult to sustain.” (Olukoshi 2007: 10)

As has become clear from the introductory remarks, the impulse that gave rise to this study was the frustrating observation that African social science, despite its vibrancy, continues to be ignored and marginalised by Western social science. It is rarely received in mainstream publications and important debates led in Africa are not considered even if Africa itself is the respective regional focus. A mere deconstruction of either ‘Africa’ or ‘the West’ (see Parpart 1995) does not help here. At the same time, I have argued that a ‘simple’ juxtaposition of Western and African scholarship is, even if it was possible, drawing a distinction between questionable entities and does not deal with Africa in its own right.

Therefore, the focus of this research lies in the nexus between the concepts of ‘human rights’, ‘development’, and ‘Africa’, with the main emphasis on the Africa discourse created in the areas of its intersection with the other two concepts. If the concept of Africa is related to human rights and development in a particular way, then the questions are both how it is done and why. The “chains of equivalence” (Laclau 1997) surrounding these two concepts change with Africa as an additional element in the chain, but Africa itself is included in other chains of equivalence, which again has an impact on the following concepts of human rights and development. These different dynamics will be analysed by studying the representations of Africa in African writings on human rights and development since the beginning of the 1980s.

The outline of the ideas that gave rise to this endeavour and was provided above asserted that I want to trace African discourses that informed (or were side-lined in) the recent debates on rights-based development. Nevertheless, it proved to be useful to separate the concepts of human rights and development respectively for the sake of analysis. They are both located in different intellectual and political traditions and, despite their interconnectedness and the growing consolidation of human rights and development scholarship (see Uvin 2004), the analytical process revealed that with respect to the image or representation of Africa they involve, different forces are involved in their constitution. The respective argument is, therefore, stronger when they are analytically disentangled. Other discourses linked to them – such as discourses on aid, democratization, or marginalization – were blanked out for similar reasons.

One basic intention of this study is to trace the meaning of both the singularity and plurality of Africa as a concept in African writings on human rights and development. The primary sources analysed for this purpose are (primarily) constituted of scholarly articles by African authors published in scientific journals since the beginning of the 1980s. The aim is thus to analyse the representations of Africa involved and to interpret the meaning of these interpretations given their ‘African’ origin. The hermeneutic approach chosen allows for the reconstruction of ‘Africa’ and its subsequent interpretation with regard to its strategic substance. It further allows tracing processes of negotiation that are inscribed in the Africa discourse linked with human rights and development.

The process of research, involving both analysis and interpretation, entailed first, an inspection of all contributions on ‘Africa and human rights’ and ‘Africa and development’ since the beginning of the 1980s that were accessible<sup>5</sup>. The selection of the period after 1980 arose from both pragmatic reasons – the low accessibility of material from earlier decades – and content-wise shifts in both development discourse and human rights discourse with respect to Africa that

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<sup>5</sup> This means that all contributions accessible from the location of the University of Vienna were considered, including publications in libraries, (affordable) publications on sale, and material available online.

became discernible in the so-called 'lost decade' of the 1980s. Moreover, the formulation of important documents in both spheres – the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1986) – and the scholarly reflections of their meaning and effects can also be seen as contributing a new dynamics to the internationally visible African discourse in scholarship.

A second aim of this study is to offer a framing of these understandings of Africa from the more superordinate perspective of knowledge production on Africa with respect to the role that African scholars have in this context. It thus strives for a certain “‘normalization’ of the academic treatment of Africa” (Boele van Hensbroek 1998: 7). If, as Boele van Hensbroek further suggests, it was in the course of colonialism that in Africa, “sophisticated indigenous traditions of politics (...) gradually became perceived, not in their own terms, but in the newly dominant ones, and not in their own right, but *as different* from European forms” (Boele van Hensbroek 1998: 13), this certainly holds true also for other spheres, where African modes of thought are interpreted primarily as different – as ‘African’ modes of thought rather than as legitimate articulations of particular concerns. It is this ‘expectation of difference’ that will be captured with respect to the outcomes of the analysis in the last chapter. Thinking about difference in this context – whether this difference is assumed, prescribed, claimed or rejected – allows us firstly, to frame the results of this study in a way that seeks to not perpetuate essentializing representations of Africans *qua* Others. Secondly, by reflecting about expectations of difference in a study on Africa(ns) written by a non-African, it is possible to use this own ‘non-African’ perspective on African scholarship not to claim a superordinate, allegedly neutral apprehension from outside but rather to link the interpretations with wider questions of defining power and authority in scholarship.

The results of such an endeavour cannot provide definite statements about ‘African discourse’ or suggest a clear-cut characterization of the latter. They can, however, offer a number of theses on the intersections between different levels of meaning in the study of Africa and, however tentatively, contribute to the reflection of the meaning and the effects of different representations of Africa and ‘Others’ in human rights and development thought and practice. Contrary to

critiques of the universalist configuration of both human rights and development thought (such as Escobar 1995), the approach followed here does neither claim that African thought per se can offer alternatives to hegemonic discourses because it is African, nor claim that different African positions can be assessed according to any alleged degree of 'mental colonization' (Tunteng 1974). Nevertheless, the representations of Africa examined in the analysis have political, i.e. emancipatory, or repressive effects, because all representations do contain either hegemonic or subversive potential (cf. Massey 1991: 17). The question that remains is then how to deal with hegemonic representations created by actors that create articulations from a non-hegemonic position. With this study, I want to argue that even though the subject positions of African scholars need to be taken into consideration when dealing with knowledge generated on Africa, this knowledge needs to be examined again concerning its emancipatory potential. Therefore, I want to contribute to the theorisation of non-Western representations of Others, which hitherto have been considered to be part of processes of "self-Orientalization" following Edward Said's *Orientalism*, by scrutinizing the notion of difference that is itself at work in such classifications of 'Other' thought.

In linking these elaborations to the crucial issues of human rights and development, this study seeks to provide inspiration for alternative ways of conceptualising both human rights and development. It is hereby based on a "procedural conception of truth" (Hauck 2012: 12) that does not measure utterances according to a dogmatically assumed notion of objective truth but rather aims at offering a number of new perspectives that have to be assessed in further argumentative enquiry. The overall aim is, therefore, to pursue "engaged scholarship" but bear in mind the "ramifications" of such an endeavour (Colavincenzo 2008: 408), as Colavincenzo warns:

"[I]t is all too easy to be postcolonially clever and theoretical about issues of race and ethnicity if one is not affected by this personally. (...) I am not arguing for a sort of 'nativism': i.e. that only indigenous scholars can discuss these issues. But I do think we need to be acutely aware of the privileged position from which we make our

pronouncements. In any case, I find it difficult to view this state of affairs as engaged scholarship.” (ibid.)

The structure of this thesis and the emphasis of particular chapters on selected issues of concern both reflect the significance of different approaches to ‘Africa’ as the focus of the research. Therefore, the first chapter, *Grasping a topic: Many Africas*, is devoted to theoretical and conceptual issues linked to the different meanings of *Africa* as the focus of this study that are crucial for an understanding of the subsequent analysis and interpretation. It introduces approaches to the understanding of ‘Africa’ as a concept and offers a background on representation of Africa as a geopolitical imagination (Slater 1993). That it is predominantly Western representations of Africa that constitute the focus of much scholarship is subsequently taken as the basis for an examination of the difference that it makes when particular actors are representing ‘others’ or ‘themselves’ (and also the difference it makes who is studying whose representations).

In this context, the first chapter aims at clarifying why it actually makes sense to deal with Africa as a whole and what the benefit of such an engagement with Africa can be, when the necessary precautions (to avoid essentialisms, homogenizations, and romanticizing) are considered. Furthermore, it offers reflections on the conceptualisation of ‘an African discourse on Africa’. It thus focuses on the discursive dimension of the texts analysed later on and approaches the fundamental (and nevertheless ambivalent) question of what is understood to be (an) African discourse in general and in the context of this study. Diving into necessarily murky waters (as, admittedly, the whole of this study), it points out the ambiguities and uncertainties that necessarily come up when a discourse is supposed to be delineated as ‘distinctly African’.

The second chapter, *Studying Africa: Who, where, and for whom?*, addresses challenges that stem from the study of Africa in Africa itself and outside of Africa and influence the process of knowledge production both in and on Africa. The chapter starts by examining contradictions inherent in African Studies as a discipline, stemming from both the history of its development and from the fact that it merges scholars with not only different origins and locations, but also

diverging interests and different sources of power. The debates emanating from within African Studies will be subsequently linked to the conditions faced particularly by African scholars in and outside Africa. A short review of the history of higher education will lead to the discussion of particular conditions that several post-colonial generations of scholars were and are confronted with. It will make clear that the different generations were influenced not only by factors emanating from the conditions in Africa itself, but also by changes in the global political economy. This issue will be taken up subsequently, when the positions and roles that African scholars are ascribed globally will be scrutinised, with a particular focus on power relations between African and non-African scholars and the consequences that power differentials have on knowledge production. The focus on the study of Africa by Africans and non-Africans and inherent tensions is further stressed by working out the peculiarities of publishing in and on Africa – an issue of particular relevance in the context of this research, which deals exclusively with scholarly publications by African authors. The chapter concludes by a discussion of the role of African intellectuals in generating knowledge and addresses the intersection beyond authority, identity, and location.

The next chapter, *Understanding Africa: How and why?*, foregrounds another problematic that I consider crucial to tackle in a study devoted to the valorisation of African knowledge in the context of global power relations (however contentious such an aim might be from my particular position): it discusses the approaches that aim at identifying knowledge that is relevant for Africa in a liberatory or emancipatory sense. Different ‘dimensions’ of relevance with respect to knowledge in the African context are presented in order to illustrate the diversity of positions involved in such a claim. Consequently, the problematic of language is brought up. The tension between former colonial languages and African languages in general is linked to its effects for scholarship.

The fourth chapter, *Framing the outcomes*, lays the ground for the main part of this study, the analysis. Therefore, it starts by contextualising the two key concepts - human rights and development - in relation to Africa. The focus here is on a historical outline of important processes, followed by a delineation of



theoretical implications that stem out of a connection between 'Africa' understood as a concept that is linked to the two key concepts. In the second part of this chapter, the methodological approach is discussed, with a particular emphasis being on the process of the selection of the material of analysis.

Chapter five, *Reading 'Africa' through 'Human Rights' and 'Development'*, constitutes the core of this study. It presents patterns of the discourses on both Africa and human rights and Africa and development by identifying a number of subordinate discourses with respect to each of the key concepts. These subordinated discourses show different relations that Africa is ascribed in relation to human rights and development and that themselves lead to certain conceptualisations of Africa in these particular types of discourses. Further theoretical implications of these different types of discourses are, finally, offered in the conclusion, which aims at rounding up the study through linking the main insights of the analysis with the overall framework of the study.



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## CARVING OUT A TERRITORY: INTRODUCING 'AFRICA'

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*"The idea of 'Africa' is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of 'African' culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes 'Africa' 'African,' are often quite slippery as the notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. Describing and defining 'Africa' and all tropes prefixed by its problematic commandments entails engaging discourses about 'Africa', the paradigms and politics through which the idea of 'Africa' has been constructed and consumed, and sometimes celebrated and condemned."*

Zeleza (2006b: 14)

*But in order to comprehend the uniqueness of Africa, we have paradoxically to compare it with other civilizations. What is distinctively African cannot be fully grasped without exploring what is universally human. It is not just the mirror which tells us what we are; it is also the traffic with the rest of humankind.*

Mazrui/Ajayi (1993: 635)



## MANY AFRICAS

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Not only the following chapters on different ways of 'thinking Africa', but also this thesis as a whole is based on the assumption that objects of study do not exist independently of the researcher but rather are simultaneously analysed and created through the analysis itself. It is thus based on the rejection of the dichotomy between "the knower [as] fundamentally separated from the known, and the known [as] an autonomous 'object' that can be controlled through dispassionate, impersonal, 'hand and brain' manipulations and measures" (Harding 1998: 364). More concretely, as Edward Said has argued, "because the social world includes the person or subject doing the studying as well as the object or realm being studied, it is imperative to include them both in any consideration of Orientalism" (Said 1986: 211, quoted in Coronil 1996: 55). This premise forces us to frame the topic of this dissertation in a particular way and underlies the approach to 'Africa' that unfolds in the course of this first part of the study.

This introductory chapter serves several purposes: it functions as part of the rationale of the research undertaken in this study and enforces the relevance of the research focus and the corpus selected for analysis. I want to argue why it makes sense constructing a research about "the whole of Africa" and why I have chosen to deal with African scholarship only. The following pages should elucidate approaches to the concept of Africa this thesis builds on and unravel meanings of Africa that go beyond a merely geographical understanding. Furthermore, they will serve as a theoretical fundament for the interpretation of the concepts of Africa constructed in the analysed scholarship and clarify, why an engagement with 'African discourses' does not necessarily suggest an essentialised understanding of Africa.

The interest that gave rise to the direction of the present study was formed by a number of publications whose authors declared they were writing about a

certain issue ‘from an African perspective’<sup>6</sup>. A similar claim – to represent an African point of view – can be found in publications on various topics, and it does not necessarily involve an explicit particularization and incomparability of Africa, criticised by Mbembe as the “new nativism” (Mbembe 2001b: 1). Instead, it implies a particular positioning with respect to other discourses that include Africa as an element and in relation to other discourses on Africa.

At the same time, there is an endless amount of literature dealing with the whole of Africa, written by Africans and non-Africans, whereby this ‘Africa’ allegedly constitutes more than just the sum of its several countries. Part of the reason for these approaches may be that the (Western part of the) readership – both academic and non-academic – might be more inclined to read about Africa as a whole and African perspectives than about Kenyan or Gambian perspectives (which itself could be challenged already), desiring to have access to knowledge or information of a seemingly broad relevance. Eze suggests that most European narratives on Africa are “hyperboles intended to attract the attention of the European reading public” (Eze 2010: 15). Referring to Africa or talking from an African perspective thus suggests a stronger authority than the one derived from a national, regional, or local context.

Yet another part of the explanation has to be that it must “make sense” to write about Africa as a whole (also apart from explicitly pan-Africanist ideas) and to argue or theorise (for) Africa as a whole. Writing about Africa thus creates a discourse on Africa, or an ‘Africa discourse’, and in this study it is the creation of a special ‘African discourse on Africa’ that is at stake. It derives its meaning from both qualifications referred to above: first, that it is constructed and perceived as ‘African’, and second, that it establishes Africa as a meaningful discursive category.

It might seem necessary at this point to introduce Africa as a ‘key concept’ for this study and provide a ‘working definition’ that will guide the reader through the argumentation. While the researcher’s assumptions about Africa definitely influence the shape of this work and there is no doubt that they have a profound

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<sup>6</sup> Examples include Boahen (1987), Cobbah (1987), Himmelstrand/Kinyanjui/Mburugu (1994), Rasheed/Chole (1994), Mkandawire/Soludo (1998), Katona (1999), Masolo (2003), Banda (2005).

effect on the outcomes, it is not possible to come up with a satisfactory definition, if any at all. This would even contradict the fundamentals of our project. However, at one point these assumptions become very evident. The selection of the analysed material – the criteria to identify scholarship to be part of an African discourse – is a clear manifestation if not of my own concept of Africa then at least of my struggle to distinguish between ‘African’ and ‘non-African’ contributions and utterances. Crucial in this respect is the (African) scholars’ own positioning in this respect. At the same time, there is not only *one* Africa that exists in the imaginations of scholars, be it Western Africanists or African intellectuals. Martin and West (1999) accommodate this idea in the title of their anthology *Out of One, Many Africas – Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa*. In this sense, Africa already takes on a number of functions: It becomes a field of knowledge, which itself is constituted through the knowledge created, which again is informed by various projections of interests.

Thus, if an author writes ‘from an African perspective’, what, then, is Africa to the author and what is it to the respective reader? Is it merely the reference to Africa as a continent and the author’s location on the continent? What is the difference between Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa? What is African about Africa? And why do we speak about Africa at all? These questions already indicate that “comprehending ‘Africa’ in merely geographical terms is foredoomed to failure” (Sonderregger 2004: 9, own translation). As suggested above, to speak or write about Africa from an African perspective seems to aim at legitimizing the validity of the author’s opinion and knowledge on Africa through an assumed proximity to Africa as an object of study. Hence, the author not only appeals to an alleged African identity (which allows him to write as an African) but also expects from her readership to understand what Africa is supposed to be. Thus, publications about ‘Africa’ do not only analyse or describe something they consider to be a subject matter of scientific inquiry, but also create this subject. When Cobbah, for example, writes about “African Values and the Human Rights Debate” from an African perspective (Cobbah 1987), this very African perspective is therefore more than just the localization within the continent of Africa – it seems to suggest a special positionality within an African discourse. It might be likewise simplistic to assume that an African discourse is simply all discourse restricted

to the geographical entity of Africa. Yet, it relates to some sort of African identity. But if “there is no African identity other than allegorical” (Mbembe 2001b, 12), this allegory still creates meaning – social, political, strategic meaning – and is worth to be understood:

“Fictions of identity (...) are no less powerful for being fictions (indeed the power of fantasy marks one of Freud’s most radical insights). It is not so much that we possess ‘contingent identities’ but that identity itself is contingent (...).” (Fuss 1989: 104)

Zeleza remarks that “African historians have long known about the invention of ‘Africa’ as a ‘sign’ with multiple and conflicted spatial, political, and cultural referents, but that has never stopped them from writing about ‘Africa’ as an organic spatio-temporal configuration” (Zeleza 2006b: 15). Therefore, we now turn to this seeming paradox that guides writing about Africa.

Notwithstanding the suggestion that there is a multitude of Africas to be discovered and unravelled in their meaning, the most obvious conception of Africa is the denomination of a geographic space, a continent. Already this understanding poses a number of questions, which unavoidably lead back to the understanding of Africa as a field of knowledge and unmask the contested and constructed nature of geography (and geographical knowledge) itself, which will be dealt with at a later stage. In what could be seen as typical imaginary of geographic space, North Africa tends to be associated with the Middle East and excluded from writings on Africa, even when the whole continent is referred to (Bentahar 2011, see also MacEachern 2007). Even though the links between North and Sub-Saharan Africa have been considered crucial in the history of the whole continent and, moreover, had a heavy influence on shaping an ‘African identity’ (Mazrui 2005, see also Tissières 2002), and even the name of Africa initially referred to its Northern part (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 284), what Ferguson calls ‘Africa talk’ (Ferguson 2006: 3) concerns mainly Africa South of the Sahara. Likewise, the scholarship analysed in this dissertation largely excludes the Northern region from its vantage point, either referring explicitly to Sub-Saharan Africa or, more implicitly, arguing in the framework of representations most closely associated with Africa South of the Sahara (see



below).

According to Miller, 'Africa' only "relatively recently (...) came to be the sole representative of a single continent, differentiated and circumscribed" (Miller 1985: 6). He explains, however, that from the earliest occurrence of this denomination, it was not only designed to neutrally describe a landmass, but included the creation of a certain (White) subjectivity:

"'Africa' originally applied only to the region around Carthage, but by synecdoche it came to represent the entire continent. The progress of the word in Western languages is that of a movement from Africa 'proper' to Africa as a whole, inserting a difference where before there was none. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* distinguishes between 'Africa proper or Little Africa' surrounding Carthage, and Africa in general. The movement away from the proper coincided with the insertion of the word in European language and discourse. From this moment on 'Africa' will be a trope – a part for a whole or a whole for a part – recounting a colonial history, designating a difference." (Miller 1985: 10, original emphasis)

Miller collected ten different etymologies for the word "Africa" (1985: 10-11), ranging from meaning the "South Land" (Taylor 1865, cited in Miller 1985: 10) to "the Arabic word for ear of corn, *phérick*" (Diderot 1778, cited in Miller 1985: 10), and concludes that "it appears to mean whatever one wants, in the language one wants" (Miller 1985: 11). Moreover, "[a]ll words are merely representations of something that is missing, and all etymologies impose a *temporal difference*" (Miller 1985: 14, emphasis added)<sup>7</sup>.

Difference as an essential element permeates not only the etymology of the word

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<sup>7</sup> Zeleza's comment on Soyinka is interesting in this respect: "There are at least seven origins of the term Africa, all of foreign derivation, which prompted Wole Soyinka, in a speech at the 1977 Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) to express misgivings with the word 'Africa' and all its descriptive associations. As an act of self-definition, he proposed the adoption of terms for Africa and African rooted in an indigenous language, preferably Abibirim and Abibiman from Akan. Soyinka sought to capture the alterity of Africa's naming, but his rhetorical gauntlet was not picked up, perhaps because it was evident to many that he was striking at straws, ignoring the historically transmogrified meanings and the agency of Africans to appropriate and modify and shape words and terms to their own purposes." (Zeleza 2006b: 15)

'Africa', but also historical and contemporary imagery of both Africans and Africa. Zeleza argues that the process of Africa's "cartographic application was both gradual and contradictory in that as the name embraced the rest of the continent it increasingly came to be divorced from its original North African coding and became increasingly confined to the regions referred to in Eurocentric and sometimes Afrocentric conceptual mapping as 'sub-Saharan Africa,' seen as the pristine locus of the real Africa" (Zeleza 2006b: 15). Why has it been necessary for such a long time to even search for anything that could be called the "real Africa"? Much of it has to do with the Otherness expected in what is supposed to be 'real' in this context. Despite the similarity of Africa-related tropes over centuries, the reasons for this search for difference or Otherness have, of course, varied according to historical contexts. There are, however, underlying mechanisms that, as postcolonial approaches<sup>8</sup> argue, have been perpetuating the 'colonial gaze' on Africa ever since (see Mudimbe 1988, Melber 1992).

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### REPRESENTING THE OTHER, CREATING AFRICA

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That Africa and Africans have been represented in biased, stereotypical, homogenizing, inferiorizing, and openly racist varieties of a discourse which served as the legitimation of the colonial endeavour as much as it perpetuated other processes of exploitation and oppression is well-documented and has been subject to a large number of studies with diverse disciplinary approaches and theoretical foci. Contemporary representations<sup>9</sup> have grown historically<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> For discussions of Africa from the perspective of postcolonial ideas in a wider sense, see, for example, Mudimbe (1988), Appiah (1991, 1992), Irele (1993), Hitchcock (1997), Apter (1999), Ahluwalia (1999, 2001), Mbembe (2001, 2002, 2006), Abrahamsen (2003), Kebede (2004), Klaitz (2005), Mazrui (2005), Zeleza (2006a), Táíwò (2010), Zein-Elabdin (2011), Pesek (2011). For criticisms of postcolonial positions or theoretical aspects in relation to Africa, see e.g. Ranger (1996), Chabal (1996).

<sup>9</sup> For respective studies that deal with images, constructions, or representations of Africa and Africans, see, among others, the following contributions: Wainaina (2005), Vera (2001) on images of Africa generally; Bamba (2010) on geo-strategic diplomatic discourse; Beinart/McKeown (2009) on wildlife media; Bleiker/Kay (2007) on photography and representation of HIV/AIDS in Africa; Landau (2002b) on colonial photography;

have to be situated within both the history of relations between Africa and the West and present power structures.

However, instead of providing a comprehensive discussion of the vast and long-lasting but changing constructions of Africa as the 'Dark Continent' and a simultaneously inferior and exoticised Other of the West, I want to offer some preliminary remarks on the construction of representations of Africa in general, primarily to clarify how this study itself can be located in the context of the many contributions available. Consequently, a number of theoretical considerations informed by discourse theory will lay the groundwork for understanding the representations of Africa analysed in this study. Subsequently, the focus should be on two selected aspects, or rather problematics, which I consider crucial in the context of a study that has African representations of Africa at its core. The first derives from the fact that Africa has been the projection surface of not just *any* representations, desires, or fears (even if that might be true for all representations), but that it is the particular process of constructing *spatial* representations that has to be understood with respect to it.

The second theoretical challenge emerging in our context is how to deal with those representations or images or concepts of Africa that are not found in the

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Bristor/Lee/Hunt (1995), and Bonsu (2009) on advertising; Dunn (2005) on travelogues; Mathers (2010) on travelling and humanitarianism; Danaher/Riak (1995), Härting (2008), Yrjöla (2009), Repo/Yrjöla (2011) on humanitarianism; Mayer (2002) on Africa in US-American cultural imaginary and, more generally, Pires (2000) and Keim (2008) on Africa 'in the American mind'; Probst (2007) on cultural productions; Barnett (2006) on African literature, and Ten Kortenaar (2000), Abukar (2009), Adeoti (2005) on images of Africa in African fiction; Clark (1997) on Western literature; Domatob (1994), Emenyeonu (1995), Schraeder/Endless (1998), Mawdsley (2008), König (2010), Ngoro (2004) on visual and textual representations in press in different national contexts; Walker/Rasamimanana (1993), Myers (2001), Marmer et.al. (2010) on textbooks and teaching material and Ansell (2002) on suggestions how to use teaching materials for creating alternative images of Africa; Jones (2007), Gadjigo (1991), Olaniyan (1996), Dunn (1996) on Africa and Othering in films; Palmer (1987), Abdullahi (1991), Fair (1993), Mahadeo/McKinney (2007), Skare Orgeret (2010) on media in general and Quist-Adade (2005) on Russian media; Okigbo (1995), Fürsich/Robins (2002), Ogunyemi (2011) on the internet, Wall (2009) on videos uploaded on Youtube; Neumann (2004) on environmental literature; Paterson (1994), Ogundimu (1994), Golan (2008), Cupples/Glynn (2012) on images of Africa on television; Yeboah (2007) on health policy and HIV/AIDS discourse; Hammett (2010) on cartoons; Harrison (2012) on development campaigning; Ebron (2002) on Africa in cultural performances and Udegbe (2001) on art works; Brusila (2001) on popular music; Demissie (1995) on exhibitions.

<sup>10</sup> See, among others, Brantlinger (1985), Kirkegaard (2001), Launay (2010), Lawal (2010), Derricourt (2011), Mudimbe (1988), Hampson (1990), Pratt (1992), Spurr (1993), Nederveen Pieterse (1992).

Western 'colonial library' (Mudimbe 1988: 188) but are created by Africans<sup>11</sup>, as is the case for the material analysed in this study. The challenge here is not only to avoid a "sentimental romance of alterity" (Gates 1991: 466, cited in Van Wyk Smith 1996: 269). The aim is rather to both question binarist assumptions of a simplistically dichotomised West and Africa without simply dismissing them and, at the same time, *still* be able to understand (or, if you will, *read*) the power relations that inform different textual representations of one or the other.

According to Eze, over the last centuries, European narratives "were wrapped in congenial terms that, framed to highlight Africa's difference to Europe, see the African as essentially, incurably trapped in a state of cultural inertia. Africa therefore becomes the quintessential home of darkness; the African becomes an unthinking, lazy person who cannot help himself." (Eze 2011: 16). Historical representations of Africans have, Nederveen Pieterse observes, rested on the image of African people as "closer to nature, more emotional, sexually uninhibited, more musical, childlike" (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 11). The *political significance* of these historical and contemporary representations of Africa can be theoretically grasped by understanding the link between discourse and power, or, more fundamentally, between language and power:

"We should admit that [it is] power [that] produces knowledge (...). That power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute (...) power relations." (Foucault 1980: 27)

In this context, a discourse can be understood, following Laclau and Mouffe, as a "structured totality resulting from articulatory practice", while *articulation*, in their terms, connotes "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result (...)" (Laclau/Mouffe 1985: 105). A discourse entails more than language, as "it is itself produced by a practice: 'discursive practice' – the practice of producing meaning" (Hall 1992: 291). At the same time, in this study, texts are selected as the means to grasp the

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<sup>11</sup> Consider the slightly different meaning that this sentence would have if I had written "(...) but are created by Africans *themselves*".

discourse on Africa, while it has to be acknowledged, that the discourse on Africa created through the texts that are analysed here cannot be understood as theoretically insulated from other sources of meaning production. Furthermore, a discourse in this sense is not to be understood in discourse-reductionist terms in that it reduces material reality to mere discourse, as this perspective acknowledges the interrelatedness of different dimensions of social reality (see Marchart 2008: 184).

In discourse analytical terms, the scientific discourse then forms a special discourse that is linked to other discursive levels, like media discourses or political discourses (cf. Jäger/Jäger 2007: 28). On all of these levels, Africa is created as a representation, and it is inscribed in the character of discourses that the meaning of Africa in this sense is at once contested and hegemonic. This nature stems from a temporary closure of a discourse, which “fixes meaning in a particular way, but it does not dictate that meaning is to be fixed exactly in that way forever” (Jorgensen/Phillips 2002: 29). This fixation of hegemonic meaning takes places around ‘nodal points’ (Laclau/Mouffe 1985: 112), which can be understood as “privileged discursive points that fix meaning and establish positions that make predication possible” (Doty 1996: 10). Cohn suggests that discourses “depend for their intelligibility on an *illusion of closure*: in order that the signs that make up the representation be taken to stand for something definite, there must be the sense that the context in which these signs will acquire this definite meaning is present and ready to hand, whereas in fact this required context is endless, spilling outside the finite bounds of the text, so that the meaning of the signs can never be fixed” (Cohn 2006: 46-47, emphasis added<sup>12</sup>). How powerful and simultaneously contested such a fixation of meaning can be with respect to ‘Africa’ might be illustrated by an anecdote that Chinua Achebe recounted in his interview with Kwame Anthony Appiah:

“It is, of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn’t a final identity that is African. But, at the same time, there *is* an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a

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<sup>12</sup> Said has pointed to the “unstable and volatile semantic ambiance” of the concept of representation itself (Said 1989: 212).

certain meaning. Because if somebody meets me, say, in a shop in Cambridge (England), he says 'Are you from Africa?' Which means that Africa means something to some people. Each of these tags has a meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility. All these tags, unfortunately for the black man, are tags of disability. ... I think it is part of the writer's role to encourage the creation of an African identity." (Appiah 1992: 73-74).

In Hall's terminology, a discourse as the totality of social practices manifests itself in "regimes of representation" (Hall 1995: 224). The effects of such regimes become clear when the connection between domination and representation is made explicit, just as in the following reflection by Stuart Hall in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*:

"The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only, in Said's 'orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other' (...) It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm." (cited in Hooks 1999: 3)

It is thus *particular* representations of Africa that find their way into the respective discourses and that create the hegemonic discourse on Africa. It is also these very representations of Africa that conflicts – be it between 'African' and 'Western' scholars or between 'development practitioners' and 'regular people' – often emerge from, most often unwittingly (we will deal with a number of these conflicts at a later stage). In each case, Africa is situated in a particular "chain of equivalence", that is influenced by its meaning as a link in the chain and itself created by the other links. These gain meaning because the specific representation they create together can only emerge out of the very discourse

they constitute, while they lose (individual) meaning because “the more the chain expands, the more differential features of each of the links will have to be dropped in order to keep alive what the equivalential chain attempts to express” (cf. Laclau 1997: 305). Laclau speaks of a “destruction of meaning through its very proliferation” and adds that “each of the links of the equivalential chain names something different from itself, but (...) this naming only takes place as far as the link belongs to the chain” (ibid.).

In the course of the last centuries, certain representations (and, in a more complex form, concepts) of Africa have served different interests and both helped to foster and maintain colonial relationships and facilitate subversive action. In the context of the issues that this study deals with, certain understandings of ‘Africa’ are necessary to legitimise development policies or to claim the universality of human rights. However, the fixation of the meaning of ‘Africa’ can never be complete. Doty explains that “the overflowing and and impartial nature of discourses (...) opens up spaces for change, discontinuity, and variation” (Doty 1996: 6).

At the same time, this is not to suggest that positive and negative connotations of Africa belong to two different discourses. Quite the contrary is the case. If Palmberg states that “many researchers have pointed out the contradictory co-existence of two images of Africa, both rooted in the conditions of Europeans rather than in knowledge about Africa: the *romantic* Africa and the *bestly* Africa” (Palmberg 2001b: 10, original emphasis) and manifested in the image of the “noble savage” and the “ignoble savage” (see Meek 1976), this contradiction is of only superficial nature. Not only do both of these images denote the inscription of inferiority qua difference in the Other, Hall explains that the ‘stereotypical dualism’ is at the core of the discourse of the Other. It involves two features: first, the reduction of simplified characteristics to create an essential understanding of the people (i.e. stereotyping) and second, the ‘splitting’ of such a stereotype into good and bad aspects (cf. Hall 1992: 308).

Moverover, Hall identifies a number of discursive strategies that characterise the discourse on “the West and the Rest”, as he terms it. These are: “(1) idealization,

(2) the projection of fantasies of desire and degradation, (3) the failure to recognise and respect difference, (4) the tendency to impose European categories and norms, to see difference through the modes of perception and representation of the West” (Hall 1992: 308). In a more general manner, Doty classifies the rhetorical strategies used in the creation of hegemonic discourses as (1) naturalization, (2) classification, (3) surveillance, and (4) negation, which, “in addition to constructing subjects, establish various kinds of relationships between subjects and between subjects and objects”. She adds that “important kinds of relationships that position subjects are those of opposition, identity, similarity, and complementarity” (Doty 1996: 11).

The “Dark Continent Metaphor” (see Achebe 1978, Brantlinger 1985, Jarosz 1992) that has shaped much of Western engagement with Africa can easily be linked to the strategies collected above. To theoretically consolidate the historical “oppositional construction of Africa” (Yeboah 2007) further, the different discursive techniques described above in relation to Hall’s representational regime “the West and the Rest” can be extended with a short recourse to Said’s seminal work on Orientalism (Said 1978)<sup>13</sup>. In his study of Orientalist imaginations, Said identified a number of “principal dogmas of Orientalism” that shape the Western construction of its relations with the oriental Other – and, by extrapolation, with ‘Africa’. These are first, the establishment of an “absolute and systematic difference between the West (which is rational, developed, humane, superior) and the Orient (which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior)”, second, the dogma that renders “abstractions about the Orient (...) always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities”, third, that “the Orient is eternal, uniform, incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically ‘objective’”, and fourth, “the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (...) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible)” (Said 2000: 104-5). In

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<sup>13</sup> For critiques of and elaborations on Said’s work, see: Schaar (1979), Gran (1980), Kapp (1980), Kopf (1980), Richardson (1990), Lewis (1993), Dirlik (1997), Jalal al-’Azm (2000), Wilson III ([1981] 2000), Brennan 2000.



arguing that the West constructs the Orient as its Other, Said does not assert that the West actually invents the Other, but rather that it invents the homogenizing, inferiorizing imagination of the Other described above, whereby “the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (Said 1978: 42). He, furthermore, suggests that while the different manifestations of Orientalism are linked to each other<sup>14</sup>, its discursive conception is crucial:

“My contention is that, without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account on the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that particular entity ‘the Orient’ is in question.” (Said 1978: 3)

The case we are dealing with in this study does, however, escape Said’s theoretical approach through a number of obvious but not less important qualifications. Thus, while it is scientific knowledge that will be analysed later, which thereby equally forms the basis of legitimations of power, it does not emanate from the Western imagination but rather from the Africans’ imagination of Africa. At the same time, it will be shown later that this imagination is not in any way uniform. This is not to suggest that the Western imaginary is homogeneous and does not comprise a

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<sup>14</sup> Said distinguishes among three „overlapping domains: firstly, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4000 year old history; secondly, the scientific discipline in the West according to which beginning in the early 19th century one specialized in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and, thirdly, the ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world called the Orient.” (Said 1985: 90)

multitude of different varieties and manifold expressions with diverse interests. Western and African utterances, however, are located within different configurations of power and, thereby, entail different subject positions within any discourse and, specifically, within the discourse on Africa. In other words, just as White racism can never 'be the same as' non-White racism (i.e. can never possibly be theorised in the same framework of power), Western and African representations of the Other, even if they entail similar articulations, have to be understood in different theoretical frameworks (again, without suggesting that the African is doomed to difference). Or, as Coronil suggests, these "classificatory systems may construct the relations among their terms as unidirectional (...) [but] they always entail different forms of mutuality" (Coronil 1996: 57).

At this point, it becomes relevant that in our context, Selves and Others are constructed as spatial representations. Within the discipline of geography, a number of critical approaches, influenced by post-structuralist and post-colonial thought and particularly useful in this context, have developed over the last decades. Relying on these approaches clarifies that as a geographical concept, Africa is created through a powerful geographical and geopolitical discourse. It is the product of a 'discursive construction of geopolitical worldviews' (Reuber/Wolkersdorfer 2004). Within such a discourse, representations of regions do not only refer to geographical entity and at the same time point out their imagined character but locate these entities in a global power structure. That implies, as Strüver argues, that "global disparities between regions and the definition of these regions are to a significant extent the result of practices of representation", while the specific representations eventually lead to the perpetration of inequalities between regions (Strüver 2007: 681).

Thus, if representations of Africa are reminiscent of colonial dualisms and oppositions between superior and inferior actors, it is not enough to simply identify the qualities of particular images and concepts of Africa. Critical geography approaches take the production of international identities a step further, questioning not only the identities that are produced but also the spaces they are invoking. In this context, "space, place, and time have come to be seen in relational terms" in geography (Amin 2002: 289), acknowledging that "place is

also a doing, that it does not pre-exist its doing, and that its doing is the articulation of relational performances” (Rose 1999: 248, quoted in Amin 2002: 289). Spatial structure is then not understood as “an arena in which social life unfolds but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced” (Gregory/Urry 1985: 3). In this sense, space has a meaning only through the social production of this very space. ‘Society’ and ‘space’ are not seen as separate categories any more (ibid.).

Similarly, geography becomes a product of power. According to Ó Tuathail, “[a]lthough often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (Ó Tuathail 1996: 11). Ó Tuathail himself is an important proponent of Critical Geopolitics, an approach that developed in resistance to classical “geopolitics from above” and its exclusive consideration of “statesmen” and “wise men” in foreign policy (cf. Ó Tuathail 1998: 3). As Routledge elaborates, “[t]hese challenges are counter-hegemonic struggles in that they articulate resistance to the coercive force of the state – in both domestic and foreign policy (...)” (Routledge 2003: 236). Critical geopolitics seeks to “overcome the traditional distinction between ‘real’ and symbolic or imagined spaces, for the latter are as real in their existence as the former” (Strüver 2007: 682; cf. also Ó Tuathail 1998: 5).

Critical geopolitics is thus not only dealing with territorial maps, but with “maps of meaning” (Ó Tuathail / Dalby 1998: 4). Gregory’s words can be added here:

“(...) I believe it is possible to use images of maps, landscapes, and spaces *and also* images of location, position, and geometry in ways that challenge the Archimedian view of knowledge, in ways that insist that geographies of knowing make a difference” (Gregory 1994: 7).

Attempts to interfere in the discourse on particular regions of the world in order to exchange problematic terms for supposedly less problematic – optionally speaking of the ‘Third World’, ‘underdeveloped countries’, ‘developing countries’, the ‘developing world’, ‘the South’ or ‘the Global South’ – have been

criticised for failing to deconstruct binary oppositions created in the respective discourse, whereby they remain stuck in the problematic nature of representing the Other (see Dodds 2008, Power 2003). One way of confronting the inherent power inequality inscribed in these terms is to put them into quotation marks, as done above. Coronil, however, reminds us that “[a]s soon as new conceptions are constructed (...), they seem to be resituated within the semantic field defined by the old binary structure (...)” (Coronil 1996: 54). It is in this sense that the East-West and North-South axes are structuring how the world is perceived, with countries, regions, or whole continents belonging to either one or the other hemisphere, ascribed with the adequate features according to the respective hypernym. At the same time, the reference to these superordinate political entities can be of strategic value. Historically, the identification of Africa with the Third World has been part of both, attempts to pursue the emancipation of the Third World as a whole, and the perpetuation of inferior images of the Other (see Young 2001: 217-292). In a similar way, the delineation of Africa as a distinct entity can serve different purposes from different perspectives and has equally served emancipatory aspirations:

“African awareness of themselves as culturally a distinct people is potentially the death knell to the white man’s cultural imperialism.”  
(Ayandele 1979: 282)

It is precisely such a reinterpretation of particular representations that bears the potential to change the effects of their oppressive configurations. The reasons for such a possibility lie in the “partial nature” of meaning within a discourse, which allows for an intervention in the hegemonic discourse and involves the creation of different meaning. If we leave aside the question of what exactly should be different about the meaning, yet another possibility is the displacement of the Western, colonial gaze and the embracing of agency on the side of the Other, who has been (hitherto) denied effective agency by the West (Doty 1996: 11). It is, however, little surprising to state that a mere reversal of the “gaze” is not the solution for ‘emancipation through representation’. Without arrogating to offer any solution at this point – we will come to this issue again in the discussion chapter at the end of this study after dealing with different understandings of

Africa by Africans in the analysis –, the following elaborations will focus on two questions emanating from such a change of perspective: Which difference does it make whether we are dealing with Western representations or ones emerging from African (i.e. Other) authors and sources? To complicate things further, how and why does it matter whether Africans represent Africa or the West (and vice versa)? Without offering definitive answers, the recourse to a number of theoretical perspectives provides us with some useful insights in this matter.

As I have outlined above, analyses of (geopolitical and other) representations in the context of Africa have tended to focus on Western – hegemonic – representations of Africa(ns) as the Other and on dominant geopolitical discourses (see, for example, Bamba 2010, Dodds 1994, or Gregson/Simonsen/Vaiou 2003). Such a tendency pertains even if authors acknowledge, as Escobar says, that “[t]he selves of the Third World are manifold and multiple” (Escobar 1995: 215). As Bilgin observes, “[w]hile the role played by the ‘West’ in inventing the ‘Third World’, the ‘Orient’ and ‘Africa’ is reasonably well documented, the former’s debts to the latter are little known” (Bilgin 2008: 7). An assumption underlying such a critique might be that representations by Others themselves inherently bear a different power structure and thus, by interfering in the classical West/non-West power inequality, automatically interrupt the hegemonic nature of representation. Such a mere reversal would be, however, a too simple conclusion in theoretical terms.

From a theoretical perspective, this issue has been approached from different sides. A number of authors have focused on these representations of Others by Others themselves, so to speak. This phenomenon has been – based on Said’s work – termed Re-Orientalism (Lau 2009, Salgado 2011), ‘Self-Orientalism’ (Creighton 1995), ‘internal Orientalism’ (Schein 1997), ‘ethno-Orientalism’ (Carrier 1992), or ‘reverse Orientalism’ (Abu Lughod 2008, Jalal al-’Azm 2000). Non-Western representations of the West are, correspondingly, theorised as Occidentalism. Occidentalism has been both, linked to critiques of Said and understood as a theoretical derivative of his work. After the publication of his seminal *Orientalism*, Said himself was blamed for constructing the same dangerous representations of the West that he sought to question in his work

with regard to the 'East' (e.g. Jalal al-'Azm 2000). Moreover, critics argued, Said's "totalizing bifurcation of the globe into the categories of representer-represented obscures (...) the historical multiplicity of axes of domination, many of which, despite being non-European, were decidedly colonial and (...) more broadly imperializing" (Schein 1997: 72). One of the responses he gave to his critics is instructive in the context of this section:

"[F]ictions like 'East' and 'West,' to say nothing of racist essences like subject races, Orientals, Aryans, Negroes and the like, were what my books attempted to combat. Far from encouraging a sense of aggrieved primal innocence in countries which had suffered the ravages of colonialism, I stated repeatedly that mythical abstractions such as these were lies, as were the various rhetorics of blame they gave rise to; cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident."  
(Said 1996: xii)

Said thus suggests that the Orient and the Occident can be understood as ideological oppositions, even though they are "interdependent and hybrid". It is, therefore, meaningful to analyse them as such – ideological oppositions that serve certain purposes. In this context, however, also the notion of Occidentalism should be treated in a more differentiated manner. According to Santos, 'Occidentalism' refers to two different conceptions. In the first, it is understood in opposition to Orientalism and denotes representations *of the West* by (its) Others. The second approach deals with images of the West created by the West itself as process of "reification" of 'Others'. Santos argues that the first notion fails to acknowledge the fact that Others do not possess the same power to construct stereotypes of the West – or, rather, that their stereotypes have different effects on the West than the other way round. In Santos' words, it falls into the "reciprocity trap". Contrary to that, the second notion is influenced by critical theory and aims at a critique of the hegemonic West (Santos 2009: 105).

Coronil is an adherent to the second, 'critical' conception of Orientalism, not only because he deals with representations of "non-Western peoples as the Other of a

Western Self” (Coronil 1996: 52), but because, more importantly, his aim is to develop non-imperial geo-historical categories, as the title of his seminal paper suggests. For Coronil, Occidentalism is “not the reverse of Orientalism but its condition of possibility, its dark side (as in a mirror)” (Coronil 1996: 56). He makes a reference to those notions, which fall into the very “reciprocity trap” criticised by Santos, by adding that “[g]iven Western hegemony, (...) opposing this notion of ‘Occidentalism’ to ‘Orientalism’ runs the risk of creating the illusion that the terms can be equalised and reversed, as if the complicity of power and knowledge entailed in Orientalism could be countered by an inversion.” (ibid.)

According to Carrier, in this respect it is instructive to see Orientalism as a dialectical process:

“[This] helps us recognize that it is not merely a Western imposition of a reified identity on some alien set of people. It is also the imposition of an identity created in dialectical opposition to another identity, one likely to be equally reified, that of the West. Westerners, then, define the Other in terms of the West, but so Others define themselves in terms of the West, just as each defines the West in terms of the Other. Thus, we can expect to see something analogous to Orientalism in a set of interrelated understandings that people have of themselves and of others.” (Carrier 1992: 197)

In Coronil’s terms, Occidentalism then is “the expression of a constitutive relationship between Western representations of cultural difference and worldwide Western dominance” (1996: 57). He adds that Occidentalism is supposed to denote an “ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which (1) separate the world’s components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalise these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the production of existing power relations” (ibid.). Such an understanding of Occidentalism allows the concept to inform the analysis provided in this study. However different the context that he elaborates, Coronil points out that naturalised representations *necessarily* intervene in

existing power relations, which will be taken up with respect to African representations of Africa after the analysis of the latter.

The second approach to the study of non-Western representations, formed around a re-interpretation of the notion of Orientalism, is seemingly more relevant in our context, as it is not Africans' representations of the West that will be the focus of the analysis, but their representations of Africa itself. Similarly, however, also the approaches assembled here cannot be referred to without qualifications and shall be therefore discussed in the light of our particular case.

Schein, for example, turns to the concept of "internal orientalism" to discuss, the turn of "individual and state culture producers" to "minority cultures as reservoirs of still-extant authenticity" in China after "the perceived emptiness of imported culture from abroad" following the Cultural Revolution (Schein 1997: 72). The concept she coins is suggested to refer to a "relation between imaging and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically", when "the Chinese elite (...) engages in domestic othering" (Schein 1997: 72). In this sense, China is taken as representing the West, and the representer again very explicitly equals the dominant part of the relationship. This conception distinguishes Schein's concept from other approaches to 'Orientalism by Orientals'.

In contrast, Lau, who has analysed writings by South Asian women in the diaspora, defines what she calls 'Re-Orientalism' as a process, which "dominates and, to a significant extent, distorts the representation of the Orient, seizing voice and platform, and once again consigning the Oriental within the Orient to a position of 'The Other'" (Lau 2007: 571). She states that it is somewhat "ironic" that the Orient now continues to be orientalised by the "semi-Oriental female", after this process had been initialised by the "foreign, male subject" (Lau 2007: 573). While Lau distances herself from any form of accusations of the writers she is dealing with, she explains that instead of being the product of "any insidious intention (...), it is precisely their positionality, both individual and collective positionality, that has rendered this process of Re-Orientalism so widespread as to be almost inevitable in this genre" (Lau 2007: 574). Lau identifies three broad problems that she sees in those writings that perpetuate 'Re-Orientalism': first, "the necessity of being recognisably South Asian" (whereby a particular attention



is given to concepts of authenticity), second, “generalisations and totalisations”, and third, the problem of “truth claims” (Lau 2007: 582-4). In the light of Lau’s argument on the positionality of the authors and the subsequent formulation of the problems characterizing diasporic South Asian women’s writing, it seems as if not only Re-Orientalism is an inevitable trap that every representation of ‘Orientals’ has to fall into but that Re-Orientalism, furthermore, is the only possibility to theoretically grasp representations of Others by Others. Lau herself qualifies this absolutist assertion when she makes clear that Re-Orientalism refers to the self-definition of the Orient “*relative to the Occident*” (Lau 2007: 590, emphasis added). It is, however, Salgado, who critically argues with respect to Lau that she works “*constitutively within hegemonic discourse*” and, hereby, „appears to engage in a form of cultural anachronism: Orientalism is re-located from the colonial West to the postcolonial diaspora but the presentation of it in this case fails to address the qualitative shift it undergoes in the process of such re-location” (Salgado 2011: 204, original emphasis).

This qualitative shift seems to be foregrounded in the prefix (‘ethno’) used in Carrier’s conception of ‘ethno-Orientalism’, which aims at revealing “how an essentialist Alien sense of Self (ethno-Orientalism) is produced in dialectical opposition to the Aliens’ conception of the impinging Western society (their ethno-Occidentalism)” (Carrier 1992: 198). He draws this notion from Thomas’ work on Melanesian and Polynesian societies (see Thomas 1992) and points out that “Thomas does not claim that these ethno-Orientalisms and ethno-Occidentalisms are the unproblematic result of a mechanical and nonpolitical comparison of Them with Us” but rather comprise very diverse representations due to the diverse interests that shape societies (Carrier 1992: 198).

For our case, such a consideration offers the possibility to unravel the meaning of the West in African’s representations of Africa. As will be shown throughout the analysis, Africa is created also as a relational concept, which emerges as a Self through the relation with the Rest, which discursively manifests itself predominantly as the West. At the same time, it is not possible to distinguish clearly between those notions of Africa that are created in an Occidental manner and those that stem from a distinctively African subjectivity, if that one

even does exist. Therefore, the variations of Orientalism 'in reverse' and the notions of Occidentalism discussed above cannot be used as frameworks for the analysis. They do, however, enable us to keep in mind both the historical sources and the political effects of representations of Africa.

An attempt to deal with this certain impossibility of clear classification can be found in conceptions of 'Subaltern geopolitics', which aim at "offer[ing] creative alternatives to the dominant (critical) geopolitical scripts" and focus on "the politics of representation from the margins" (Sharp 2011a: 271). While in her introduction to a special issue of *Geoforum* entirely devoted to Subaltern geopolitics, Sharp argues that "subaltern geopolitics refers to spaces of geopolitical knowledge production which are *neither* dominant *nor* resistant, because studying only the dominant accounts and those that absolutely oppose them, can have the effect of reifying this binary geopolitical structure rather than challenging it" (Sharp 2011a: 272), in her own contribution, where she analyses Tanzanian newspapers, Sharp's reading admittedly entails the danger of "searching out another voice to stand as opposition to the dominant" (Sharp 2011b: 305). At the same time, and with the full awareness of the danger involved, Sharp turns to the "original military meaning" of subaltern as "a lower rank", i.e. "neither the commander, nor outside the ranks" (Sharp 2011b: 304). Such a concept of subalternity allows working against absolutising readings of processes of representation and, simultaneously, "recognizes the precariousness of subalternity" (ibid.) without dogmatically seeing it in every account of 'Other voices'. In the context of the present study, it, therefore, allows us to approach African representations with the same circumspection, without negating the ideological processes that are at work in the creation of representations and discourses about Others or Selves.

## **(THE PERIL OF) IDENTIFYING AN AFRICAN DISCOURSE ON AFRICA**

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If the endeavour presented in this study aims at identifying and interpreting representations and concepts of Africa in the African intellectual discourse, it is required to not necessarily characterise such a discourse but to define it for the purposes of the later analysis. However resistant I was until this point to define Africa or Africans on the previous pages, at this point it is necessary to at least clarify what understanding of African discourse is constitutive for the analysis. There are several possible approaches to the creation of such an understanding. One option would be to restrict African intellectual discourse to prevalent notions and issues and refer to, for example, an assessment like the following:

„African intellectuals (...) are characterized by the specificity of their intellectual concerns, such as pan-Africanism, apartheid, development, and the question of language, rather than race or geography.” (Nesbitt 2008: 274)

Nesbitt uses this portrayal to explain the notion of African intellectuals brought forward in Mkandawire’s anthology *African Intellectuals – Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (Mkandawire 2005). Such a delineation that bears on intellectual *concerns* rather than *places* of origin seems to be in line with an open and inclusive concept of Africa that extends the latter beyond its geographical borders. It would, however, automatically exclude from analysis those positions by African intellectuals that contradict, question, negate, or ignore the issues mentioned above and, thus, obviously is of no use for our context.

Another possibility is to start with an examination of different notions of Africanity. If we understand Africanity as the imaginary unity of Africa constructed for a multitude of purposes, there are many sources that people draw upon to establish such a notion. Whether a phenomenon is considered to be *African*, ‘foreign’ or simply non-African depends on various factors influencing the given situation. At times, the interest behind the establishment of an alleged

'African nature of things' lies in the distinction from all those associated with the Other, the West, the colonisers, through what Gilroy has termed "the fantasy of frozen culture" (Gilroy 2000: 13, cited in Onoma 2008: 78). Onoma points to the fact that former colonial languages that are widely used for a variety of purposes in Africa "are not considered African despite the long use of these languages by segments of African populations" (Onoma 2008: 78). His example makes clear that not only it is not possible to say at first glance whether or why something is termed African, but moreover, that it is necessary to look for the reasons of such a label.

At the same time, in many instances, Africanity is set in relation to some notion of African identity or culture. This is what Owomoyela suggests when she states the following:

"[W]e can accept the commonality of genes across racial lines and the accident of color; but ultimately genes and color are not what Africanity stresses or symbolizes. Africanity implies a certain way, a *learned way*, in which people relate to one another, to the environment and to the universe, what Ayi Kwei Armah has called "our way," one that is not necessarily beyond the capacity of other people, but one that Africans have historically embraced. If race or ethnicity has come to be identified with Africanity, and therefore to be invested with some mystical quality, it is only because the people of "the way" necessarily share a geographical space, and that fact in turn results from common descent. Blood is thicker than water only because it symbolizes our obligation to deal in a certain way with those consanguineous with us, not because in itself it possesses some mysterious, psychological potentiality to enforce particular modes of behavior." (Owomoyela 1994: 82, original emphasis)

What, then, in the light of both the theoretical considerations above and Owomoyela's comment, is African identity? In which contexts has it been claimed and how has it been defined over time? Who defined it with which interest? Is it necessary to define it at all? Instead of answering these questions explicitly, I want to recourse to a statement by Anise:

“When scholars ask whether Africa exists, they question the African identity. This question is raised because of the psychological, racial, and historical relationships that have existed between Europeans and peoples of European descent and the people of Africa. Denial of African identity is an integral part of the history of Western encounter with Africa. From the beginning of this encounter to the present, Africans have had to justify and defend many aspects of African identity.” (Anise 1974: 26)

Anise seems to suggest that it is the historical *denial* of African identity by Europeans (as an ideological concept) that leads to new representations of Africa and a reactive assertion of Africans towards the West. Extending Anise’s reproval, Wright (2002: 1) asserts that “African identity is a category that is always already overdetermined and spectacularly overgeneralised and homogenised”. Other authors have, nevertheless, tried to come up with a more tangible notion. For example, Eno and Eno (2010) make a distinction between different types of “Africanity or Africanness” according to the reasons that give rise to a claim to African identity (Eno/Eno 2010, 3-4). The first three types are bound to Africa as a continent and refer to (a) persons who either live on the continent, regardless of the reason (“Africanity by accident of geography”), (b) those who were born in Africa, “regardless of his/her race or ethnic group, or even political ideology or cultural doctrine” and (c) settlers who came to Africa in the course of colonization and stayed on the continent after independence. The other three categories involve a dynamic element and understand “Africanity” as a more flexible category. They involve (d) culture as the instrumental factor and the possibility of acculturation (“Someone who may not be an African by ethnicity but who has lived in the continent long enough as to have adopted the way of life, culture and tradition of the average African”), (e) “Africanity” as an ideology (relating to a person “whose understanding and sentiment for Africanity is based on African thought, values, ideology and other sentiments of intuitive desire to be part of the African world”) and (f) “Africanity by pretension or circumstantial Africanity” (appealing to people or societies using African identity selectively for specific purposes).

These types are based on two assumptions: first, they suggest that “Africanity” can be a matter of choice (in the sense a strategic positioning as an African) and that, second, “Africanity” is attainable if enough effort is made (in a process of acculturation). Furthermore, the authors imply the existence of “an average African” and “the African world”, pointing again back to Africa as a geographical entity. They also draw a distinction between genuine and pretentious ‘Africanity’ and thereby stabilise the dynamic part of their typology.

However, even though it seems necessary to “keep Africanity open” (Diagne 2002) and to counter the stabilizing tendencies of categorizations like the one of Eno and Eno, there are a number of historical processes that contributed to the “current identity complex of Africa” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 284). According to Neocosmos, the transcontinental slave trade had a severe impact on the meaning of “Africanness” (Neocosmos 2008: 2, cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 285). Chipkin argues that the self-understanding of people *as Africans* “emerged primarily in and through the process of nationalist resistance to colonialism” (Chipkin 2007: 2). Zeleza points out, however, that it was African diasporas “that appropriated and popularised the name Africa and through whom Africa became increasingly racialized”, while it is “[f]ar less clear (...) when the appropriation of Africa, as a self-defining identity, occurred in the various regions and among the innumerable societies that make up this continent” (Zeleza 2006b: 15). He further states that historically, local identities – ethnic, regional, and national -, had a greater importance for Africans than the continental one. This leads to a “hierarchy of spatial identities”, whereby “space and the spatial stage (...) contextualize cultures, economics, and politics, and invent and inscribe places and landscapes with ethical, symbolic and aesthetic meanings” (Zeleza 2006b: 17). In this way, the continental identity is thus bound to the continental imagination of ‘Africa’; it is linked to the representation of Africa as a geographical trope, which was discussed above. If the representation of geographical entities, and the involved creation of geopolitical identities is not a one-way road, where representations draw from geography-as-it-is in an unequivocal way, the construction of an African identity is part of the process of creating an “imaginative geography” (Said 1985: 90).

To come back, however, to the initial concern: What is, in the light of the variety of approaches to Africanity or African identity, an African discourse in the context of this study? On the one hand, it is articulated by a “community of interpretation”, to refer to another concept asserted by Said (1985: 92). This community “gives existence” to Africa and Africans, just as Said has argued for Arabs and Islam (ibid.). Who is part of an African discourse thus can be derived from the particular subject positioning of a certain author.

On the other hand, and moreover, it is possible to first, provide criteria that allow for the selection of representatives of African discourse in this study, and second, to delineate an African discourse by a number of criteria of exclusion, so to speak, or, in other words, by asserting a number of characteristics that it does *not* possess according to my own premises. An African discourse is then understood as not *fundamentally different* from a Western discourse in its content and form. At the same time, it *is different* from Western discourse in the subject positions it entails and creates. Furthermore, an African discourse is not in itself homogeneous, i.e. being African does not automatically lead to particular articulations on Africa. It is, of course, also not static and unchangeable. For the purposes of material selection, in this study only those contributions were considered to be part of an African discourse that were written by authors with African origin, including the (new) African diaspora. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind in the light of the theoretical elaborations discussed above, that this ‘definition’ is a working definition that allows the analysis to be implemented and should not serve as a theoretical category beyond this study.





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## STUDYING AFRICA: WHO, WHERE AND FOR WHOM?

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*“What is African Literature? Was it literature about Africa or about the African Experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa: did his work qualify as African literature? What if an African set his work in Greenland: did that qualify as African literature? Or were African languages the criteria? But, what about Arabic, was it not foreign to Africa? What about French and English, which had become African languages? What if a European wrote about Europe in an African language. If... if... if... this or that...”*

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1981)<sup>15</sup>

*“If an agreement to fight white domination exists, this unanimity covers a multitude of differences as to the goals to be reached, as well as conflicting interests.”*

Georges Balandier (1957): *Afrique ambiguë*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> cited in Zegeye/Vambe (2006: 342).

<sup>16</sup> cited in Krieger (1988: 177).



This chapter, which is devoted to issues and challenges that are linked with the study of Africa, will start with a view onto the discipline of African Studies. Such a starting point is suitable first of all because this study is itself located within the discipline; this in some way reflective beginning then suggests why such a study is necessary precisely from the chosen approach. Furthermore, as an institutionalised scholarly engagement with Africa, African Studies offer a clearly defined framework to raise important questions with regard to the contemporary study of Africa. Even more importantly, those controversies that emerged primarily out of the discipline of African Studies reflect fundamental sets of problems that manifest themselves in any discussion of Africa but have been discussed within the discipline in a particularly trenchant and far-reaching manner. Moreover, the discipline's debates have dealt with or even anticipated certain issues that appeared in other fields, for example in Development Studies, only belatedly, such as the question of authority and knowledge, for example. Therefore, debates between scholars of different origins – African, American, and the historical and new African diaspora (mainly in the USA) – will serve as an illustration of the different interests in producing knowledge on Africa within academia and lay the ground for an understanding of the study of Africa as a contested endeavour not only throughout history but also over different geographical and geopolitical landscapes. That Africa as a field of research and as the subject of African Studies is in itself a diffuse concept should further clarify the rationale that gave rise to the focus of this research; if it is unclear what Africa is supposed to mean in the context of a whole discipline devoted to its study, the search for different meanings of Africa in African scholarship itself becomes all the more crucial for debates within this very discipline.

In the second part of the chapter, the attention will be turned to the situation of academia in Africa. A short account of the history of higher education and the role of universities will be followed by first, an elucidation of the different conditions that several post-colonial generations of African scholars were confronted with and second, a contextualization of these trends with respect to the roles that African scholars have towards their Western counterparts and their relationship to what could be termed the global production of knowledge

on Africa. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the problematic of publishing as a very powerful instrument of domination in scholarship and a field that entails particular challenges for scholars from Africa, which lead to the marginalization of African research in mainstream publications adopted in the West, as was argued in the introduction.

## **AFRICAN STUDIES: MORE OR LESS AFRICAN**

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In terms of an institutionalised academic discipline or field, African Studies faced challenges similar to those of other ‘young’ disciplines that don’t belong to the classical ones established for centuries. These include a continuous search for answers to moral and ethical demands, contentions on the legitimacy and scope of the discipline and its relationship with other disciplines, as well as various redefinitions of what the actual subject of African Studies is supposed to be. This section will highlight a number of issues that shed a light on the meaning of African Studies for the focus of this research, which is itself also located within the discipline. I want to start by emphasizing that the roles and positions of African scholars today are influenced also by the history of the study of Africa. Instead of giving a full account of this history, the discussion will be restricted to African Studies itself as the most immediate context of relevance. A short review of the discipline’s contested origins shows that many contradictions are inscribed in the field<sup>17</sup> already due to the circumstances that led to its establishment<sup>18</sup>. In a similar vein, Crowder suggested in the mid-80s that „the

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<sup>17</sup> See also Melber (2009: 186).

<sup>18</sup> As the majority of authors whose works are analysed in this study write in English and are located in the Anglophone linguistic context, this short review brings out the selected issues in the history of African studies in Britain and the United States, and is written for the sake of argument, not completeness. For regional/national studies see also the following contributions, on Australia: Lyons/Dimock (2007); Japan: Ichikawa (2005), Yoshida (2007); India: Biswas (2007); China: Anshan (2007); the Soviet Union: Filatova (1992, 2007); Poland: Czernichovski et.al. (2011); Austria: Schicho (1999), Gomes (2010), Sonderegger (2011), Germany: Engel (2003), Probst (2005), France: Coquery-Vidrovitch (2006), Jewsiewicki (2007), Sweden: Schlyter (2007) and Nordic countries: Melber (2009); the Caribbean: Copley (2007), and Brazil: Lima (2007).

present crisis in African Studies, with non-Africans apparently dominating their development and certainly dominating the dissemination of research results, has always been implicit in the way they have developed over the past sixty years” (Crowder 1987: 111).

Zeleza points to the relevant themes and contexts of its establishment:

“The institutionalization of African studies around the world in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be divorced from the processes of African nationalism and decolonization, which raised the political and paradigmatic profile of the new independent states for foreign policy makers and higher education institutions.” (Zeleza 2009: 111)

As he further reminds us, except for the Americas and Africa itself, African Studies did not develop “out of liberatory impulses, that is, in order to produce Africanist knowledge for the empowerment and emancipation of marginalized and racialized national citizens” (Zeleza 2009: 112). Instead, its development in Europe can generally be traced back to the necessity of former colonial powers to gain knowledge about African countries as their colonies. In the United States, the institutionalised study of Africa as a clearly delineated field is tied to the emergence of area studies after World War II due to geostrategic impulses in the early days of the Cold War<sup>19</sup>. While Melber stresses that everywhere, African people were “the passive objects rather than the architects of the study areas defined” (Melber 2009: 186), within the USA, such a narrative is being increasingly contested with regard to African Studies<sup>20</sup>. Many scholars have faulted mainstream accounts of the US-American history of African Studies, which accredit the development of the latter to historically White universities and date its beginning back to the establishment of the African Studies Association in 1957. Robinson suggests that such accounts deliberately exclude part of the Africa-related legacy in the US:

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<sup>19</sup> Strategic interests are, of course, not only inscribed in the field’s past and re-emerged palpably after 9/11 (cf. Melber 2009: 188). See also Hentz (2004), Barnes (2005), and Carmody (2005).

<sup>20</sup> See Martin (2011) for a detailed account of the history of the post-World War II study of Africa in the United States.

“Virtually all the prevailing reconstructions of African Studies begin with the Cold War and focus on the legacies of government- and foundation-funded Area Studies programs. Curiously, such accounts generally omit any reference to the long-standing tradition of African Studies at historically black colleges and universities, only rarely give a nod to African American professional and lay scholars of Africa, and seldom acknowledge the existence of epistemic communities based in Africa.” (Robinson 1997: 169)

Zeleza adds that not only such a representation reflects merely part of the history and excludes its African-American origins; it does, moreover, create a particular understanding of Africa as the object of study:

“The Africa of African American activist-scholars focused on Africa’s global civilizational status, the Continent as a whole, and its diasporic connections. In contrast, the Africa of professional Africanists became increasingly prescriptive, focusing on Africa’s deficiencies and that strange contraption called “sub-Saharan Africa.” (Zeleza 2009: 118-9)

He concludes by stating that “there are now at least three ‘Africas’ in the American academy, each with its own history, and this has made contestations within African studies complex and fierce” (Zeleza 2009: 119). Zeleza’s remark here feeds directly into the focus of this study, which is itself devoted to ‘different Africas’ in African scholarship<sup>21</sup>.

In the British context, African Studies developed in association with colonialism and imperialism and initially were oriented content-wise mainly to those who were to leave for Africa as expatriates working in colonial administration or as missionaries. Accordingly, the study of African languages and African legal systems was expected to render colonial control more effective (cf. Fyfe 1995: 54). Fyfe asserts that in the course of decolonization, new interest in Africa

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<sup>21</sup> The self-understanding of African studies in the USA is furthermore historically linked to the emergence of ‘area studies’ within the country. These developed out of strategic interests after World War II and are “a marker, not of America’s globalization but its imperial provincialism, reflecting a relentless drive for the American villagization of the globe now that history has apparently ended, and a channel-surfing intellectualism in which the temptation to reinvent newness is always great” (Zeleza 1997: 201). See also Watts (1997) and Zeleza (2009).

emerged, whereby a new perception of Africans “as people with ideas, histories, and economic aspirations of their own” (Fyfe 1995: 55) made it necessary to develop a systematic study of Africa in the academic context. While this new perception was surely restricted to academia and the public opinion in the late 1950s continued to be, for instance, influenced by horrific reports on the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (see Odhiambo 1991), African Studies nevertheless became a popular field at several universities. Even though the majority of students and teachers were British, a large number of African students underwent higher education at these departments and returned to what was then still ‘British Africa’. Fyfe suggests that it was even “part of the role of British African studies to service these new African universities with teachers and expertise”, as the main motivation for the funding of the young African Studies centres was “to ease the transition from empire to independence” (Fyfe 1995: 56). The paternalism inherent in this unequal relationship was articulated bluntly by Lord Hailey, who in 1947 stepped down as a chair of the London-based International African Institute and reminded his colleagues in his farewell address:

“We should use every endeavor to secure the collaboration of those Africans whose attainments in scholarship may fit them to take a share in our work.” (cited in Martin 2011: 73)

Martin furthermore stresses that political decolonization did not involve the deracialisation of knowledge production even at a later stage. New departments of African Studies accommodated very few women and very few Africans and African Americans (Martin 2011: 64, 69) and conflicts over identities in knowledge production did not lose their urgency in the following decades.

I want to approach these conflicts and their meaning from ‘within the discipline’ here, whilst they will be discussed from the particular (and necessarily generalised) perspective of African scholars in the next section. For the purposes of argument, on the following pages, main emphasis will be given to two interrelated issues or dimensions that evolve from the remarks above. Both involve struggles over power and domination within African Studies but relate to

different levels: first, antagonisms around issues of personnel and authority in African Studies (linked to the problematic around race, location, identity), and second, discussions on what actually the subject of African Studies ought to be. This second point is related to the 'knotty problem of relevance' (Watts 1997: 189) of African Studies itself and, more importantly, of knowledge generated within the discipline<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, these two levels directly correspond to the axes of criticism that build the basis for the rationale of this study. In other words, the crux here (and in almost all sections of this chapter/study) is twofold: who speaks and what is being spoken in African Studies.

### *AUTHORITY, IDENTITY, AND LOCATION*

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The first dimension thus concerns "the role of outsiders in setting research agendas and controlling publication in African studies" (Berger 1997: 8), which puts us directly to the core of the argument: who is an outsider? Within the discipline, the question is less a theoretical one but remains complicated in its implications, as will be made comprehensible by means of a recapitulation of some developments that have taken place over the last couple of decades.

According to West and Martin, the geographical and ideological location of scholars and issues leads to the distinction between three different paradigms: the European-North American Africanist establishment, the continental African school, and the more heterogeneous ("amorphous") group "linked by transnational visions grounded variously in diasporan, pan-African, or Afrocentrist imperatives" (West/Martin 1999: 2). While it seems that West and Martin acknowledge diversity and heterogeneity exclusively to the group they themselves belong to, it is necessary to stress that even though it is possible to distinguish among different 'categories' of scholars that are inspired by different paradigmatic traditions, also the continental African 'school' is in itself extremely

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<sup>22</sup> What constitutes 'relevant' knowledge with respect to Africa will be raised as a theoretical question later on. This section will, instead, elaborate on relevance particularly with regard to African studies.



heterogeneous and, similarly, it is not possible to speak of a 'European-North American establishment', as Western Africanists are located in various national and regional traditions. At the same time, there have been explicit debates on the roles of African, African American, and White/Western scholars<sup>23</sup> in field of African Studies that have emerged since at least the 1960s<sup>24</sup>.

In 1965, Wolfe observed that the new post-colonial developments in US-based African Studies did not only urge African students and researchers to establish stronger ties with Afro-American concerns and interact less with White Africanists. He also pointed out that the latter are generally losing the interest to support the interests of Africans by means of their research. According to Wolfe, this interest was palpable in the United States before the year 1960, which was a time when "we all shared at least one common value, our desire to see colonialism ended" (Wolfe 1965: 17). Due to, on the one hand, the increasingly tangible effects of the Cold War on fields of research and, on the other hand, the growing ignorance of (White) Africanists, it disappeared or was replaced by other agendas. Wolfe warned his colleagues, stating that "[u]nless it involves Africans themselves to an important degree, it will cease to be an African program altogether" (Wolfe 1965: 18). It was in the same year that Baum suggested that „Africans are disturbed at being regarded as guinea pigs and their countries as laboratories to test scientific hypotheses" (Baum 1965, quoted in Zeleza 1997: 198).

Whilst the charges made by Wolfe refer particularly to the US-American African Studies institutions and have only a restricted validity for the study of Africa in general, they nevertheless make clear that both the problem of relevance of research for Africa and the question of the inclusion of Africans in African

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<sup>23</sup> Despite the controversies involved, it is important to bear in mind the commonalities and linkages among these groups and beyond them to avoid paralysis and enable common action: "To what extent allows "global Africa" to establish common denominators irrespective of origins and identities of the actors involved in the processes (politically, analytically)? Is there a common ground to act, which is able to eliminate (or at least put aside) potentially divisive aspects of one's personal making (in terms of socialisation impacts through shaping the individual perspectives by means of gender, social class and cultural roots, to mention just a few most significant factors)?" (Melber 2009: 191).

<sup>24</sup> For contributions to the broader debate see, among others, Owomoyela (1994) and Robinson (1997, 2003). For elaborations on specific issues in this regard see for example Robinson (2008), Bates (1971), and Waters (1995).

Studies programs have been unresolved issues ever since the early beginnings of the institutionalised study of Africa in its 'modern' form and lasted until today, having a very similar character.

The crux in these debates is not geography but power, and the ambivalent role of identity (and, by extension, race) can be illustrated by recalling what has been termed the "Montreal affair" of 1969. During the 1969 meeting of the US-American African Studies Association in Montreal, a confrontation between Black and White scholars occurred which led to extensive debates among scholars located mainly in the USA. A group of people that called itself the "Black Caucus" interrupted several sessions with demands on the African Studies Association, which centred on the issue of representation of Black scholars in the Association and broader concerns about racism within the discipline. According to van den Berghe, one of the claims was "that parity of racial representation be established between 'Africans' and 'Europeans' on the Board. Asked to define these two terms, spokesmen for the group repeatedly stated that 'Africans' meant Blacks irrespective of culture or geographical location, while 'Europeans' meant Whites whether from America, Europe, Africa or Australia" (van den Berghe 1969: 10). A representative of the Black Caucus later wrote on the category of "Africans":

"We maintained that all peoples of African descent are African peoples; we recognized that despite a difference in form and degree we shared a common historical experience of racial oppression that has substantially distorted our history and culture or even denied its validity; we affirmed that Africa's image and political position in the world affect all of us." (Challenor 1969: 4)

According to this opposition between Black and White scholars, the latter were accused of "having served the cause of racism in the world" and being racists themselves, while their work has similarly "not been relevant to the problems of black men, either in Africa or in the United States, (...) because it has not been committed to the cause of black liberation from white domination" (Wallerstein 1969: 12).

The actions and claims of the Black Caucus were, of course, highly contested and subjected to different interpretations between dismissal and approval. While authors like Wallerstein expressed solidarity with the concerns of the group and called for a compromise (Wallerstein 1969), van den Berghe – himself an African American scholar – denied any validity of the claims and argues that “the main thrust of their action was a purely racist one”, as “a small totally unrepresentative group of racists succeeded in imposing on the Association a racial definition of the situation” (van den Berghe 1969: 10). According to him, “it was quite clear that most African participants in the conference viewed the Black Caucus as quite irrelevant to Africa, and, indeed, as another neo-colonialist attempt by outsiders to speak on behalf of Africa” (Ibid.). Others rejected the issue by pointing to the threat of scientific objectivity and professional neutrality that the agenda of the group represented for them (cf. Zeleza 1997: 196). The Black Caucus, in contrast, opposed “the tribalization of African peoples by geographical demarcations on the basis of colonialist spheres of influence” (Black Caucus Statements 1969: 18).

The different positions indicate the interdependence between identity and epistemology. Those scholars that Shepherd called “the underprivileged and unrecognized proletariat of African Studies” (Shepherd 1969: 1) not only resisted against institutional racism but also refused to accept identities that were ascribed to them by the (discursive) majority. It is striking that Njisane compared the meetings of the African Studies Association of that time with academic meetings in apartheid South Africa, noting that White scholars use anecdotal evidence and demeaning vocabulary when commenting about African phenomena. He concludes:

„For the study of Europeans, we have to defer to them as the arbiters of their situation; and so, too, must Africans be regarded as arbiters of their own situation. Even Darkest Africa demands that simple courtesy” (Njisane 1971, quoted in Zeleza 1997: 197).

In 1971, Chilcote and Legassick commented on the problematic relationships among scholars, suggesting that „[r]acism here walks hand-in-hand with

imperialism. Until the United States took on, after World War II, the responsibility of defending the ‚free world’ empire - and advancing its own economic interests along the way - Africa had been an anathema for American academics.” (Chilcote/Legassick 1971: 8) and, subsequently, asked themselves “[h]ow can the non-conformist, the radical, the person whose research is geared in the interests of Africa rather than the United States, escape?” (ibid.: 10).

It is important to emphasise that the events at Montreal had a primary impact on the Africanist academic landscape in North America and are, of course, of particular relevance for that very context. Yet the North American research landscape has not only an enormous significance for African Studies – with respect to the distribution of power within the discipline – but also, increasingly, for the “third and fourth generation” of African intellectuals. It is therefore worthwhile to keep these developments in mind when thinking about the linkages between intellectual engagement and the distribution of power and knowledge in principle.

Conflicts within African Studies as an institutionalised discipline thus evolved out of the antagonism between African American and White intellectuals in the United States. The first and second generation of African scholars faced very specific conditions, issues, and priorities, whereby the dynamics within the discipline seemed rather secondary to them. It was only later that African scholars became involved in the disciplinary debates and added a new dimension. As Berger writes:

„Most of the first generation of Western-educated scholars were trained abroad, but returned to teach in local institutions as part of the effort at nation building and intellectual decolonization. As a result of overseas contacts and local support for research, the quality of their work was internationally recognized; in the words of Senegalist novelist Mariama Ba, they were the confident ‘messengers of a new design’ (...). Also helping to cement closer relationships across national boundaries was the relatively large number of

expatriates who spent extended periods in African universities.”  
(Berger 1997: 8)

What is, however, common for both axes – in the relationship between White and Black intellectuals, as well as in the discussions between African and non-African scholars – is the central problem: the interplay of power, identity, knowledge and location. It is in both cases the perceived self-righteousness of White Africanists (or merely “experts”) that is being questioned, whereby the aim is to destabilise their exclusive legitimacy and authority to *know about* Africa. Power and legitimacy are linked to different factors in each case, depending on the perspective from which the problem is approached. For African scholars, power manifests itself through geographical location as well. For African American scholars, however, race and racism are the central issues around which the conflicts evolve. Parker and Rathbone thus write with regard to the US:

“Divisions were bound to arise; and they soon did: over questions of race and power within universities and professional associations, over the relevance of Western historical epistemologies to the African past, over the degree to which history writing should be an academic exercise or a political project. These debates played out mainly in the United States – not just because of the intensity of its own racial politics, but because it soon surpassed the old colonial powers and independent Africa itself as the principal centre of African historical research.” (Parker/Rathbone 2007: 147)

More than three decades after the Montreal affair, an opinion piece of a leading African historian entitled “Ghettoizing African History” (Curtin 1996) fuelled the (anglophone) debate<sup>25</sup> around the very connection between identity, knowledge and power again, making clear that it did not lose any of its urgency (see Tettey/Puplampu 2000). What Curtin meant by the danger of ghettoization was not the marginalization of African Studies in academia or the study of African history in the discipline, but rather the allegedly growing focus of African history

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<sup>25</sup> See also the special issue of the *Bulletin of the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars* from Winter 1996.

on the needs of African American students and “the use of racial criteria in filling faculty posts” that would lead to diminishing the quality of teaching and research as a consequence (Curtin 1996: 3)<sup>26</sup>. While for Curtin the preference of race over qualification leads to the deterioration of academic standards, for Hunt Davis it is the very racialised and racist society of Northern America and particularly the United States that necessitates African Studies:

„One of the crucial intellectual and social arguments for sustaining African Studies in the United States is the continuing need for a strong countervailing force, within U.S. academic life, to the repeated resurgence of deeply rooted and deeply ingrained patterns of racially based thinking. (...) The respected status of African Studies on university and college campuses across the country has contributed to the general rejection of overt racially based explanations for the ordering of society.” (Hunt Davis 1997: 143)

Interestingly, Hunt Davis then sees the benefit of African Studies not for Africa, but for the United States. Burke has made a similar point in response to so-called ‘Kitching controversy’ (see below), suggesting that it is reasonable for different intellectuals to be preoccupied with and devoted to different issues and aims:

“I am not saying there should be a total disconnect between the two academies, but it seems wholly positive to me that African intellectuals should be motivated by one set of problematics in their writing and thinking and Anglo-American academics by another. I am not writing and teaching about Africa for Africans, though I am delighted and educated by their readings of my work and avidly welcoming of any and all exchanges. I am writing and teaching about Africa for my students, my colleagues, my society.” (Burke 2003: 208)

Such a statement has also an impact on the question of power – experts, then, do not determine the interpretation of Africa for Africans but merely for Western

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<sup>26</sup> For Iyer, the hiring of Africans or people of the African diaspora for teaching posts on African literature is a “political strategy designed to ensure continued marginalization”. She explains that “[i]f African Studies were taken seriously, it would be a regular part of an integrated curriculum” as “African literature is [not] only relevant to black people” (Iyer 1995: 28).

students. Nevertheless, this doesn't seem like an appropriate solution to unequal power relations that prevail in the study of Africa with respect to the hegemonic knowledge production on Africa. Even if, as Burke paraphrased Diouf's comment, "African intellectuals could mostly care less about what is being produced by Africanists in the US, Canada and the United Kingdom" and it is his illation that "fears about the perceived domination of Africanist scholarship by Anglo-American scholars seem rather groundless" (ibid.), it is enough to have a look on recently published literature on Africa to see who dominates the field.

### *A DISCIPLINE LOOKING FOR A SUBJECT*

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Linked with the difficulties regarding the issues of authority and identity within African Studies, also its subject has been contested, notwithstanding the fact that Africa as a subject is inscribed in the name of the discipline. That there are 'many Africas' in the Africanist world, as Zeleza's remark above suggested, and that Africa itself is contested generally within and outside academia, as will be shown later, forms the background to the hardly surprising lack of agreement among scholars dealing with Africa on what their subject should be. If we remain within the framework of the discipline for now, answers to this question have been dominated by US-American Africanists, "or at least located mainly within the network of the US-American African Studies Association", as Melber notes (Melber 2009: 186). Yet, even within the North American space, there is hardly any consensus or common understanding of Africanist scholars on their subject. In a survey conducted among Africanists in the United States, scholars provided different definitions to the question of what constitutes 'African Studies'. Most of the respondents suggested that it meant the "study of people of Africa, both in Africa and the diaspora" (41%), while the rest was divided among those who believed that African Studies was the "study of the entire continent of Africa" (33%) or "the study of sub-Saharan Africa" (22%) (Bowman/Cohen 2002: 2).

The problem related with such a variety of understandings is not that there are

different approaches to the study of Africa involved, but that these lead to first, extensive 'soul-searching' among Africanists, which, according to some, prevents Africanist scholars to make any serious progress in theoretical or methodological matters (Ukaegbu 1998: 324), and second, that this preoccupation with itself further distances African Studies from other critical issues – the very matter of authority outlined above, connected with issues of relevance and responsibility. The authors of the survey mentioned above stress that defining African Studies is problematic among scholars because it is linked to leadership, power, and intellectual orientation (Bowman/Cohen 2002: 2). Zeleza thus argues that the discipline has been torn between culturalist, developmentalist, deconstructionist, and globalist imperatives (Zeleza 2009: 112), all of which have different priorities regarding the study of Africa and pursue it with different interests, whereby not all of them are for the benefit of Africa itself. West and Martin even go to the lengths of stating that “members of the predominantly white Africanist establishment have long sought to separate sub-Saharan Africa, the object of their study and research agendas, from the African diaspora and issues of race” (West/Martin 1995: 8).

Martin and West further suggest that postmodern theorizations contribute to the de(con)struction of African Studies (from the inside) through questioning Africa as its subject. Hereby, they argue, these approaches actually add to neoliberal tendencies, which strengthen only those disciplines or fields of research that prove to be beneficial for strategic priorities of powerful actors<sup>27</sup>. They write:

“Most prominent is the burgeoning literature charting the West’s construction or ‘invention’ of Africa as an imagined Other, whereby the ‘Africa’ of classical and modern writers becomes but a mirror of its creators in the West (e.g., Mudimbe 1988; Miller 1985, 1990). Based on the pioneering work of Edward Said on orientalism (1978), this line of research has the unintended effect of undermining Africanists and African studies from within, as the field becomes depicted as an insular, introverted community whose research tells

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<sup>27</sup> According to the authors, the establishment of ‘global studies’ instead of ‘area studies’ programs reflects such a trend (ibid.).



us more about the West than about Africa. The comparison with the studies of orientalism is instructive, for like orientalists, Africanists cannot abandon their subject, Africa, without also abandoning their enterprise altogether.” (Martin/West 1999: 7)

Such an accusation cannot but be rejected on the grounds of their own premises. It implies that any critique that develops out of a particular discipline and questions the engagement with the central object of research automatically has a damaging effect on the discipline. That would mean that within Development Studies, for example, the revelation of power mechanisms and interests underlying certain conceptualisations of development (mainly those ones of ‘the powerful’) or the questioning of statistical correlations that are taken for granted is objectionable. However, the development of (critical) social science itself requires that the introduction of new perspectives or themes involves a re-definition of the disciplines themselves. This is, obviously, not a smooth process.

A discursive thread that has had such an effect in and outside academia – in that it has provoked a fortified articulation of positions arguing *for* the study of and engagement with Africa – has been frequently termed Afro-pessimism. Ranger has remarked already in the 1960s that “the Africanist historian (...) who emphasises African activity, African adaptation, African choice, African initiative, will increasingly find his main adversaries not in the discredited colonial school but in the radical pessimists” (Ranger 1968: xxi, cited in Hunt Davis 1997: 145). Not only media are permeated by fatalistic perceptions of Africa, the discourse has been vigorously discussed also within the discipline at least since the 1980s and has had an impact on the self-understanding of Western scholars. An article written by Kitching with the title *Why I gave up African Studies* has triggered a new debate on this issue (Kitching 2000) – evolving around Western fears of irrelevance and the privileged position of Africanists to “abandon” their research focus (see Postel 2003, Olukoshi 2007). This (Western) fear of African Studies becoming marginalised, the “specter of irrelevance” diagnosed by Martin and West (1995: 24) then can be countered with Zeleza’s words:

“But marginalized from whom? Certainly not for people within the continent itself, not for those of us for whom Africa is not merely an academic ‘problem’, a distant research site that can be abandoned at will, but a permanent and profound existential and intellectual reality” (Zezeza 1997: 206).

Owomoyeka suggests in this context that “perhaps the surest way of getting Africa back into African Studies is to get African Studies back to Africa”, if not in geographical terms, then “at least epistemologically and paradigmatically” (Owomoyeka 1994: 96-97). From the African perspective, this then means building research on “African priorities” (Crowder 1987: 120) instead of seeing Africa as “a lifeless object” and “a permanent enigma for which the Africanist is the ‘expert’ interpreter” (Olukoshi 2007: 16). Olukoshi further arrogates that instead of interpreting Africa(ns) for the world, African Studies should facilitate “intra-African cross-national learning” (Olukoshi 2007: 15).

It is not the aim of this chapter to decide which of the positions discussed should be preferred, but rather to make understandable the dynamics around particular issues that are crucial for understanding negotiations of power within the study of Africa. I therefore want to close this chapter by offering the very broad suggestion regarding the subject of African Studies provided by the Africanists Alpers and Roberts. In reference to the Bowman survey mentioned above, he maintains the following:

“We contend that although the study of Africa must focus on Africa and the peoples of Africa, it should also include the study of Africans in African diasporas and the place of Africa in its global context, both historically and contemporaneously. African Studies, we firmly believe, is about African peoples, both on the continent of Africa and abroad, rather than about a continent called Africa.” (Alpers/Roberts 2002: 13)

While such an inclusive understanding of African Studies offers a perspective to think about the repercussions that different scholars’ identities and understandings have on the subject of their study, it is a normative definition

that is being continuously negotiated within the field. To sum up, it is important to keep in mind that first, there are de facto different perceptions among different groups of scholars according to both their backgrounds and, of course, individual socializations and beliefs, and second, there are reasons for these differences that need to be considered as well.

### **AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP: PAST AND PRESENT CONTINGENCIES**

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*“We Africans have become experts at dissemblance: saying all the right things about marginalization, exploitation and acculturation, but behaving in ways that contradict our pleas for valorization of our humanity, creativity and scholarship. Rhetoric and visions aside, everyone of us is running away from Africa, each at our own level: from the elite few who beg and bank abroad and who shop around for foreign citizenship for their unborn children, to scavengers appropriating the refuse dumps of the rich and powerful consumers of foreign products.”*

*Nyamnjoh 2004a: 348*

The preceding section outlined a number of crucial debates that dominate the scholarly engagement with Africa and manifest themselves in controversies between African and non-African scholars. The study of Africa, be it as a distinct discipline or one of the fields located within other disciplines, served as the point of reference here. Before some of the issues that were raised will be problematised more explicitly from the point of view of African scholars, the material and historical context of their work will be foregrounded, as the representations and concepts of Africa that are created by African (and other) scholars are also connected with the conditions they face and, as a consequence, their collective and strategic meaning can be understood or interpreted against this backdrop.

What is the influence of material inequality on the knowledge about Africa? In his introduction to the anthology *Africa and the Disciplines*, Bates, Mudimbe, and O'Barr argue:

“Viewed through the lens of a discipline, then, knowledge from Africa is equally significant and persuasive as knowledge from Europe, no less - and no more. And knowledge produced by an African is equally significant as that produced by a European, no less and no more, if it has been generated, analyzed, and assessed in ways capable of withstanding the analytic and methodological rigors of the author's discipline.” (Bates/Mudimbe/O'Barr 1994: xii, see also Hauck 2012: 111-123)

In the light of the power relations that shape the creation of knowledge, such a statement still seems appropriate and valid, it does, however, seem to refer to an ideal world of science devoid of power. If, as the authors assert, „the study of Africa is already lodged in the core of the modern university” (Bates 1994: xii), then Africa's role in the development of Western social sciences seems beyond question. Equally, the knowledge generated by Africans (be it on Africa or any other subject or region) might be as valid as the knowledge created by Europeans. In any engagement in this knowledge it is, however, crucial to consider two qualifying points for the discussion. First, it is necessary to perceive and explain the actual marginalization or invisibility of African knowledge in Western social science. Second, it is important to acknowledge that the conditions of the emergence of African knowledge are different than the conditions in which hegemonic knowledge is being produced, even if these differences are not to be ascribed to any inherent difference of Africa or Africans but rather to historical and political developments. Third, it is questionable to refer to the methodological and analytical norms of the original disciplines, if those disciplines are themselves grounded in a Eurocentric history of science, which precisely did not acknowledge Other knowledge as valid (see also Hountondji 1990: 6), and if its theories need to be 'de-westernised' first, so to speak (see Nyamnjoh 2010).

Bates' statement introduces a number of further considerations that emerge from its implications: Under which circumstances is 'African knowledge' created? In other words, what are the conditions that African scholars face in their work? This includes both challenges – as trials and tribulations – emanating from scarce resources and contradictory colonial legacies, as well as new dynamics and opportunities that all shape the field of (social) science in Africa. The acknowledgement of contradictory dynamics and the flexibility in scholars' lives and identities needs to precede the characterization of the African scientific field, for as Melber emphasises (or warns):

“To discuss in serious terms the danger of domination of African Studies [and knowledge production on Africa] by Western scholars requires to begin with a strict definition of both and ignores that the mobility of the 21<sup>st</sup> century counteracts and reduces at least in the academic field some of the determining aspects of primary socialisation” (Melber 2009: 192).

Defining 'Western scholars' then accordingly implies also the necessity of a definition for 'African scholars', which might in itself be a problematic aim. Following Melber, it should, however, be noted that even though the challenges faced by African scholars are by no means static and homogeneous, many factors nevertheless contribute to a structural disadvantage. Some of these factors will be discussed on the following pages.

Scholars located in Africa have been facing various material and political constraints over the last decades, which have been decried by many authors. They range from repression by oppressive state forces, material disadvantages (including low salaries, low access to publications, etc.; see Mkandawire 1997) to tensions and rivalry within universities themselves, and identity politics in research communities (cf. Tettey/Puplampu 2000). Hountondji thus states that universities and research institutions in Africa (or, generally, in the South) are maintaining “a system of mediocrity” (Hountondji 1990:11). While the relationship between intellectuals and governments could be termed fruitful in the years following after independence, it deteriorated in the wake of

authoritarianism of the 1970s. In the last two decades, states oriented themselves more and more towards foreign experts, while either sidelining local research or expecting “subservience and sycophancy”, as Mkandawire puts it (Mkandawire 2005a: 2, cf. Tettey/Puplampu 2000: 92). Since independence, scholars found themselves increasingly excluded from policy making<sup>28</sup> and alienated from their societies by first nationalism, then developmentalism, and, most recently, neoliberalism (Mkandawire 1997, 2005: 5)<sup>29</sup>.

### *CONTESTED SPACES IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH*

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In order to understand the contemporary situation of scholars in and from Africa with respect to their institutional origins and locations, it is necessary to have a short review of the history of higher education and illuminate particularly on the ambivalent role of universities<sup>30</sup>. Hereby I want to stress those aspects that have had a lasting effect on the situation of scholars and turned into particular challenges for African scholarship. An example is the colonial origin of a large number of universities in Africa, which is closely linked with the character of post-colonial universities. Assié-Lumumba (2009) even argues that contemporary African universities reflect colonial relations<sup>31</sup>. I want to therefore selectively trace the changing conditions of scholarship in this section, before turning to the scholars themselves in the next one.

The view that institutions of higher learning in Africa were merely products of the colonial era was a long-lasting idea in the historiography in this regard. However, quite the contrary is now considered to be state of the art at present day (Assié-Lumumba 2009: 37). In their seminal account on higher education in

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<sup>28</sup> Ndiaye 2009 constitutes one of the current initiatives to strengthen the ties between policy makers and scholars.

<sup>29</sup> For debates on the role of African intellectuals in constructing ‘relevant’ knowledge on Africa, see the next section.

<sup>30</sup> See also Mamdani (1993), Domatob (1996), and Zeleza (2004a, 2004b).

<sup>31</sup> In this sense, van Rinsum interprets the development of higher education and research in Africa “as a process of prescriptive construction, or imposition, of identity” (van Rinsum 2002: 28).

Africa, Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson have outlined that “the roots of the University as a community of scholars, with an international outlook but also with responsibilities within particular cultures, can be traced back to two institutions that developed in Egypt in the last two or three centuries BC and AD” (Ajayi/Goma/Johnson 1996: 5)<sup>32</sup>. Sichone has, however, pointed out that “African knowledge systems have been considered backward by both the Islamic and Western traditions” (Sichone 2003: 467). The discussion here should be focused on the late colonial and post-colonial background, not only because of the undeniably more immediate relevance to our topic, but also because it was a “new type of institution” that evolved through colonialism (Assié-Lumumba 2009: 34). This colonial African university was created as “a stranger to its own environment”, as Sherman puts it (1990: 371), while Simala stresses that the colonial “systems of education were evidently apt to make African countries poor by stunting intellectual growth” (Simala 2003: 28).

Whilst most colonial institutions of higher education and research were established in late colonialism, after World War II<sup>33</sup>, some of the so-called University Colleges (which were later turned into universities) were established earlier<sup>34</sup>. According to Mazrui, these “satellite universities” (Barnes 2005) were to become “the clearest manifestation of cultural imperialism” after primary schools and churches had occupied this role until the 1950s (Mazrui 1975: 193). The explanation is that the institutions were created not because the colonial powers saw any fundamental value in (higher) education for the African population, but because they were bound to specific objectives for the benefit of the colonial system (cf. Assié-Lumumba 2009: 35).

The colonial University Colleges were oriented towards metropolitan needs and norms – providing “raw data for processing in Europe” (Sichone 2003: 468). Not

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<sup>32</sup> Pre-colonial institutions and notions are, however, usually not mentioned in general accounts of the history of higher education in Africa (see, for example, Tadesse 1999: 145-6).

<sup>33</sup> University Colleges were established in Ibadan (1948), Legon (1948), Sierra Leone (1960); the University of Dakar in 1957 (see Tadesse 1999: 146).

<sup>34</sup> Among them, most importantly, the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, established in the late 1870s, and Fort Hare in South Africa, Makerere College in Uganda, Achimota in the Gold Coast and Yaba in Nigeria, all of which offered higher education by 1935 (cf. Tadesse 1999: 145-6). See also Ashby 1964.

only were they perceived according to European university standards, but also was the colonial administration controlling the curriculum and the teaching staff “in partnership with the metropolitan universities” (Ajayi/Goma/Johnson 1996: 67). Even examination questions had to be sent to the colonial metropolis for approval (cf. Mazrui 1975: 194-5). Mazrui points out that the Western oriented (higher) education in Africa during colonialism served basically two needs: “producing appropriate manpower and redefining the market through acculturation” (Mazrui 1975: 198).

This first phase – the “formative years” of higher education in Africa (Tadesse 1999: 145) – lasted until 1960. According to Tadesse, three main features characterised these “formative years” of higher education in Africa. She points out that the institutions were altogether sub-regional, even though they were directly linked to the European colonial powers. Interestingly, their students were influenced by pan-African<sup>35</sup>, “Third World” and African nationalist ideas. Furthermore, they were provided with sufficient resources and infrastructure to become “detached and self-sufficient communities”, many of them even being able to start publishing own journals (Tadesse 1999: 146). However, even if their target group included Africans during colonialism, the institutions were also characterised by a system of racial discrimination, until then typical for colonial civil services (cf. Ajayi/Goma/Johnson 1996: 54, 69). According to Sichone, an educated African elite could only emerge in those colonies that were not dominated by settlers (cf. Sichone 2003: 471).

After the wave of political independence in Africa, education was the first priority for the new governments. Thus, colonial systems of higher education had to be simultaneously expanded and reformed as to be adapted to the new situation in the young states (cf. Habte/Wagaw 1993: 681). In other words, universities had to change from serving the needs of the metropole to fulfilling the needs of the societies they were located in. Two strands of reasoning can be observed with regard to this post-colonial re-orientation of the African

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<sup>35</sup> The pan-Africanist thinkers James Africanus Horton and Edward Wilmot Blyden had both advocated the establishment of universities in West Africa already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. van Rinsum 2002: 33).



university, which Mamdani termed to be “a fruit of nationalism” (Mamdani 1998: 2, cited in Sall 2002: 49).

The first evolved around a notion of alienness and criticised the hegemonic basis of higher education established during colonialism. African leaders agreed on the need for “Africanization” (of civil services and in a general sense, cf. Adedeji 1993: 407) and the adjustment of education to “African cultures”<sup>36</sup> (Habte/Wagaw 1993: 686). Thus, the aim was an ideological re-orientation. As Porter commented in 1972, universities after independence were supposed “to give a distinctive image to what was originally an imported institution” and “certainly have a more direct responsibility towards the goal of nation-building” than elsewhere in the world (Porter 1972: 75). This aim had to be achieved through the very policy of Africanization, which ascribed the priority to the training of administrative and technical staff for posts hitherto occupied by Europeans and African teachers for secondary schools and teacher training colleges:

“(…) both of content and personnel. For as long as the system is seen as an importation in which Africans are trying to conform to alien ideas, there is bound to be artificiality and too much formalism in educational attainment. As Africanization increases both in terms of curriculum content, research priorities and personnel, so will the questions framed by Africans themselves come to dominate the current analysis of the African situation. The university is in a uniquely advantageous position to contribute towards this analysis.” (Porter 1972: 82-3).

In a similar vein, Kenyan scholars had argued already in 1964 that “Europeans who now run our [university] affairs for us cannot undertake any major reforms because they are prisoners of their own irrelevant and out-of-date prejudices” (Okumu / Odhiambo 1964, cited in Tadesse 1999: 147).

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<sup>36</sup> Among them was, for example, Sékou Touré : “We must Africanize our education and get rid of the negative features of misconceptions inherited from an educational system designed to serve colonial purposes” (Sékou Touré 1963, cited in Habte/Wagaw 1993: 685).

Furthermore, post-colonial universities were located within the wide consensus on the need for development in Africa. This link between (higher) education and development was officially formulated as early as 1962 at a conference organised by UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Africa in Tananarive, Madagascar. The participants of the conference agreed that besides research and teaching, African universities should play a decisive role in African development:

“Consequently, in addition to its traditional role of giving a broad liberal education, African universities must reflect the needs of the African world by providing African society with men and women equipped with skills that will enable them to participate fully and usefully in the economic and social development of their continent.”  
(UNESCO 1962: 2)

Similarly, Yusuf asserted in 1973 that the “African university must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite” (Yusuf 1973: 42, cited in van Rinsum 2002: 35). It was this reasoning that led to the concept of the “developmental university” in Africa, which emerged after decolonization<sup>37</sup>.

In the 1970s, the university not only lost its appeal to the new generation of authoritarian leaders but became the dangerous home of critical academics and students, whose research was seen as inseminating foreign and irrelevant ideologies and theories. In the following decade, with agendas increasingly driven by international financial institutions<sup>38</sup>, “state-sanctioned anti-intellectualism found succor in the strange gospel from the World Bank, that

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<sup>37</sup> Sall observes that after political independence, social science teaching and research in Africa has been determined by different kinds of change, which he summarizes as follows: “i) economic change (from developmentalism to decline and liberalization), ii) social change (changes in the status of large sections of the elite from high to low; rapid urbanization and a rise in mass poverty), iii) political change (authoritarianism, followed by liberal democratic reforms in some countries, conflicts and civil wars in others); iv) change in information and communications technologies; and v) change at the level of the university and other research institutions of social research (expansion of the sector and diversification of types of institutions and governance systems)” (Sall 2002: 51).

<sup>38</sup> A rather dangerous curiosity in this regard is the World Bank’s recommendation made in 1986 that “Africa did not need university education” (Imam/Mama 1994: 73, cited in Onoma 2008: 78).

Africa needed primary schools rather than universities” (Zezeza 2009: 116). As a result of this crisis, many African universities turned into “Entrepreneurial Universities”<sup>39</sup> since the beginning of the 1990s (Sall 2002: 56).

On the one hand, universities have been forced to adapt to the needs of the market, even though they have been coerced to increase their student numbers beyond the needs of the labour market, producing unemployed academics and not being able to cover students (and researchers) with necessary resources. On the other hand, they have also lost their legitimacy, as the necessity for university education was challenged by the state and the public (Wohlgemuth 2002: 72). Thus, even though the African university can be interpreted as “the premier, deeply subversive symbol of the colonial-era ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ actually writing, thinking and theorising for themselves” (Barnes 2005: 8), its roles remain highly contradictory, subject to both reactionary and revolutionary contestations (cf. Nyamnjoh/Jua 2002) and influenced or at times even determined by changes in the global political economy<sup>40</sup>.

The restrictive forces of authoritarianism and neo-liberalism made scholars look for alternative possibilities to pursue more or less independent scholarship. As a reaction to authoritarian tendencies, many intellectuals undertook subversive activities in classrooms, participated in protests, engaged in oppositionary politics, and signed declarations on academic freedom (Onoma 2008: 70). Beyond doubt, intellectual migration (or, as Hountondji terms it, “intellectual nomadism” (Hountondji 1990: 11)) has become one of the most important strategies to escape inhibiting conditions that dominate continental scholarship in the course of the 1980s<sup>41</sup>. An estimated 40% of those obtaining their

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<sup>39</sup> On the concept of ‘entrepreneurial universities’, see Clark (2004), Cargill (2007).

<sup>40</sup> Douglass (2005) discusses global influences on higher education systems. For discussions on GATS in relation to higher education in Africa, see Zezeza (2005). Brock-Utne (2003b) discusses the formulation of education policies in Africa in the context of neo-liberalism. Internationalization of higher education is discussed by Jowi (2009), Teferra/Knight (2008), and Singh (2010).

<sup>41</sup> The migration of intellectuals has been largely discussed as the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon, a term that should be rather avoided here due to its questionable implications (first, it reduces intellectuals to the ‘brain’ (and functions related to it), blanking out all other aspects of life that are influenced by the migration, and second, it suggests that all other migrants do migrate for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the ‘brain’, or even, to put it more radically, that

postgraduate education outside of Africa do not return to African universities (cf. Sall 2002: 61). Many of those who 'remained' in Africa joined research networks, looking for "alternatives to the limited social science priorities of their own national universities and the global academy"<sup>42</sup> (Sichone 2003: 480). When CODESRIA was founded, one of the main concerns was to "ensure that the African academy played a full role in the quest for improved human livelihood on the African continent" (Olukoshi 2002: 1, cited in Simala 2003: 27). Moreover, consultancy work has become the major income source for African scholars on the continent, creating further contradictions with respect to the aims of research and science and the self-understanding of the scholars (cf. Butterfield/Abye 2012: 213).

To discuss gender dynamics with respect to African universities and higher education in an adequate manner would require space that goes beyond the extent of this study. However briefly, the associated problematic should at least be mentioned, as the relevance of gender with respect to knowledge production is clear not least from the material analysed later: the authors whose contributions within the chosen framework were most accessible or even visible and which were therefore considered for the analysis here are almost exclusively men. Amina Mama delivers a sharp verdict on Africa's universities, criticizing that they "remain steeped in patriarchal institutional cultures in which women are generally vastly outnumbered, and their intellectual contribution relegated to the fringes or steadfastly ignored" (Mama 2011a: 4). Two interlinked issues are important in this respect: the access of women to (institutions of) higher education and their visibility in knowledge production and the gender dynamics at the universities themselves<sup>43</sup>.

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their brain doesn't count. For literature on the 'brain drain', see for example: Mutiso (1979), Logan (1992), Sako (2002).

<sup>42</sup> Among these networks are the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Third World Forum, the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern Africa (OSSREA) in Ethiopia, the African Association of Political Science (AAPS) and the Southern African Political Economy Series in Zimbabwe, and the African Economic Research Consortium in Nairobi. The African Center for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS) was established as a 'think tank' by Adebayo Adedeji in 1991 (cf. Sichone 2003: 480).

<sup>43</sup> See also Jacobs (1996), Sall (2000), Bennett (2002), Barnes (2007), Mama (2003, 2006, 2011b), Zeleza (2003), Aina (2010), Oyewumi (2011).

Mkandawire has presented a characterization of post-independence intellectuals in Africa, making a distinction between three generations of scholars, each generation experiencing a different context for their work (Mkandawire 1995). Most of the scholars belonging to the first generation, which emerged directly after independence, had the opportunity to pursue their graduate and/or postgraduate studies abroad, mainly at high-level universities in Great Britain, France, and, later, the United States. Mkandawire, being one of these first generation intellectuals himself, explains that most of them returned back to their countries of origin, as not only they were driven 'morally' by the aims of nation building but also the material (and political) circumstances allowed them to fill leading positions at their (mostly newly established) universities in the course of the indigenisation of the latter. They enjoyed wide international recognition and were provided with the opportunity to publish in 'international' journals. Moreover, they also established the first pan-African and sub-regional institutions, the abovementioned CODESRIA being one of them. Moreover, the first generation of scholars featured relative content-wide cohesion, as Mkandawire argues:

“The first generation was self-consciously anti-neo-colonial and considered decolonisation of national institutions, and of the intellectual terrain, as major tasks. Not surprisingly, this generation was profoundly pre-occupied with problems of nation-building, of economic and intellectual dominance and the continued dependency of their respective countries on their erstwhile colonial matters.”  
(Mkandawire 1995: 76)

Sall adds that many of these scholars shared not only nationalist aspirations, but also statist views of development and many “were into some form of radical scholarship” (Sall 2002: 60, see also Martin 2011: 75)<sup>44</sup>. Martin further argues

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<sup>44</sup> Sall also provides a list of many members of the first generation. Among them were Samir Amin, Harris Memel-Fote, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Claude Ake, Cheikh Anta Diop, Amady Aly Dieng,

that it was these scholars, who returned to Africa from Western universities with “vindicationist and pan-Africanist impulses” (Martin 2011: 73)<sup>45</sup>.

Many scholars of the second generation likewise took the opportunity to study abroad, however, contrary to the first generation, many of them did not return back home or, even if they did, left their countries soon again. Confronted with the repressive climate that emerged in the 1970s and the economic crisis of the 1980s, they looked for appointments in the United States (or, less often, in Europe). Mwangola bemoans that these intellectuals “remain an influence in intellectual circles everywhere but in Africa” (Mwangola 2008: 9).

The third generation had far less chances to pursue their studies abroad and faced extremely difficult conditions, involving both, continued political repression and the difficult material conditions outlined above. Furthermore, these scholars grew into the “identity crisis of African universities”, Mkandawire writes, and “lack [the] international exposure” (1995: 79) of the first two generations. Thus, he suggests, it was also the third generation that added new dynamics to the international research networks. Mkandawire further adds, comparing the third generation with the first one:

“Where the first generation can be accused of advancing excessively ‘externalist’ explanations of Africa’s problems, this third generation runs the risk of committing the opposite error of advancing excessively ‘internalist’ explanations of the crisis by ignoring the global structural contexts within which the prospects of their respective countries are embedded. It is also the third generation that is likely to initiate an autonomous discourse and reflection on Africa - autonomous not in the sense that it is isolated but in the sense that it takes the specificities of the African experience seriously and has a proactive rather than reactive relationship with non-African

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Abdoulie Ly, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Ousmane Sembène, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Lenrie Peters (Sall 2002: 60).

<sup>45</sup> Prah suggested that the first generation(s) of scholars were influenced by Western intellectual concepts (and “fashions”), which “shaped their thinking on Africa and the world, but have hardly provided viable inspirational or ideological sources for transformation which translate into the betterment of the quality of life of African humanity” (Prah 1998: 160).

scholarship. In many ways, much of the early African scholarship operated within the parameters defined by Africanist discourse so that in its critical form it was essentially reactive - 'debunking' colonialist or neo-colonialist interpretations of the African experience, while, in its non-critical form, it tended to assume a mimetic mode that stifled originality. Getting out of both of these stances may be the greatest challenge to the current generation of African social scientists." (Mkandawire 1995: 81)

Young scholars, who define themselves as being part of a new, fourth generation, have started defining the peculiar challenges that the present intellectual and political climate in and beyond Africa poses to them (Anyidoho 2010, Mwangola 2008, see also Adesina 2008). The concerns of the fourth generation are informed by the challenge to build on their predecessors. Mwangola stresses that different generations of African scholars have been united in their core aims, and issues like "identity definition and the continent's complicated relationship with the rest of the world" remain the main focus (Mwangola 2008: 8). At the same time, she stresses the new generation's particular mission to work on these issues and argues that the two most important challenges are to enhance the visibility of African scholarship within African Studies and engage with relevant epistemologies.

#### *AFRICAN SCHOLARS VS. OTHERS*

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The following section is devoted to what Hountondji termed the "socio-theoretical extraversion" of African scholars (Hountondji 1990: 11) and their roles within the global academic field. According to Martin, the expansion of the Western academic community was met by a consensus of African scholars that the knowledge production on Africa should take place within Africa and be pursued by Africans themselves. He concludes that throughout the 1970s and 1980s therefore, these communities worked rather separately and rarely

engaged in collaborative projects (Martin 2011: 75). While there are numerous accounts that stress the necessity of African knowledge, power relations add another explanation to the stated isolation of African scholars. According to Schipper, knowledge production on Africa is permeated by the “intellectual authoritarianism of Western-controlled knowledge production which tends to subordinate the views of those who are the objects of study” (Schipper 1997:125).

Research linkages between the South and the North are still very rare and even if they are established, African scholars tend to be ‘used’ for local research and data collection, while the development of research projects and the decision making as well as writing and publication are done in the North (cf. Robson/Chipeta 2007: 350-1). Hountondji argues that African students are socialised as scholars with the feeling that “whatever their special fields might be, everything that matters for them is located or taking place elsewhere”. African scholars find themselves becoming constant “scientific tourists” because of their dependency on foreign libraries and the lack of facilities at their own universities (Hountondji 1990: 10).

The distance between Western Africanists and (continental) African scholars thus emanates not only from the decision to value own knowledge and strengthen the relevance of knowledge created on Africa, but also from structural relations among the two groups. Mkandawire summarises that there are seven broad sources of discontent that African scholars feel towards Western Africanists (Mkandawire 1997: 28-31)<sup>46</sup>. His list is diffusedly reflected in all of the Africa-related chapters here, but should be provided here in a nutshell.

First, Mkandawire writes, Western Africanists are perceived as gatekeepers to the study of Africa – whether as referees in journals that reject African scholarship (see below) or as evaluators for research funding by Western institutions. Accordingly, Nyamnjoh writes African scholars are “gate-crashers” for them (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 346). Second, Africanists increasingly prefer deductive methods, using African phenomena merely as a testing ground for

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<sup>46</sup> See also Nkwi (2006).



their models. Third, many Western scholars visit African institutions, 'discover' local realities as "academic tourists" (Martin 2011: 75) and do not account for African research communities in their work<sup>47</sup>. A fourth issue concerns the "division of labour" in African Studies, which means that African researchers are used as local research assistants or consultants, while the conceptual work is prepared in the North, which, as Mkandawire argues, leaves the former in a humiliating position and again serves the needs of the North. The fifth factor is the already mentioned lack of intellectual ties between the Africanist and African research communities, exacerbated by the invisibility of African scholarship: "[w]e are probably the only part of the world about which it is still legitimate to publish without reference to local scholarship" (Mkandawire 1997: 29). The sixth source of discontent is accounted for by the tension between universal and particularistic knowledge, whereby the contribution to the universal should be legitimised by the particular. Another point of critique is the "hubris" of the prescriptive and moralising approach that guides most writing about Africa, with "[e]veryone feel[ing] competent to admonish the Africans for their thinking and practices, to give them advice and to elaborate on their behalf complete plans on (...) burning issues" (Mkandawire 1997: 31).

According to Altbach, the position of African scholars is further exacerbated by the fact that almost all research funding for international linkages comes from external sources, be it governments, agencies or foundations, which makes African scholars dependent not only on the funds but also on external priorities and programs of the funders (cf. Altbach 2003: 5). As Onimode comments boldly:

"The imperialist funding of social science teaching, research and staff development in the Third World also imposes the same ideological and imperialist orientation and surveillance on peripheral social

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<sup>47</sup> Already in 1970, Smock commented on 'intellectual imperialism': "How many American political scientists expect ready access to the President, Secretary of State, or Chief Justice, along with freedom to examine confidential government documents, in their studies of the American political system? Yet many American scholars believe they have an inherent right to any data required to complete their research in Africa. Inevitably, this intellectual aggressiveness often results in abuse of research privileges. For example, Ghanaian academics and journalists have recently decried the removal of books, documents, and whole files from archives and research libraries by expatriate academics. Researchers also sometimes betray the confidence of sources by revealing identities which embarrass or compromise their informants' position" (Smock 1970: 23-24, cited Zeleza 1997: 199).

science scholarship. The issue here is more: 'who pays the piper, calls the tune'. This is how valuable energies of Third World scholars are diverted into the pursuit of false problems, the mystification of the realities of their countries, and the whims and caprices of imperialist foundations and other research grant donors. True enough, the recipient institutions and scholars should be able to define their own academic priorities, but the problems are that some of the foreign grants are project-tied 'aid' (in reality subsidies for donor countries' exports), while the pro-imperialist orientation of peripheral social scientists ensures that their most irrelevant and obscurantist projects may be funded from abroad in the symbiotic relationship between comprador scholars and imperialist donors. This is how the system of imperialist intermediary in the larger neocolonial economy and society is reproduced in the intellectual sphere." (Onimode 1988: 36, cited in Mkandawire 2005c: 37)

Onimode's argument was quoted at length because he refers to a number of other issues that will become relevant in the course of this study. Most importantly, the ambivalent role of African intellectuals in the global network of knowledge will be brought up in several of the following chapters.

Before we turn to the very tangible and in our context crucial example of publishing in Africa, one last point necessary to mention is that the role of the African diaspora is highly contested in this context as well. While members of the new African diaspora – those who left Africa to escape the worsening conditions in African academia since the 1980s – are at times viewed with suspicion and perceived as yet another dominant force contributing to the incapacitation of African scholars (see Mkandawire 2002), there are a number of authors who assert forcefully that they play a crucial role in the valorisation of Africa (e.g. Mamdani 1999, Zeleza 2005b, Busia 2006, see also Palmer 2000, Nesbitt 2002)<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> For a theoretical contribution on the role of the diaspora, see Salgado (2011).

After Mkandawire's list of potential reasons for resentment, it might seem paradoxical when Hountondji states that due to the sustainable scientific extraversion, African scholars write for a primarily Western audience and adjust their research, as far as possible, to the state of knowledge in the West (Hountondji 1990: 11). At the same time, as Hountondji also suggests, if African scholars are driven to remain within an immediate and particular scope, "unwilling to raise one's speculations to the level of the universal" (Hountondji 1990: 11), the reason for this can be traced back to the function they have in the Western knowledge system. While European/Western scholars rarely refer to African intellectuals when they write about Africa and tend to quote Western Africanists instead, African scholars "run to European sources to validate their experiences the way ducks run to water", as Dipesh Chakrabarty formulates it dismissively (cited in Zegeye/Vambe 2006, 343). Yet, as has been suggested in the introduction to this study, if African authors are considered for example in anthologies published on Africa, in most cases they tend to be 'used' for case studies or contributions of a very limited scope, while the theoretical chapters are mostly preserved to non-African authors. This is what I mean by the 'function' that they have in hegemonic knowledge – including them serves a legitimatory purpose, just as including 'indigenous knowledge' in development co-operation legitimates interventions and at the same time puts different knowledge sources into a hierarchy. It is therefore necessary to understand the publishing patterns that prevail with respect to publishing on Africa and the conditions of publishing that African scholars in general face. If, as Nyamnjoh states, "[t]o publish Africa without making visible the dignity, creativity and humanity of Africans, is to publish Africa 'deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness'" (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 335), the relevance of this chapter for a study dealing with African scholarship becomes obvious.

Therefore, as publishing is one of the main instruments of power in social

scientific research production<sup>49</sup>, its dynamics account for a large share of the lack of visibility of African research (see f.e. Altbach 1996, Davies 1996, Huggan 2001, Mlambo 2006b, Ngobeni 2010). This is true for both its visibility in the North and, in a seemingly incongruous manner, also in the South, as the “vertical exchange” with Northern scholars was stated to be much more common than “horizontal exchange” with other Southern scholars (Hountondji 1990: 13, cf. Butterfield/Abye 2012: 212). In other words, African scholars have more and easier access to Northern/Western scholarship than to the knowledge produced by other Africans. Much of the literature written by African scholars remains ‘grey literature’, even if it contains in-depth analysis and a considerable amount of data, and therefore does not find its way into bibliographic databases, remaining inaccessible to both other African scholars and the ‘international community’ (Tostensen 2007: 24, cf. Nyamnjoh 2004a: 345-6). This is particularly problematic as publishing gained power as an instrument of establishing and maintaining hierarchies in academia with the rising importance of university education in the 1960s, whereby the amount of publications started to serve as a benchmark for rewarding the academic elite (Zezeza 1997: 45).

Yet, it is publishing in those journals that are considered to be ‘international’ that counts, while the journals published at African universities are believed not to possess any relevance (cf. Mlambo 2006a: 167). However, international journals are edited by scholars with a different background – be it cultural or ideological, which is seen to often play a role in rejecting papers from African writers<sup>50</sup> (see Cabral/Njinya-Mujinya/Habomugisha 1998). In the field of African Studies, works of popular Northern Africanists need to be reviewed and quoted in order to fulfil the necessary criteria for publication<sup>51</sup> (cf. Tettey/Puplampu 2000: 93).

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<sup>49</sup> Cabral/Njinya-Mujinya/Habomugisha (1998: 90) also emphasise that (hi)stories of rejection mostly remain unheard and (African and other) scholars rarely receive feedback in the form of detailed reviews that would enable them to rework the rejected manuscripts.

<sup>50</sup> Ignorance is not the only reason, as Mazrui reminds us: „Otherwise reputable publishers turn down manuscripts, edit out ideas, or surgically remove chapters likely to offend powerful groups in the nation.” (Mazrui 1990: 91). Yet, Tettey and Puplampu ask: “Who are the peers who review the manuscripts from Africa? What are their worldviews? Which authorities do they recognize in the respective fields? How do these backgrounds affect the review process?” (Tettey/Puplampu 2000: 96)

<sup>51</sup> Zegeye and Vambe moreover suggest that African scholars are ashamed to refer to the ideas of important intellectuals like Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o or Cabral (Zegeye/Vambe 2006: 343).

Therefore, in order to get published, African scholars have tended to sacrifice peculiarities in their perspectives and “chosen recognition over relevance, (...) celebrat[ing] a cosmopolitanism of perspective that is more assumed than negotiated or tested” (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 347). They subject themselves to “academic imperialism, in which the particularistic vocabularies of US social science are supposed to be universal representations” (Paasi 2005: 776). Musila speaks of a “selective process of canonisation and authorisation of certain bodies of knowledge over others” with regard to African Studies (Musila 2011: 6). In a similar vein, Nyamnjoh relates the lacking representation of African intellectuals in (international) publications to the broader context of globalisation and explains that it can be hardly surprising that African ideas are not received in the West if Africans themselves know more about the West than about Africa. The “privileged” position of American social science prevents not only intellectual exchange, but also intellectual “importation” from Africa or from the South in general. Nyamnjoh emphasises that it is only those ideas, which conform to certain norms that are accepted in the Euro-American scientific space (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 344).

Zeleza made a survey of five important Euro-American Africanist journals published between 1982 and 1992, with findings that confirm the trend described above: Africans living on the continent authored only 15% of the articles and 10% of the reviews published in the journals, and 81% of all articles were written by men. Zeleza thus concludes that publishing on Africa is preserved to white male scholars (Zeleza 1997: 55-65, see also Musila 2011: 6). That it is a question of unequal power relations and the maintaining of dominance that is at work in the publishing space becomes even clearer when one looks at the variety of arguments that have been used over the last decades to legitimise the exclusion of African scholarship from Western publications. In the 1960s, the argument was that Africans “in most cases are not yet ready to perform the kinds of research we feel are necessary. They need time to build up their own resources” (Baum 1965, quoted in Zeleza 1997: 199). In the 1980s, it was the university crisis that was made responsible for not considering African

scholarship (cf. Zeleza 1997: 199). In the 1990s, Hyden stated that manuscripts submitted by Africans “usually have not gone through the same rigorous peer scrutiny and advising as is the case with those submitted by scholars based in Europe and North America” (Hyden 1996: 5, quoted in Tettey/Puplampu 2000: 96). As Tettey and Puplampu emphasise, these arguments “smack (...) of condescension toward those Africans who get published in Euro-America journals, as though they were granted a favor in spite of low quality work” (ibid.). As Zeleza explains further:

“[S]cientific research and academic production is fundamentally a social activity, which is deeply implicated and infused by the social hierarchies and inscriptions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and other inequalities found elsewhere in society and the acceptance or rejection of a publication is filtered by the editors and referees through the prism of their intellectual traditions, ideologies, and networks.” (Zeleza 1997: 47)<sup>52</sup>

What is analysed as a discipline-specific problem by Zeleza when he shows that African scholars are not gaining access to Africa-related scholarly publications, is part of the larger framework of unequal North-South relations in knowledge production and beyond it. According to Canagarajah, the exclusion or appropriation of ‘Third World scholarship’ in general is one of the mechanisms that perpetuate Western hegemony in its material and ideological dimensions. He sums it up as follows:

“[A]cademic writing holds a central place in the process of constructing, disseminating, and legitimizing knowledge; however, for discursive and material reasons, Third World scholars experience exclusion from academic publishing and communication; therefore the knowledge of Third World communities is marginalized or appropriated by the West, while the knowledge of Western communities is legitimated and reproduced; and as part of this

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<sup>52</sup> For gender-specific dynamics in publishing, see Beoku-Betts 2005: 404-5. Hooks has argued that there is a tendency to overvalue the writing of white scholars (hooks 1989, cited in Zeleza 1997: 311).

process, academic writing/publishing plays a role in the material and ideological hegemony of the West.” (Canagarajah 2002: 6)

This reasoning has thus to be also set in relation with the power of corporate publishers and the growing commercialization and commodification of research and knowledge production on a global scale<sup>53</sup>. The publishing industry, Nyamnjoh suggests, prefers “streamlined, standardized, and routinized publications and is controlled by Anglo-Saxon publishing corporations (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 344)<sup>54</sup>. Holmquist and Sundin elucidate further that over the last decades, social science research production has changed profoundly due to particular strategies, which were introduced in order to enhance its quality and enable internationalization. These strategies, however, had the very reverse effect and, the authors argue, put the whole of social sciences at risk. They particularly emphasise the problematic consequences of anonymous evaluation, the preference of articles over the writing of books, and the abandonment of the scholars’ own languages in favour of publishing in English (Holmquist/Sundin 2012: 13-14).

Practices like the ranking of academic journals (see Willmott 2011) are being increasingly criticised and linked to the critique of market values that shape knowledge production (cf. Paasi 2005). The effects of the neo-liberalisation of publishing are suggested to be the homogenisation of content, together with deteriorating quality and losses in diversity of research. Paasi (ibid.) explains how a certain notion of ‘internationalism’ has come to dominate the publishing space, with Anglo-American journals occupying the most powerful positions in it. Meriläinen et.al. (2008: 586) argue with respect to organization studies that “institutions of academic publishing are constantly reproduced through

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<sup>53</sup> See Pirie (2009), McNeely (2009), Fitzpatrick (2010), Morrison (2011), Peekhaus (2012).

<sup>54</sup> Zegeye and Vambe further explain the link between knowledge production and global hegemony by their reference to reading patterns in Africa that are determined by powerful institutions like the World Bank. The latter, Zegeye and Vambe argue, suggests strategies for dealing with questions of education and literacy that perpetuate inequality and undermine “Africa’s quest to enhance her knowledge production” (Zegeye/Vambe 2006: 341). Because the World Bank mainly finances primary education in Africa, this very education of Africans does not serve their own interests. Rather, the authors stress, “[t]he main aim [of such funding] is to create a pool of employable Africans with basic literacy for the smooth running of capitalist interests in Africa” (Zegeye / Vambe 2006: 342).

hegemonic practices that serve to maintain and reinforce core-periphery relations”, with power operating “through publishing practices in ways that attempt discursive closure”.

The indexing of academic journals is said to enhance the visibility, accessibility, and credibility of journals, yet only a small number of African journals are indexed (cf. Le Roux 2006: 50). Le Roux argues that Southern journals tend to be excluded from databases because they are expected to be of poor quality and limited regional scope, notwithstanding the fact that there are high quality journals in Africa and elsewhere in the South (Le Roux 2006: 56)<sup>55</sup>. African journals, meanwhile, face multiple financial and technical problems (Limb 2005: 7; see also Adebowale 2001, Henige 2002, Ondari-Okemwa 2007).

At the same time, there are alternative spaces opening up. While the control and profits over new technologies and digitalization have also tended to sidestep Africa (see Agbeja/Salawu 2007), new technological developments have, however, had a considerable impact on the continent. The Internet opened up new opportunities for disseminating knowledge and information, and many creative digital initiatives have emerged over the last years that also allow for new trends in scholarship. Open access is being discussed as a necessary alternative to commercial publishing (cf. Limb 2004, 2005; Ouya/Smart 2005).

Libraries in Africa still have to rely more on the acquisition of printed material in the case of books, as electronic publishing is still in its early stages (see Igun 2005, Kanyengo 2009, Chiware 2007)<sup>56</sup>. However, in the course of the last couple of years, many initiatives have been developed by African universities to publish research findings on their websites and make their journals available online (see Rotich 2011, Chiware 2007, Keats 2003). A number of online platforms and projects funded by Northern institutions have contributed to the digitization of African journals and the dissemination of knowledge from Africa<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The freely available AfricaBib database was started because of the minimal coverage of African journals and Africa-related contents in commercial indexes [<http://www.africabib.org>] (cf. Le Roux 2006: 57).

<sup>56</sup> For a historical perspective on libraries in Africa, see Odi (1991).

<sup>57</sup> For example, *The African e-Journals Project* [<http://africa.msu.edu/aejp>, 24.07.2012] or *African Journals Online* [<http://www.ajol.info>, 24.07.2012].



(see Limb 2005, Kitchen 2008). Collaborations between Northern editors and publishers and African journals turn out to be crucial in this respect (Limb 2005). Research platforms provide another alternative for the funding and publishing of African scholarship. The aim of CODESRIA, for example, was also to provide an independent platform for the funding, publishing, and dissemination of African scholarship. Limb (2005) describes a number of other projects that aim at digitization of content and contribute to the creation of platforms for the dissemination of knowledge on and of Africa.

It is against the light of the above discussion that the material selected for our purposes needs to be perceived as well. For this study, the problems of publishing point to a number of issues. First, being published does not automatically bring about a high visibility of the authors' work. Second, considering mainly internationally accessible scholarly publications, as was done for this study, does not render visible local research and discourses. Furthermore, discourses among networks of intellectuals do not necessarily take place via publications but also through informal channels and opportunities for meeting. These aspects feed into what will be discussed on the following pages, where the relations between intellectuals and the roles that they have and are supposed to have in Africa will be dealt with.

## **AFRICAN INTELLECTUALS AND AUTHORITY IN AFRICA**

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The discussions in the preceding two sections captured the role of intellectuals in the knowledge production of Africa from different points of view. It was argued that within African Studies, there are different claims for authority established by different groups of scholars, who all refer to Africa as their subject of study, yet perceive this Africa and the spheres it opens up for their research in very diverse ways. The challenges that African scholars face in their work were linked both to the conditions within Africa – most importantly with respect to

the consequences of the changing relations with the state – as well as to unequal power relations on a global scale. Without doubt, there would be many more insights to be drawn from the complex issue of the study of Africa. On the following pages, one more issue with respect to African intellectuals will be brought up: the roles that they have or are supposed to have with respect to the whole of Africa and with respect to their societies of origin. The intention here is not to offer an elaborate discussion on debates led among African intellectuals in this respect but rather to provide a short impulse by bringing up a number of positions and to make clear that a more inward perspective is necessary to bear in mind, even though it exceeds the scope of this study. To separate these positions into a distinct chapter is to draw a rather artificial line between issues that are interrelated and interdependent but, nevertheless, remains useful at this point.

Out of the many positions articulated on this issue, I want to single out a number of contributions that focus on first, the desired role of the ideal African intellectual, and second, more critical evaluations of the performance of intellectuals in the past decades. Both sides draw their arguments mainly from the relationship of the intellectual and society, and either charge the former to be alienated from the latter or project a close proximity for the ideal case.

Anise, for example, noted in 1974 that while being marginalised globally, African intellectuals are at the same time viewed suspiciously in their relations with their own societies. In the course of their education, they are almost automatically seen as belonging to a questionable elite:

“Even after the liquidation of European colonialism, African elites, the intelligentsia, and indeed anyone who receives education at all, continue to be presented to the world as marginal people who have been alienated from their culture and uprooted from their traditions. Whoever dares to acquire an education in Africa becomes a ‘Westernized’ elite” (Anise 1974: 26).

In 2003, Simala makes a similar argument, suggesting that in Africa, there is an “unusual dissociation of the educated from the masses of the people”. Africa is facing an unusual situation because while intellectuals are everywhere alienated

from their societies, “in Africa, where the learned class has been reared upon an alien culture, this detachment is especially noticeable” (Simala 2003: 31). Trudell adds that the “African political and cultural elite, those whom Frantz Fanon (1967) calls ‘the native bourgeoisie’, have themselves bought into the assumptions of cultural deficit – and nowhere is that more evident than in the formal education system” (Trudell 2010: 339). She further explains the historical origins of the present types of elites in Africa, suggesting that the role that education plays in both acquiring and maintaining the respective status goes back to the establishment of colonial rule and the development of those colonial educational structures described above.

In 1992, Abiola Irele has charged African intellectuals to lack a moral commitment to scholarship, suggesting that:

“The moral indolence is matched by an intellectual indolence. Outside a few circles of writers and intellectuals, generally of radical persuasion – pools of light in a vast conceptual darkness – there is no sustained thought in this country [i.e. Nigeria], no coherent intellectual, cultural, moral connection with any scheme of ideas, Western or African.” (Irele 1992: 212)

These criticisms of African intellectuals extend the picture outlined above of Western dominance in knowledge production on Africa. While in the previous section, the emphasis was laid on the respective inequality that African scholars face in their relations the West, there are many animadversions directed at the intellectuals themselves. Verhaegen has, for example, stated that the latter were merely “informed native guide[s], (...) *comprador*[s] in cultural communities”, the “Trojan Horse” of the West or “a relay of cultural imperialism” (Verhaegen 1995, cited in Mkandawire 2005c: 34; original emphasis). Similarly, Mazrui and Mazrui see them as the “main agents of Western assimilation” (Mazrui/Mazrui 1998: 103).

Mkandawire calls our attention to Appiah, who locates this experience in the post-colonial condition:

“Post-coloniality is the condition of what we may ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: of a relatively small, western-style, western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa.” (Appiah 1992: 240, cf. Mkandawire 2005c: 34; original emphasis)

Another point of criticism towards African intellectuals is what Mkandawire has termed “victimology”. He particularly blames Achille Mbembe to have taken this position to the extreme: “Convinced that the African intellectual project is exclusively one of self-pity, he read any narrative of protest along these lines” (Mkandawire 2005c: 35). Mkandawire himself evaluates many of the criticisms by his African colleagues as “border[ing] on self-flagellation” and continues as follows:

“Understandable though some of the anger and frustration may be, it does considerable injustice to the record of African intellectuals. First, it generalizes too much. Second, I doubt that African intellectuals have been that silent. I tend to agree with Mafeje’s assertion that ‘by any standard African intellectuals have not been that silent, submissive or subservient: if anything, the likelihood is that they talked too much too soon. One should also bear in mind that, as national intellectuals were squeezed by the state, African intellectuals actively sought to create new regional or continental spaces through which they could find a voice.’” (Mkandawire 2005c: 39)<sup>58</sup>.

Whilst Mkandawire goes on to recount some of the achievements of post-colonial intellectuals in Africa, Onoma adds a very different perspective to the debate. He suggests that despite many criticisms – some of them recounted above – of the political role of scholars, they have been depicted in the dominant

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<sup>58</sup> See also Trudell (2010), who points out the ambivalence of the intellectual experience in Africa.

narrative as “valiant strugglers leading their societies to liberation” (Onoma 2008: 73). He locates this idealised image of intellectual even in the works of those African critics, who themselves “decry the non-organic character of African intellectuals”, such as Ki-Zerbo, Mafeje or Shivji (ibid.). Onoma even suggests that when Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o speaks of “the split between the body and the mind in Africa”, which has created a continent of “bodiless heads and headless bodies” (wa Thiong’o 1998: 89, cited in Onoma 2008: 73), he claims a position for African scholars that their societies might have never assigned them – the one of the leaders (Onoma 2008: 73). Instead, Onoma argues, the role of African scholars as collaborators in the exclusion and disempowerment of African people is not only rarely concretely thematised, but, more importantly, and despite some critics who have pointed out the charges, excluded from the surface of the respective discourse (Onoma 2008: 74).

While Onoma links the role of intellectuals to their self-representation in local, national, African, or global discourses, Zegeye and Vambe relate their notion of the ideal African intellectual back to the global context. They argue that in Africa, there is the need for “an intellectual who understands the politics of knowledge production fully, one who can challenge the stereotype of the idea of wholeness and stability imagined for Western knowledge systems and fragments ascribed to African knowledge productions” (Zegeye/Vambe 2006: 344).

Mwangola offers a possibility of evaluating the knowledge created by African intellectuals when he suggests that it is necessary to focus on “the centring of African communities in intellectual production on and of Africa” (Mwangola 2008: 10). In a similar but more general manner, Ki-Zerbo suggests that intellectuals “have to be at the forefront of responsible citizenship” (cited in Mkandawire 2005: 2). According to Bamgbose, the intellectuals do not only possess the possibility to use the knowledge they have gained for the benefit of the people; instead, it is their duty they owe to the society that have enabled them to become part of the intelligentsia:

“In the African context, the educated elite who have benefited most through access to, and participation in, all the important domains of national life now have a duty to those who have been excluded only

because they are not literate or not proficient in the imported official language, which continues to determine access to power and privilege.” (Bamgbose 2000: 29, cited in Trudell 2010: 345)

I would like to end this section with yet another quote from Thandika Mkandawire, who makes clear in his comment that African intellectuals are both facing similar challenges to all other intellectuals and, at the same time, are ascribed a special role in the emancipation of their societies – a hope that is probably attributed to intellectuals in other places of the world in a similar way:

“Like all communities of intellectuals, African intellectuals will not always be able to resist the contingent and transitory call of passing fads, material detractions and mystification. I believe that the African intellectual must continue to be, in the words of Wole Soyinka, an ‘author of the language that tries to speak truth to power’. One can only hope that this time around both state and society will realize that an unfettered intellectual class is an emancipatory force that can be put to good use.” (Mkandawire 2005c: 46)

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## UNDERSTANDING AFRICA: HOW AND WHY?

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*“The self-appointed heirs to the right to reason have thus established themselves as the producers of all knowledge and the only holders of the truth. In these circumstances, the right to knowledge in relation to the African is measured and determined by passive as well as uncritical assimilation, coupled with faithful implementation of knowledge defined and produced from outside Africa. The condescender currently manifests the will to dominate through the imposition of ‘democratization’, ‘globalization’, and ‘human rights’.”*

Ramose (2003: 2)

*But it is not only in terms of the variety and scope of structural ingredients that African sociology and social science requires a broader spectrum than contemporary Western bourgeois sociology. Also with regard to the variety of dynamic historical processes which must be taken into account in order to understand contemporary Africa, and in predicting likely futures of African societies, a broader spectrum of processes must be taken into account. Western social science is concerned mainly with short-term equilibrating processes of a rather ahistorical nature - on the micro level with status crystallization and rank-equilibration, and on the macro level with a so-called dynamic equilibrium which allows for change, but always with a return to a state of equilibrium, whether on markets or societies at large. But such an ahistorical approach is not sufficient in a social-scientific analysis of African societies.*

Himmelstrand/Kinyanjui/Mburugu (1994b: 13)





## KNOWLEDGE FOR AFRICA(NS): DIMENSIONS OF RELEVANCE

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*“My own view is that if African research was ‘irrelevant’, this was not in the simplistic ‘basic’ and ‘applied’ research dichotomy. It was, rather, at two other levels. One was the oppositional stance of most African intellectuals and their unwillingness to be ‘usable’ by some of the unsavoury regimes that littered the African continent. One simply did not want to be relevant to a Mobutu or Banda. “Relevance” would have been as good a case as any of ‘adverse organicity’.”*

*(Mkandawire 2000: 211)*

The title of this section offers two different interpretations. Knowledge *for* Africa could be understood as knowledge *given to Africa* for the sake of, for example, development, in terms of knowledge or information flow *from* somewhere else (for example the West) *to* Africa. The usefulness of such a conception was a widespread belief in Western development discourses until the 1980s, which in that regard focused on the “North-South information flow through aid and charitable enterprises” (Lor/Britz 2006: 2). It will of course be hardly surprising to state that this section is, instead, devoted to the other possible interpretation: the question of which knowledge is *relevant for* Africa.

This call for the relevance of knowledge is a common thread in critiques of African scholars towards Western knowledge. If we recall the agenda of the Black Causus at the ASA-conference in Montreal referred to above, one of the main accusations towards White Western scholars was that their work lacked relevance for Africa. It is yet another issue or problem that has endured over the last decades. In 1971, Maina wa Kinyatti affirmed that this question was the actual difference between Africanists and African scholars, saying that “[w]e are Africans first, historians second. Unlike our so-called ‘African Specialists’, we do not merely wish to research and write just for the sake of writing or to be historians for the sake of being historians. We wish to consciously and actively use our historical knowledge *for the liberation of our people.*” (wa Kinyatti 1971,

quoted in Campbell 2008: 150; emphasis added). Kinyatti's plea thus entails not only a call for appropriate knowledge (that serves the liberation of 'our' people), but also engenders a certain collective identity, connecting first, the immediacy of experience inherent in the work of African scholars, and second, the conviction that through their location within Africa and their concernment in the issues they work on, their scholarship is automatically well-intentioned. On the other hand, Nyamnjoh reminds us that the necessity to publish in order to climb the intellectual ladder often entails "cultivating insensitivity to issues, perspectives and approaches of relevance to Africans, their realities, values and priorities" (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 334). What, however, are those priorities from the perspectives of African scholars?

As the previous chapter has already shown, critiques of African scholars have focused on both on the dominance of Western scholars in the study of Africa and the dominance of Eurocentric concepts and categories irrelevant to the realities of Africa. The Afro-centrist scholar Molefi Kete Asante shows how these two levels are interrelated when he argues that "tak[ing] Africa seriously as an agent in human history" is "not a biological issue but one of location" (Asante 1995: 11-12). His remark can be interpreted to mean that writing about Africa in a serious manner is thus not only the possibility or even responsibility of those born into particular social, cultural, or political contexts, but also the conscious choice of a position, which results out of a complex network of sources. Mafeje explains why such a conscious choice is particularly necessary with respect to knowledge generated on Africa. He argues that with respect to knowledge production, Africa is confronted with a unique situation because "it is the only region which has suffered such total paradigmatic domination" (Mafeje 2010: 33). He refers to a trenchant statement by Kwesi Prah to elucidate further:

"Rather strikingly, in comparative terms it is remarkable that when Chinese study Chinese culture and society in their own terms and for their own purposes, western scholarship does not protest. This is because the sovereignty of Chinese scholarship on China [contrary to African scholarship on Africa] is accepted. India and the Arab world have almost reached that point. Russians do not look west for

understanding their society... Neither do the Japanese.” (Prah 1997, cited in Mafeje 2010: 33)

Therefore, what exactly Asante could mean by ‘location’ becomes a complicated question. It is only when the *effects* of a particular kind of knowledge are understood that it becomes clear how knowledge is interconnected with and determined by power<sup>59</sup>. Relevance has to mean more than *adequacy* if it is to counter the paradigmatic domination of Africa. Instead, in the search for ‘relevant knowledge’, African scholars have been mainly occupied with knowledge that is *beneficial* for Africa and helps questioning power relations and roles that have been attributed to Africa and Africans in the past (and present) – which then could be interpreted as the appropriate ‘location’ in Asante’s sense. These roles of Africa and the power relations they contributed to have been the product of a “selective affirmation of certain bodies of knowledge” (cf. Musila 2011: 4, see also Odhiambo 2002, Ogot 2009), which allow only for certain ways of writing about Africa and exclude alternative readings of both Africa and the issues that are discursively linked with it. In other words, the mainstream discourse on Africa entails a particular representation of Africa that serves particular interests and that is built upon a particular knowledge on Africa.

This is a process that takes place even, or especially, if this very discourse claims objectivity and asserts the universality of science, creating a “very powerful narrative that has been instrumental in delegitimizing other descriptions of the world, while consolidating its own position as the preeminent form of knowledge” (Vessuri 2007: 157). Santos, Nunes, and Meneses suggest in this respect that “one of the aspects of the crisis of modern knowledge rests upon the fact that it perpetuates the relations of colonial inequality, giving shape to a monoculture of knowledge” (Santos/Nunes/Meneses 2007: xxxix, cited in Musila 2011: 7). Within such a monocultural and totalizing narrative, different kinds of knowledge are framed in a hierarchical system. With respect to Africa, this hierarchisation of knowledge has resulted in the privileging of Northern academics as more authoritative commentators on the continent (see Dei 1998)

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<sup>59</sup> For discussions on the intersection and interrelation between knowledge and power, see for example Kogan (2007) or Zeleza (2007a).

or even in the initial denial in European historiography “that African knowledge existed at all” (Zegeye 2011: 209; see Mudimbe 1988).

With regard to contemporary knowledge structures on a global scale, Makinda suggests that Africa is largely “a net consumer, rather than a producer, of *useable* knowledge”, which, he argues, is the reason for its marginal position with respect to “scientific, technological, economic, political and military” matters (Makinda 2004: 1, emphasis added). He does not, however, suggest that the knowledge crucial for Africa should merely serve the sake of superficial policies or be judged according to its applicability. Rather, Makinda looks at the problematic of relevance from yet another angle, adding another layer to the discussion. His assertion focuses on the link between Africa’s position in the global political economy and the knowledge it needs to question. This link is interpreted as corresponding to power relations. The above quoted diagnosis he offers thus makes clear that it is crucial to ask what the particular aim of asserted claims to relevant knowledge is and, furthermore, that on different levels of analysis or agency different understandings of relevant knowledge are necessary.

To sum up, relevance means more than just the link to random African realities – the crux is not only to make knowledge “more African” (Falola/Jennings 2002b: 2), but to make it both *African* and *relevant* in a very particular way – a way that makes Africa the actual beneficiary of the knowledge generated, whichever level of analysis is concerned. However, the different interpretations of ‘relevant knowledge’ are not necessarily compatible; they can also serve different interests and focus on different priorities. At the same time, ‘for Africa’ is obviously a very vague and undetermined claim that can be easily claimed by very different actors and groups. Therefore, instead of assessing the claims for relevance articulated by different actors in different contexts according to the benefit ‘for Africa’ – as such an endeavour is not realizable – on the following pages, an overview of different approaches to the relevance question will be provided. This should enable the reader to assess such claims and understand references to Africa that will follow further below.

Relevance *as applicability*, for example, implies an understanding of knowledge that aims at “applied research”, which is meant by Mkandawire when he recalls

that “[g]overnments often argued that local research was ‘irrelevant’, by which they meant that it was not immediately usable in policy matters” (Mkandawire 2000: 210, see also Lyakurwa and Ajakaiye 2007). Societal relevance of research (one that is “relevant to broad sections of society, albeit not necessarily to all of them”, Tostensen 2007: 30) and relevance for donors (i.e. research that would be paid by donors) thus most often exclude each other (cf. also Tettey/Puplampu 2000: 85)<sup>60</sup>. The very diverse positions that are unified in their claim for ‘more relevance’ thus involve different degrees of what could be termed ‘radicality’ and will be distinguished here for the sake of easier orientation.

Figure 1 provides an overview of a simplified yet useful distinction among different ‘dimensions of relevance’ in the search for the ‘right’ knowledge for and in Africa<sup>61</sup>. As will become clear from the following account, the dimensions are interrelated and not clearly separable. They comprise (1) the call for knowledge that is useful for policy purposes and for donors, (2) positions that claim that it is necessary to provide (more) accurate knowledge on Africa that takes into account its peculiarities, using proper research designs and adequate methodologies, (3) the opinion that the right knowledge for Africa ought to (or even must) be created by Africans themselves, (4) demands for knowledge that benefits the wide societal aim of development, (5) more radical calls for knowledge to serve the emancipation of Africa, (6) the rejection of Eurocentric concepts and the creation and apprehension of African concepts instead, and (6) calls for an African epistemology. As stated above, this is a rather simplistic distinction of positions, and all the dimensions themselves not only involve different standpoints and arguments but also come from different ideological backgrounds and intellectual traditions. However, it would be redundant for the purposes of this study to deal with questions of detail at this point. Rather, this distinction should emphasise that calls for relevance with respect to knowledge

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<sup>60</sup> Hydén argues that domestic financial restraints and researchers’ dependence on Northern funding perpetuates the difficulties in challenging Western (“mainstream”) theories and concepts (cf. Hydén 2007: 55). See also Bryceson (2012).

<sup>61</sup> The question of language in the African context provides for another dimension in the struggle for relevance. It is omitted in the diagram because it will be covered in a separate section below and also because it cannot be unequivocally located with respect to ‘radicality’. There are different positions involved that claim different aspects of relevance to be crucial – these variations are, however, reflected in the figure.

in and for Africa are manifold and, furthermore, that it is necessary to bear in mind whose interests exactly are hidden behind the respective understanding of 'Africa' that is evoked in each case.

In the diagram (figure 1), the outer circle displays claims to relevance on the most superficial level, where these are understood as the relevance to (or adequacy for) the externally shaped conceptions and needs of donors and, in further consequence, the generation of knowledge that serves the effective implementation of their projects and programs<sup>62</sup>. This dimension will be excluded from further elaboration, as it only ostensibly takes into account the needs of Africans themselves and is rarely asserted (e.g. Ajakaiye 2007) but largely criticised by African scholars (e.g. Mkandawire 2000, Manji 2000).

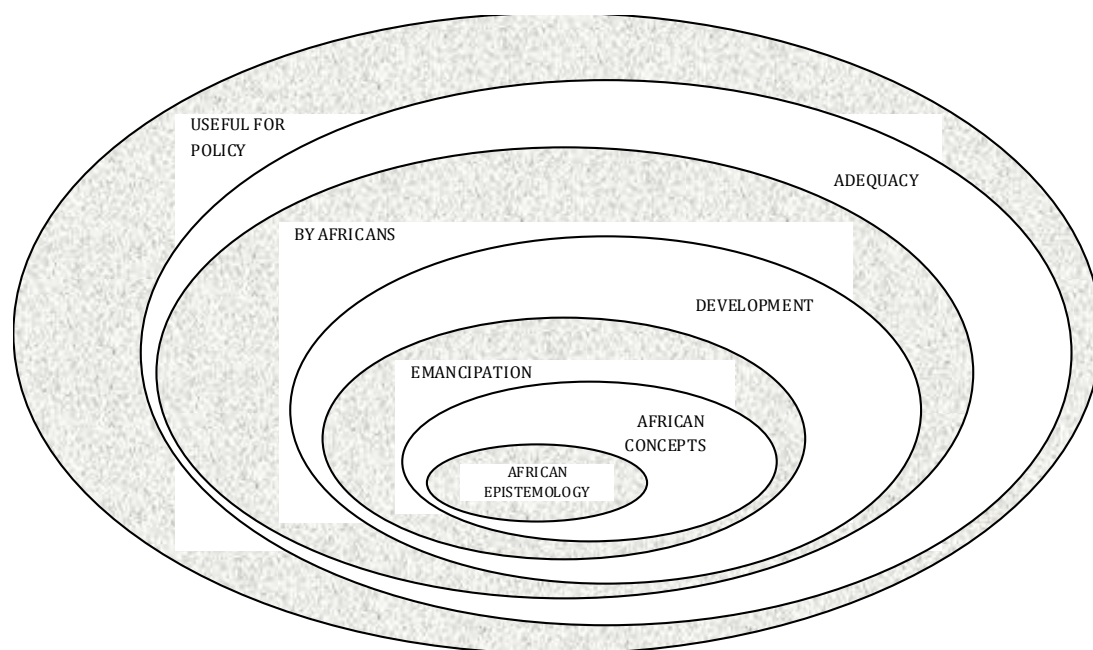


Fig. 1: Knowledge for Africa: dimensions of relevance.

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<sup>62</sup> For different approaches and positions on the related set of problems, see Cooke/Morrison (2002), Thomas (2007), Potter/Subrahmanian (2007), Young (2007), Ayuk/Jones (2007), Hansohm/Naimhwaka (2007).

The necessity to make knowledge (or research, as (one of) the process(es) of knowledge creation) more adequate for Africa rests on the obvious assumption that knowledge on Africa that has been created so far is, at least to a large extent, not adequate. According to Nabudere (2002: 12), this bias in knowledge production can be traced back to colonial research, including the interests behind the latter, the actual practice of research involved, and the effects it had on African societies. Nabudere further argues that it was through colonial knowledge production that a ‘mythology of neutrality’ was established with respect to Africa, which interpreted allegedly neutral facts in the very sense that was necessary to strengthen colonial rule<sup>63</sup>. On a more general note, he refers to Smith, who adds:

“[The] collective memory of imperialism [established through colonial knowledge production] has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then presented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who had been colonized.” (Smith 1999-2001: 1, quoted in Nabudere 2002: 13)

This mirroring of knowledge through the eyes of the West, which became the basis for a systematic knowledge production in and on Africa, is then suggested to be the very origin of biased knowledge that requires not only corrections, but the creation of fundamentally different knowledge instead. To use Mudimbe’s concept, the ‘colonial library’ needs to be overthrown (Mudimbe 1988: 188). The first step, which is the core of this ‘dimension of relevance’, seems to be to create more accurate knowledge on Africa for the sake of accuracy itself. Zeleza, for example, criticises the “tendency to use epithets, anecdotes, and caricature in definitions and descriptions of African states and societies” (Zeleza 1997: 200) and demands to take African realities seriously as research focuses. To take

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<sup>63</sup> To add more complexity to this argument, see also Beinart/Brown/Gilfoyle (2009), Lester (2002), Derricourt (2011), Canaparo (2008), McCulloch (1995), Cooper (2005), and Nkwi (2006).

African realities seriously would then mainly mean to use just the same rigour in dealing with Africa as has to be brought up with respect to other areas of research.

Olukoshi adds more concrete reproaches to his main charge, the preference of analogy in scholarship on Africa (he, however, only refers to *Africanist*, i.e. Western scholarship here):

“The historicization of questions under consideration is increasingly absent in Africanist discourses on Africa and, as pressures arising from careerist considerations, the publish-or-perish syndrome, and the culture of research as a rat-race pile, the temptation to invent false problems, resort to easy answers, and proliferate adjectival qualifications of African experiences has become all too common.”

(Olukoshi 2007: 18; see also Mlambo 2006a)

In their introduction to the anthology with the aim (and title) of *Africanizing knowledge*, Falola and Jennings offer some instructive considerations as a starting point to counter both the tendencies in contemporary research and the historically generated bias. He suggests that generally, scholars should (“might pause to”) contextualise the research they are undertaking and the work they are doing to make it “more African”:

“For example, they might consider their selection of sources, their use of particular methods of research, their style of writing, or their own roles within the academic community and in relation to the local African social settings in which they carry out their work.”

(Falola/Jennings 2002b: 1)

Again, Falola and Jennings understand scholarship (and, consecutively, knowledge) that would be more ‘relevant’ or appropriate to Africa as scholarship that is ‘simply’ more genuine in the scientific ideals it follows:

“We would like to suggest that, rather than running ourselves in circles as we chase the elusive dream of authenticity in our research into, and portrayals of, Africa, we would do better to simply approach our profession, our research subjects, and our writing, with a healthy



dose of open-minded skepticism, a concerned commitment to the present and future of the continent, and maybe even a trace of humility.” (Falola/Jennings 2002b: 8)

At this point, the specificity of Africa does not seem to play a decisive role (yet) or, rather, seems to be taken into consideration ‘only’ to produce adequate research. The aim of relevance here lies in a valorisation of Africa as a research object and in paying tribute to the complexity of the realities of the continent and of the livelihoods of African people.

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#### *AFRICAN AUTHORSHIP*

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The second ‘dimension of relevance’, which directly feeds into the most crucial aspects of the previous chapter on African scholars(hip), emerges from the conviction that knowledge should be made more relevant to Africa by shifting agency to Africans ‘themselves’, i.e. by being generated by African scholars instead of non-African (particularly Western) scholars.

Against the background of the discussion presented in the preceding chapter, Táíwò argues that Africa has been appropriated by Western Africanist scholars and Africa “has served Africanist scholars, mostly white, as a springboard for their eminently successful careers, as objects of study, and as cartographic points to which some of them could lay claim as theirs, trespass on which is often the equivalent of a capital offence in African Studies. Many of us have often been lectured, harangued, sometimes nearly insulted, because we dared to suggest that a subject on which a particular Africanist is ‘expert,’ or one that happens to excite her or him has little relevance to the scholarly concerns of African scholars or the lives of Africans!” (Táíwò 1995, 39).

From Táíwò’s assertion, it can be interpreted that scholarly concerns of Africans and the lives of Africans are connected either in a particular way or, at least, through a more direct link than the one between concerns of non-African scholars and African people’s lives. Again, as argued above, there is a failure to recognise the invaluable contributions of African-based social scientists, even

though “their dense, locally grounded knowledge is providing the framework for a revival of African Studies on the [North American or European] continent. To diminish the importance of such understanding [is indeed a] way of asserting the superiority of Western intellectual production” (Berger 1997: 7).

One possibility to counteract the hegemony of Western knowledge is to consider African ‘contributions’ as “the African voice” in scholarship. Both notions are problematic in their own respect and theoretical implications of both the assumption of an African voice as such and its inclusion in diverse fora is linked to questions that reach beyond the scope of this chapter. At this point, however, it will suffice to refer to what Cohen suggested was the new responsibility for scholars that emerges out of any inclusion of “the African voice”: it is necessary to be aware of ways how also these ‘African voices’ “achieve authority and fail to, to recognise the power of wrong and incomplete accounts, and to comprehend the tensions among different processes of the production of knowledge” (Cohen 2001, quoted in Falola/Jennings 2002b: 2). Cohen’s call for responsibility demands particular caution, Falola and Jennings counter, when scholars claim to stand for ‘an African voice’ that represents “the true essence of the African world” (Falola/Jennings 2002b: 2).

The link between African authorship and the relevance of knowledge with respect to Africa thus directly points to the inequality of power relations in the study of Africa described in the previous chapter. It does not necessarily claim that African scholars are essentially more qualified to deal with Africa in their research but rather appeals to all scholars, both African and non-African, to reflect upon their own position when doing research and bear in mind the consequences that the researcher’s location has for the latter.

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#### *DEVELOPMENT*

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The next level, or dimension, is the one where the purpose of (relevant) knowledge becomes explicit. African knowledge is juxtaposed with Western/Northern knowledge because it is more appropriate to serve the

benefit of Africa in terms of genuine development. Thus, through the link with development, and through building on adequate methods and contents (dimension 1) and African authorship (dimension 3), 'African' is more clearly suggested to be something else than only not external to Africa. By contrasting African and Western/Northern as two opposing (and mutually exclusive) poles instead of talking about African and non-African knowledge, 'Africa' ceases to be a descriptive category but becomes a strategic one in an open manner. It serves not only as a means for delimitation but also as resistance towards the scientific domination and knowledge hegemony of the North (see also de Haan 2010).

Hountondji (1995: 3) discusses the fundamental link between science (in the complex of science and technology) and development by arguing that scientific activity is itself "but a specific mode of economic activity in the wider sense of the word (...)[,] concerned with both material and non-material goods. Science, as we said, is the production of a specific kind of statements: non-material goods. It is, therefore, part and parcel of economy in the wider sense". At this point, knowledge is directly linked with international and local power structures and structural inequality both within Africa and with respect to Africa and the rest of the world. Similarly, Mlambo links the Western social science tradition to capitalism and suggests that as an effect of its hegemony, Africa does not gain the possibility to develop and, as both a consequence and cause, to take part in global knowledge flows (cf. Mlambo 2006a: 191).

Anugwom establishes the link between social scientific knowledge and development against the backdrop of structural and epistemological problems, arguing that "social sciences occupy a crucial place in societal development. This derives largely from the ability of the social sciences to re-examine or re-interrogate prevailing notions of the world. This appraisal process aims at discovering the real extent of societal development, obstacles to development and the way forward" (Anugwom 2004: 399). Nyamnjoh, finally, traces the link back to the colonial era, arguing that since then, knowledge "needed for African development is rendered irrelevant by a dysfunctional set of values" (Nyamnjoh 2011: 139).

When they link knowledge relevant for Africa with development, African scholars refer to different notions of development. This link established in a superficially similar way also in those development discourses that stabilise official development policies and refer to knowledge as one of the necessary factors to be taken into consideration – be it as local knowledge or from the perspective of ‘global knowledge flows’ (see Makinda 2004). These discourses are, however, located rather within the first dimension of relevance outlined above, where knowledge is a resource that is being used for policy, not for wider societal change. However, in the dimension suggested here, both the aims of this knowledge and, as a consequence, the notion of development established on the basis of it, are different, involving the broad aims of both, the improvement of general living conditions of Africans and the advancement of Africa’s position in the world.

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#### *EMANCIPATION*

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Another more extensive and, at the same time, more fundamental (and, therefore, again more radical) claim for relevant knowledge is the focus on its emancipatory potential and effects. Amina Mama (2007) argues that knowledge should account for the emancipation of African people – it should in this sense satisfy existential goals in addition to academic ones (see Ndegwa 1992). For Nabudere, emancipatory knowledge forms a distinct category of knowledge, which, in the African context, has (or should have) two aims:

“firstly, to identify problems that impact negatively on peoples’ lives arising out of the colonial and post-colonial experience; secondly, to identify tools, which can resolve those problems and contradictions in a positive manner. In short, emancipatory knowledge is a liberating and humanising process.” (Nabudere 2002: 22).

In his understanding, the necessary prerequisite for the establishment of emancipatory knowledge is the generation of first, “practical knowledge” and, in a second step, “technical knowledge that helps one to identify and assess the

empirical relationships described from the practical knowledge. One needs to begin by operationalizing the effect of those social forces on the life chances of people of African descent. Finally, there is the need to participate in action that improves the life chances of African descended people” (ibid.). Nabudere refers to Kershaw’s contribution on the ‘Afrocentric method’ (Kershaw 1998) and transfers his notion of Afrocentrism into his model of emancipatory knowledge. In the process he describes, knowledge becomes emancipatory because it is put to use for emancipatory purposes; it is applied for the emancipation of African (descended) people and deliberately utilised to interfere in unequal power relations. It is only through this last stage of activist utilization of knowledge that practical and technical knowledge can become emancipatory; it is bound to action.

Another conceptual possibility is created by Anyidoho’s understanding of “insider scholarship”, which the author defines as scholarship that takes place under two conditions. First, it is scholarship by members of a particular group *about* that particular group – here Anyidoho situates his understanding of relevant knowledge on the level of African authorship discussed above. He, however, adds that it is even more important that relevant knowledge is built on the basis of a “‘shared struggle’ as a strategic basis for reconstituting the theoretical value and the viable practice” of this scholarship (Anyidoho 2008: 25).

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#### *AFRICAN(ISED) CONCEPTS*

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In her sharp critique of (both Western and African) Eurocentric theories, Oyéwùmi condemns the West being the frame of reference of African knowledge-production. Pointing out the perpetual pressure towards African scholars to prove Africa’s ability to come up with either certain concepts or whole modes of thought, Oyéwùmi asserts that the most important debate since the 1980s was whether there is anything like African philosophy that has existed already prior to contact with Europeans or not. She states that Africa at present

experiences “the most recent phase in an old Western concern with the evolving status of African primitivism, where the indices have moved from historylessness to statelessness and now to philosophylessness” (Oyéwùmi 2003: 470). Oyéwùmi consequently asks why it is not only Western scholarship, but also African scholarship that has to be blamed for Eurocentricity (or, in a broader sense, *Westocentricity*; see also Mudimbe 1988)<sup>64</sup>.

Such introspective reflections have been undertaken by various African scholars who assert that the problem of a large proportion of African scholarship is its preoccupation not with Africa itself (and the “real issues”, as Oyéwùmi puts it), but with the exhibition of Africa’s *difference from the West*. Oyéwùmi herself questions such an interpretation and argues that it is not the difference, but Africa’s sameness with the West that is sought to be exposed by African scholarship. The endeavour that she sees behind it is to create “African versions of Western things” and thus to prove Africa’s ability to measure up to the West (Oyéwùmi 2003: 471).

When Africa is subjected to a universalist understanding of science, allegedly objective concepts are being transferred to it. Africa becomes a testing ground where knowledge on it is generated through analogies (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 347). One of the steps for the creation of relevant knowledge – almost the most radical approach to the latter – is the rejection of ‘foreign’ or ‘imported’ concepts and the demand for autonomous or even independent concepts. Part of this process is to reveal these foreign concepts as the basis of knowledge on Africa that has been established according to Eurocentric norms but hidden behind the mask of objectivity. The aim of this dimension of relevance, which aims at the *liberation* of Africa, is then not to create own concepts just for the sake of the mere rejection of foreign concepts but to create new, ‘African’ concepts because the foreign concepts have been serving the interests of everyone but Africa itself<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> The Afrocentrist approach to this issue is very different from the one followed by African scholars and is excluded from the discussion here. An example can be seen in Ajamu’s work, which is devoted to the “restoration, reconstruction, and reconnection of African ancestral memory” through the utilization of African terminologies and concepts (Ajamu 1997).

<sup>65</sup> For a concrete example of work devoted to ‘African concepts’, see Diagne (2011) or African feminists’ conceptions of alternatives to Western feminism(s), such as Nnaemeka (2003) and Kolawole (2004).

Similarly, in his account of (the history of) knowledge production on Africa dominated by Western social science through a 'Western sociology of ideas', Mlambo argues that "there is still need for African social scientists to establish a truly African social science tradition and not to continue to be dependent on the paradigms initiated by scholars in the North", whereas the "theoretical frameworks that they should develop independently of the North must address African realities and challenges and help develop appropriate policies that resolve African issues in ways that reflect the lived experiences of Africa's societies" (Mlambo 2006a: 174)<sup>66</sup>.

Those who demand not only African *re-conceptualisations* but 'truly African concepts' decline what in 1979 seemed to be an acceptable possibility for Ayandele: the appropriation of Western concepts wherever they are suitable. He argued that "[b]orrowed ideas, customs, and institutions have their value, but only to the extent that they are adapted, or adaptable, to the indigenous milieu in which they are being adopted." (Ayandele 1979: 284).

Hountondji's charges that were referred to above with respect to his understanding of 'scientific and mental extroversion' are linked to this issue. While he criticises that Africans do not develop "any consistent effort to interpret, elaborate on, or theorize" about the "most peculiar features of their societies" (Hountondji 1995: 4) – and, in fact, deal with these features only to serve as informants for their Western counterparts – his critique leads to what he sees as "the real question", namely (after having asked "What to do?"): "Which islets of such creativity, which skills, which domains of knowledge, have *remained untouched*, and can they be not only safeguarded, but developed, improved, updated and actively reappropriated?" (Hountondji 1995: 5, emphasis

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<sup>66</sup> Himmelstrand and his colleagues warn against the simple rejection of anything perceived as Western in their introduction to the anthology *African Perspectives on Development*: "Obviously the terms 'African' and 'Western' are often used within African establishments in a most opportunistic manner to defend repression, ill-gotten wealth and unwarranted privileges. If some African social scientists sometimes succumb to the temptation to shortcircuit an intellectual argument by using the term 'Western' in this manner, then this use must come to an end. Western thought and practice should certainly be critically scrutinized and evaluated from the vantage points of African predicaments, but as a result of such scrutiny we may find it less necessary to neglect or reject Western thought in some cases than to supplement it with notions acquired from African experiences." (Himmelstrand/Kinyanjui/Mburugu 1994: 10)

added). While it is questionable whether there indeed exists anything like 'untouched domains of knowledge', the distinction between African and Western knowledge in this context seems to be one of strategic value. A similar strategic value is at stake when Zegeye and Vambe claim that it is necessary to distinguish whether "knowledge production is weighted towards Africanising Western knowledge or globalising African knowledge", with the latter being the goal of any process of change (Zegeye/Vambe 2006: 345).

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*AFRICAN(ISED) EPISTEMOLOGY*

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The most radical approach to relevance with respect to knowledge and Africa is the call for a particular African epistemology, i.e. the conviction that knowledge for Africa has not only to be different, more than that, it has to be created in a special way. The underlying question is formulated by Nyamnjoh: (Why) does Africa pose unique research questions (Nyamnjoh 2010: 19)? One of the answers is that simply the wrong questions have been asked so far in the dominant scientific engagement with Africa. Such a very specific call for an epistemological revision can be found in works by African and African American scholars, who both refer to a special understanding of Africanness as the source of epistemology, although this differs according to the approach. For both, the origin of such a claim lays in the exceptional epistemological domination that Africa and Africans – however defined – have been experiencing over the centuries. As Makinda puts it, "Africa is disadvantaged because it plays no role in the *adjudication* of knowledge claims" (Makinda 2004: 2, own emphasis).

According to Mwangola, the epistemological change that is required

"involves the rediscovery, development, recognition and validation of African epistemologies in the creation and transmission of knowledge. This needs to happen in both the studying of issues specific to Africa and those of a universal nature." (Mwangola 2008: 14)

In order to explain the idea of what an African epistemology is or could be,



Kaphagawani and Malherbe depart from a position between the two poles of universalism, which is denying that there are various epistemologies possible, and relativism, which questions the validity of asserting that there is anything like an African epistemology that can be understood or accounted for from an external perspective (Kaphagawani/Malherbe 2003: 261). They draw on the deliberately oversimplifying concepts of 'African traditional culture' and 'modern Western culture' as two significant mainstreams (Kaphagawani/Malherbe 2003: 263). While they account for the empirical reservation about the (lacking) ability to speak for all African people(s), they argue that for the purposes of (philosophical) debate, it is possible to rely on an "intuitive understanding" of the term 'African' and "see if, at the end of our considerations, we are in a better position to say what is characteristically African in epistemology, rationality, and philosophy in general" (Kaphagawani/Malherbe 2003: 265). According to Udefi, the notion common to all advocates of an African epistemology is "some kind of symbiotic relationship between the subject and the object" (Udefi 2009: 83).

At the basis of the attempts to grasp the idea of an African epistemology, there are two fundamental approaches. The first one locates distinct African epistemologies within African traditions, such as Osei-Nyame, who suggests that "the African oral tradition" is at the core of African epistemology and knowledge production (Osei-Nyame Jr. 2005: 170). In a similar vein, in the respective article of the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, a number of features are suggested to constitute "the African approach to knowledge": "the wisdom of oral tradition, especially the various creation myths, folktales, and proverbs; the way of seeking truth in social, political, and religious institutions; the work of healers; the avenues for finding guilty parties in traditional justice systems; and the ways of solving family disputes and other social conflicts" (Nkulu-N'Sengha 2005: 40). At this point, the second approach to African epistemology comes to the fore, when it is grounded in a particular relationship "between knowledge and political and economic power" due to African people's "unique history of enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism" (ibid.). While the quoted encyclopaedia, edited by Ama Mazama and Molefi Kete Asante, stands in the tradition of the (primarily African American) school of Afrocentrism, the link between political and epistemological claims is also to be found in the writings of

African scholars. Just as Nkulu-N'Sengha writes that “[f]or Africans, the focus is on not knowledge for knowledge’s sake but knowledge for humanity’s sake” (Nkulu-N’Sengha 2005: 44, see also Serequeberhan 1994), Nabudere quotes a statement by Okolo, who asserts that

“In Africa, the interest in hermeneutics also arises out of the reality of crisis: a generalized identity crisis due to the presence of a culture - a foreign and dominating tradition - and the necessity for self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition” (Okolo n.d., cited in Nabudere 2002: 18).

Thus, the aim is not only to construct a *different* epistemology, one that is supposed to be particularly African, but see it as inextricably linked to political and social needs of Africa. The reason behind this inherent link between epistemology and politics (and the social relevance of epistemology, one might add) can be attributed to the same inherently political nature of knowledge on Africa that Makgoba refers to when he suggests that “[k]nowledge about African people is always political, useful in maintaining intellectual neo-colonialism, propagates Western culture, helps perpetuate an inferiority complex (...)” etc. (Makgoba 1997: 205, cited in Lassiter 2000: 8).

This approach is broadened when the politically charged notion of epistemology is linked to the lived realities of African people. Nyamnjoh, for example, rejects the “Western epistemological import” to Africa, calling for the reformulation/reconceptualisation of education in Africa, integrating popular (and to a certain amount also traditional) epistemologies as the basis for an education relevant to Africa’s development (Nyamnjoh 2004a, see also Nyamnjoh 2004b: 347-348). Similarly, Kaphagawani and Malherbe (2003: 262) establish the notion of an African epistemology as a *social* epistemology. Konadu, in turn, argues in a paper on the relationship between African and Africana Studies that for the purpose of constructing an African epistemological framework, “science must be understood as a cultural science that is anchored in the Africans’ understanding of the dynamism of their culture and their ideas about the organization of reality” (Konadu 2004: 36).

This social embedding creates the link to Keto's Africa-centered paradigm, which he defines as "the original paradigm that Africans used to create knowledge about themselves, for themselves, and about the physical and social milieus in which they lived", a paradigm as old as the African continent that has been violently disrupted through the enslavement and colonization of African people. "The distinguishing characteristic of this paradigm was the location of the most central, sacred, and revered part of the world of Africans in Africa itself, whether that part was political, religious, or cultural" (Keto 1999: 177). Despite the authors' assertion of (epistemological) location as the decisive aspect of such a paradigm, the idea carries with it a certain notion of purity of African cultures prior to any contact with the West, which is rejected by others (e.g. Kaphagawani/Malherbe 2003).

The wheel seems to come full circle with the last notion of African epistemology that I want to refer to, Nabudere's understanding of an African hermeneutic epistemology that aims at closing the perceived gap between knowledge and wisdom (Nabudere 2002). Nabudere argues that it is necessary to search for an epistemology that would "ensure that the plurality of knowledge existing in all human society is recognized as valid statements of truth" (Nabudere 2002: 13). He seeks to extend the "scientific methodology" of empiricist knowledge generation, which is only able to recognise a limited part of human understanding, with "African hermeneutics (...) [that] acknowledge[s] the validity of diverse ways of knowing and knowledge" (ibid.).

Nabudere's conceptualisation offers an interesting perspective on what has been claimed to be the most radical approach to relevant knowledge with respect to Africa: While it is the one dimension of relevance that aims at most fundamentally overthrowing hegemonic Western knowledge, it does, at the same time, suggest that at the core of the appropriate epistemology for Africa are mechanisms of understandings useful also for any other place in the world. African epistemology then appears as a way of knowing to see things other than the ones seen in dominant discourses.

## HOW TO ARTICULATE? THE RIGHT LANGUAGE FOR AFRICA

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*"I think now of the grief of displaced 'homeless' Africans, forced to inhabit a world where they saw folks like themselves, inhabiting the same skin, the same condition, but had no shared language to talk with one another (...). I imagine, then, Africans first hearing English as the 'oppressor's language' and then re-hearing it as a potential site of resistance. Learning English, learning to speak the alien tongue, was one way enslaved Africans began to reclaim their personal power within a context of domination. Possessing a shared language, black folks could find again a way to remake community, and a means to create the political solidarity necessary to resist."*

bell hooks 1994: 169–170, quoted in Mazrui 2004: 80

The fact that all of the publications analysed in this study were published in English is not only a matter of fact that needs to be mentioned. More than that, it leads to making language an issue and dealing with the particular role that language plays in knowledge production in Africa. For Hountondji, the dependency on foreign languages as a means of access to research in Africa is yet another "index of scientific dependence" (Hountondji 1990: 11). While the choice of an African language does not automatically mean that the knowledge produced in this language has a more immediate relevance for "African people" or serves their interests (cf. Zegeye/Vambe 2006: 343), the predominance of publishing in former colonial languages is widely criticised by African scholars and links knowledge with the issue of imperialism and hegemony due to the power relations involved. This can be explained by the contested nature that language choice has in Africa. To put it bluntly, as Adegbija does, "European languages in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly spoken and used by the political and economic élite, have, in comparison with the indigenous languages, been given far more power and institutional functions and attention *than they deserve*" (Adegbija 1994: 4-5; emphasis added). Adegbija's formulation stands for an

extensive debate on the place that (ex-)colonial languages should have in various arenas of the public sphere in Africa, which is itself characterised by multilingualism and cultural diversity<sup>67</sup>.

While the debate on language in Africa seems at times like a placeholder for other issues and a space for the projection of other contradictions, it is in all contexts a political and loaded issue. “‘Language’ is objectified in the politics of discourse, but it may be the *imposition* on others of discourses and practices to do with language that constitutes the hegemonic relation—and not the language as an agency in itself” (Furniss/Fardon 1993: 16; original emphasis). Language policy is thus linked with questions of democracy, equity, and equality – the choice of language determines who has access to decision-making and crucial discourses of power –, which, as Brock-Utne and Hopson note, is often blanked out in the debates (cf. Brock-Utne/Hopson 2005: 4). That the language question is “one of the defining questions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” in Africa (Alexander 2001: 11) is thus explicable through the significance of language in the negotiation of development:

“It is hard to believe that there can be, or that one can possibly argue for, a true and lasting development under such policy when so many people do not know their constitutional and legal rights, cannot understand the developmental goals of their governments and therefore cannot actively exercise their basic democratic rights simply because they are written in foreign languages.” (Djité 1990: 98, cited in Brock-Utne 2003: n.pag.)

The role of language is most vividly discussed with relation to educational processes<sup>68</sup>. Prah even raises the language question to it being the most important issue with regard to education in Africa (Prah 2008: 1). Pragmatic arguments are mingled with moral ones in this context. A number of authors stresses that not only are African languages of more importance for the daily

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Prah (2011) for a related discussion and a re-evaluation of various classificatory systems, and, more general, Heine/Nurse (2000), Batibo (2005). Fardon and Furniss argue that contrary to other, more obvious problems, the ‘language problem’ in Africa is to a large extent a ‘hidden’ problem (Fardon/Furniss 1993: 1).

<sup>68</sup> See also Rubagumya (2009).

lives of the majority of Africans compared with European languages but also – or on account of this – children could learn more effectively if education was provided to them in their mother tongue (cf. Brock-Utne/Hopson 2005: 14, Chubmow 2005: 171). It is then not only the usage of European languages that was inherited from colonialism, but also the mechanism of exclusion that they involve, an argument put forward by Prah, who himself is advocating the use of African languages as languages of instruction in all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary (Prah 2005: 35). According to Prah, the continuous recourse to former colonial languages do lead to the alienation of the educated elite from the uneducated mass and thus undermine the self-consciousness of African populations as a whole. As a result, ‘foreign languages’ constitute one of the main obstacles to “African emancipation” (Prah 2005: 27)<sup>69</sup>.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o writes in a similar vein:

“Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people’s identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history.” (Ngũgĩ 1986: 14)

Prah also emphasises the problematic role of language with respect to Africa’s development (see also Magwa/Mutasa 2007):

“The search for the solution to African underdevelopment and socio-cultural backwardness through the use of colonial languages has a destination, which is, in its own right, disconcerting and troubling. If we are waiting for the day when all Africans will learn, read and write in colonial languages, that day will take forever to arrive, and even

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<sup>69</sup> In relation to this, Bamgbose outlines how African languages themselves should be empowered (Bamgbose 2011). Majid (1995: 7) remarks that “the restoration of an indigenous vocabulary is not the nostalgic and sentimental gesture that many of its critics make it out to be, but is the very act of cultural affirmation and political expression needed to reconnect the individual with his or her tradition”.

when or if that day arrived we would find that Africans have ceased to be Africans, and become 'Europeans'." (Prah 2011: 12)

The roots of the problematic role of language in the African context lie in the role of language in colonial policy, as Maral-Hanak explains (Maral-Hanak 2009: 115-119)<sup>70</sup>. Colonial domination had a severe impact on linguistic practices of the local populations and relied on linguistic ideologies that aimed at proving that African languages were inferior compared to European languages (or, more precisely, the language(s) of the colonisers). In the colonial context, language was instrumentalised as a means of domination and control and served to establish hierarchies. The access to European language thus was restricted and linked with the idea that also the access to education should be reserved for a chosen few, who would be incorporated in the colonial system through administrative posts. It was furthermore through these administrative jobs and the higher income they entailed that the competence in European languages became a status symbol (Habte/Wagaw 1993: 679)<sup>71</sup>. While during colonialism African languages were subject to different colonial policies invoking the danger of assimilation, after political decolonization, a new phase of reorientation in African language policies lasted until the beginning of the 1980s (Sow/Abdulaziz 1993: 540). Political discourses glorified African languages for "their richness, their originality and their necessary link with African-ness", while language policies largely failed to adequately take them into consideration (Breton 2003: 209)<sup>72</sup>. Trudell, however, makes clear that the underlying problematic is more complex than is to be seen at first glance:

"[The] formulation and enactment of supportive policy for mother tongue-based education have been notoriously lacking in Africa,

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<sup>70</sup> It is interesting in this respect to bear in mind Mazrui's discussion of the "psycholinguistic impact" that the imposition of European languages had on people of colour (Mazrui 1993: 355).

<sup>71</sup> Alidou and Mazrui offer a more differentiated picture and distinguish between French and British colonial language policies, suggesting that these rested on different assumptions: "first, that language was a reservoir of culture and a vehicle of cultural transmission. Second, that language was a reservoir of knowledge and a transmitter of ideas, including those that could serve subversive ends through resistance against colonial rule". See Alidou/Mazrui (1999: 109) for more details.

<sup>72</sup> See Simpson (2008) for country-specific discussions of the matters involved. For general discussions of the politics of language in Africa, see also Alexander (1999), Laitin (1992), Makoni/Trudell (2009), Crystal (1997), Pennycook (2003).

leading some writers to link nonimplementation of these policies with the desire of elites to maintain control. Musau (2003) argues that negative attitudes toward the use of indigenous African languages are rationalized by members of the African elite in terms of the supposed lack of political neutrality, the lack of international acceptance and the nonscientific character of those languages. However, the reality is that, for those in power, the very real capacity of mother tongue-based education to facilitate educational equity and access for minority language communities is not necessarily seen as a point in its favor.” (Trudell 2010: 344)

It is then little surprising that the issue of language has been of considerable concern in African scholarship<sup>73</sup>, especially as in the whole of Africa university education is provided exclusively in European languages (cf. Altbach 2003: 4) and the ‘colonial’ link between power and European languages is maintained (see Gandolfo 2009). While most scholars who deal with this issue agree that the predominance of European languages is problematic, the strategies that they suggest or follow are very different<sup>74</sup>. According to Alidou and Alamin Mazrui, two positions are predominant in this respect. On the one side, there is the “pragmatist school of thought”, which stresses the possibility of a modification or adaptation of European languages so that they reflect ‘African worldviews’. This school also suggests that the usage of these languages serves national unity, as it enables communication among people with very different linguistic backgrounds. On the other side, there are the “nationalists”, who assume that the choice of a particular language restricts possibilities of knowledge and reduced alternatives and who, like Prah quoted above, advocate the valorisation of African knowledge through the utilization of African languages (Alidou/Mazrui 1999: 102).

A similar typology is created by Onoma, who, however, is more critical towards both positions (Onoma 2008: 72-74). He stresses that both the pragmatist and

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<sup>73</sup> On the language question with respect to philosophy in Africa, see Kishani (2001).

<sup>74</sup> Okara adds to this typology the “neo-metropolitans”, who use the metropolitan language without any conscious effort to adopt it to ‘African’ conditions or needs, while his category of “evolutionists/experimenters” refers to the ‘pragmatic school’ and the ‘nationalists’ are defined as “rejectionists” (Okara 1991, cited in Zeleza 1997: 51).



the nationalist approaches – if we stick to the denomination given above – rest their argumentation on a very restricted understanding of ‘Africanity’. The nationalist position “locates Africanity outside of the lived experiences of generations of Africans, and imprisons it in a slice of the pre-colonial past” (Onoma 2008: 72). Likewise, the pragmatist position excludes the majority of Africans from “the sphere of Africanity” and “trivialis[es] their presence” (Onoma 2008: 73). Intellectuals in both positions thus usurp the notion of Africanity for themselves by prescribing what Africanity is supposed to mean. Furthermore, Onoma argues, African scholars themselves are having an opportunistic stance regarding this issue. He lays his charges against intellectuals not only for predominantly falling back on European languages when writing themselves, but particularly for not having formed a consensual position against these languages. In having failed to act they became collaborators of an exclusive and anti-democratic linguistic structure and contribute to the disempowerment of the majority of African people, who don’t have access to knowledge being generated in these languages. According to Onoma, the language debate and the positions taken with respect to it therefore make visible the anti-democratic tendencies of some African scholars – a point that seems ironical considering the emancipatory diction that is taken up in this context:

“African scholars have contributed to the usurpation of the rights of the majority of Africans to participate in discourses that determine what aspects of social realities are subjected to democratic contestation.” (Onoma 2008: 74)

At the same time, the role of English as a colonial language in post-colonial societies is more complex<sup>75</sup>. Canagarajah argues in his book on ‘linguistic imperialism’ in Sri Lanka:

“Appropriating English while maintaining their vernaculars makes periphery subjects linguistically competent for the culturally hybrid

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<sup>75</sup> See also Bgoya (2001), Mühleisen (2003). Descarries (2003) explores the effect of English as a hegemonic language on feminist knowledge that leads to marking all other knowledge as ‘other’. Toolan (2003) discusses the role of English with regard to human rights law and a “rights-oriented culture”.

modern world they confront. (...) The simplest gestures of code-switching and linguistic appropriation in the pedagogical safe houses suggest the strategic ways by which discourses may be negotiated, intimating the resilient ability of human subjects to creatively fashion a voice for themselves from amidst the deafening channels of domination.” (Canagarajah 1999: 197, cited in Phillipson 2001: 196).

In a study on the role and history of English in Africa, Alamin Mazrui has argued that English has not only created divisions and hierarchies, but also served as a source of unification. As a common language of Africans in ‘Anglophone Africa’ and African Americans overseas, this “linguistic gulf” was put on the agenda of trans-continental Pan-Africanism and similarly served as a potential communication tool between Africans of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds<sup>76</sup>. In the post-colonial context, furthermore, English was preferred in many states for the sake of nation-building, as the upheaval of one African language over others through making it a national language was regarded as bearing the danger of creating divisions among societies or groups (Mazrui 2004: 66-68). At the same time, however, it has been stressed that in post-colonial societies, English has contributed to the maintenance of Western interests (Bgoya 2001)<sup>77</sup>. Furthermore, the global upheaval of English as a “universal lingua franca” similarly serves the interests of particular groups of people and conceals the fact that the majority of the world’s population does not speak English (Phillipson 2001: 187-8)<sup>78</sup>.

Writing in English thus becomes a conscious choice for African scholars. Several intellectuals, among them Léopold Sédar Senghor, have stressed that English bears an inherent potential for the construction of an “African consciousness”. In this sense, Ken Saro-Wiwa has formulated the underlying reasoning as follows:

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<sup>76</sup> See also Nyamnjoh/Shoro (2011) and Appiah (2004).

<sup>77</sup> See also Phillipson’s seminal study on English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992).

<sup>78</sup> In this context, Mühlhäusler offers an interesting interpretation of English as an “exotic language” that has become naturalized and stresses that fact is rarely emphasised in the scientific discourse (Mühlhäusler 2003). Alexander (2003) predicts that ironically, the knowledge of English will likely be necessary for the formulation of alternatives to hegemonic linguistic relations.

“With regard to English I have heard it said that those who write in it should adopt a domesticated ‘African’ variety of it. I myself have experimented with the three varieties of English spoken and written in Nigeria: pidgin, ‘rotten’ and standard (...). That which carries best and which is most popular is standard English, expressed simply and lucidly (...). And so I remain a convinced practitioner and consumer of African literature in English. I am content that this language has made me a better African in the sense that it enables me to know more about [fellow Africans from] Somalia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa than I would otherwise have known.” (Saro-Wiwa 1992: 157, cited in Mazrui 2004: 69).

Mazrui himself, finally, summarises the tensions of the role of the English language in Africa:

“The rise of English as a global language, combined with advances in information technology, have (sic) opened up new lines of communication between people of African descent; the same communicative tools, however, have widened the space for the exercise of Northern hegemony.” (Mazrui 2004: 90)



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## **FRAMING THE OUTCOMES**

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Depending on their position in the world – their gender, place of origin, religion, profession, class, political opinion, or other influences – different people have different understandings of how the world functions, and, more importantly, how it *should* function. They draw upon differing concepts to articulate the meaning of their ideas of change and even if they share the same wording, the notions they draw upon tend to be very distinct and at times contradictory without being recognised as such. This is particularly true for terms and concepts that carry an affirmative connotation and that have gained an undeniable prominence through their internationalization over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the key concepts of this study: human rights and development. For some actors, it is beyond question that each of these terms points to a clearly identifiable and established set of documents, institutions, and goals. For others, not only is the meaning ascribed to these terms not easily discernible, it is, moreover, subject to contestation, disrupted by claims for power, and – if any clear meaning can be accredited to them at all – it evolves in a constant process of negotiation, where some have more power to define the terms of reference and others are silenced or rendered invisible.

The following chapter will delineate some of the outcomes of such processes of meaning making that lead to the existence of diverse interpretations of the key concepts of this study. Instead of looking at these processes in general, it will, however, focus, on the meaning they gain through the prism of ‘Africa’ as again another set of meanings. The underlying question that will implicitly be dealt with on the following pages could, therefore, be framed as ‘what does ‘Africa’ mean for ‘human rights’ and ‘development’?

While the introductory thoughts that will follow can offer only a tentative answer, they can be seen as not only the starting point for a description of the relevant context with respect to human rights and development in Africa, but also constitute a certain bridge between such a contextual outline and the subsequent analytical chapter.

There are different relations between 'Africa' and the key concepts, whereby (at least) three clusters of functions that Africa has for both development and human rights can be distinguished when the former is understood as both a concept and a sphere where each key concept unfolds its influence. While the influence among the three concepts is beyond doubt mutual – in other words, it is just as important to ask what Africa *does* to human rights and development as it is to ask what human rights and development *do* to Africa, the diverse meanings of *Africa* within the spheres of human rights and development are the primary area of interest in the analysis, while the different variations of the key concepts serve merely as a tool to understand the former. Human rights and development as concepts exert their influence within the symbolic, discursive, material realm of Africa, while their implementation in Africa, albeit contested, draws upon particular understandings of Africa and creates new ones at the same time (see also Slater 1993). The resilience of Africa as a concept simultaneously destabilises the meaning of human rights and development, which are questioned in their 'normality' (and, as a result, their normativity) not only when Africa eludes usual representations, but also when Africans 'themselves' contest and shape the relationship between Africa and the hegemonic discourses.

It is important to bear in mind that to ask about the influence of either 'Africa' on 'human rights' and 'development' or vice versa does not mean to ask about the effects that Africa has on Western concepts or that Western concepts have on Africa. There are two directions of movement among the meaning of the concepts involved here. These two directions, however, shall not imply that the concepts are understood as either exclusively external or distinctly internal to Africa or that what is at stake is graspable as Western influence on Africa and vice versa. Instead, all concepts involved are contested not only themselves but also in the influence they have on one another.

The basic meaning of Africa for human rights and development is the understanding of Africa as the *setting*, where both concepts wield their influence through processes of implementation – i.e. through "development practice" and "human rights practice" – and through the impact of discourse related to them.



Both dimensions are interrelated; therefore, in such a description of the context, discourse and practice are inextricably bound to each other. If development and human rights are to be implemented in Africa, then this endeavour rests upon particular assumptions about Africa, whereby Africa serves as a *signification* for both human rights and development. Thus, the basis for Africa to become the setting of human rights and development (interventions and ideas) is the conviction that either there is “not enough” of both – human rights and development. Underlying this “lack” is the notion that there is something fundamentally wrong with Africa, or, more generally, that there is “a problem”. Furthermore, ‘Africa’ is in different ways also an actor concerning human rights and development, constructed, for example, as a partner, a participant, a thinker, a violator, or a collaborator. Which understanding of Africa - or Africans as part of the process of unfolding of either human rights or development - is preferred in each situation, shapes the outcome of interventions, feeds into the theories drawn upon and relates to the construction of Africa as a *setting*.

According to Himmelstrand, the historical causes for African ‘underdevelopment’ have to be traced to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism (cf. Himmelstrand 1994: 22). He adds that

“[t]his should be well known by now, but bears repetition in view of some unhistorical but now fashionable assertions that the lack of current ‘development’ of African societies is a result mainly of the poor internal politics of African countries today, and that historical explanations of so-called underdevelopment are nothing but excuses for present-day shortcomings.” (ibid.)

In the magnified logic of the hegemonic discourse, Africa thus not only has a problem, Africa, to be able to serve as the setting for development, itself constitutes the problem; the historical dimension tends to be side-lined in the prescriptions (see, for example, Andreasson 2005). Africa as a *problem* allows for Africa to become the *target* of development and human rights concepts and interventions. There are different possible rationales behind “Africa as the problem”, and the theorizations of this assumed problem that underfed different practices changed over time, they varied over the last century in accordance both

with the interests of the diverse actors involved in solving the problem and with the changing global and local contexts of negotiations, contestations, appropriations, and implementations of development and human rights. In the words of Andreasson:

“The overwhelming impression is that of a quagmire, of failure. Despite a variety of sociopolitical contexts and trajectories across the continent, the basic assumption is that things have gone seriously wrong in Africa during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whatever nuances there may be, they pale in comparison to what could perhaps be described as a ‘systemic’ failure of African cultures in their encounters with the challenges of the modern world.” (Andreasson 2005: 972)

This continuously perceived lack is closely linked with the notion of ‘doability’ and an interventionism criticised by Nyamnjoh:

“This dominant epistemology has engendered theories and practices of social engineering capable of justifying without explanation almost everything, from colonialism to neoliberalism, through racism and imperialism. Whole societies, countries and regions have been categorised, depending on how these ‘others’ were perceived in relation to Western Cartesian rationalism and empiricism. The epistemology has resulted in disciplines and fields of studies that have sacrificed morality, humanity and the social on the altar of a false objectivity. In other words, it has allowed the insensitivities of power and comfort to assume the moral high ground, dictating to the marginalised and the disabled, and preaching salvation for individuals and groups who repent from ‘retrogressive’ attitudes, cultures and practices.” (Nyamnjoh 2011: 140-141)

In order to ‘get things right again’, human rights and development provide adequate sources of hope for different actors in this context. The history of both on the continent is, however, much more complex than the mere conception of them as possible ‘solutions’ allows. Moreover, both are contested as sources of hope and as solutions, but these contestations underlie different dynamics and,

more importantly, draw upon at times distinct understandings of Africa, even if the representations of Africa involved in the respective discourses might be similar.

The historical contextualization of the meaning of the concepts within Africa has to be traced back to colonialism. Development and human rights have a different meaning for Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for as Cooper stresses, “[n]o word captures the hopes and ambitions of Africa’s leaders, its educated populations, and many of its farmers and workers in the post-war decades better than ‘development’” (Cooper 2002: 91). Development, at the same time, has very explicit colonial roots and was initiated as part of the colonial powers (first Britain, later France) to “make conflict-ridden colonies both productive and legitimate” (Cooper 2002: 85, see also Cowen/Shenton 1996, Cooper/Packard 1997: 7). Cooper further adds that

“[c]olonial development, in the end, produced more conflict than it resolved, but the development idea had immense appeal to many Africans. Colonial and nationalist versions of development shared a belief that government planning and government investment – not just the ‘natural’ operations of the market – would help African economies emerge from backwardness.” (Cooper 2002: 86)<sup>79</sup>

While the post-independence state in Africa built on the interventionist logic of the colonial state, its role as an “activist state” (Cooper 2002: 88) that could bear the promise of fostering national development and popular welfare lasted only until the early 1970s. Mkandawire asserts that “[d]evelopment was essentially a statist and elitist project – not in the sense that it deliberately sought inequality and protection of elite interests but rather that it presupposed the pre-eminence of the elites in both its elaboration and implementation” (Mkandawire 2005c: 17). According to Amin, it was in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that “the peoples of the periphery began to liberate themselves, mobilizing themselves under the flags of socialism (...) or of national liberation”, whereby he argues that the period between 1914 and 1945 was marked by “the long war being

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<sup>79</sup> On colonial development, see also Havinden/Meredith (1993), Constantine (1984), and Cooper (1997).

conducted by the imperialist centres against the first awakening of the peripheries” (Amin 2011: 5). Likewise, Cooper suggests that there are distinct periods identifiable in economic terms, with the rise of the developmentalist state marking the period between 1940-73, its subsequent crisis after 1973 until 1990 and an “ambiguous period” following (Cooper 2002: 97)<sup>80</sup>.

Linked to the role of human rights in Africa, Cooper, similarly, outlines several phases of popular participation in Africa. Between 1945 and 1960, he suggests, colonial Africa was marked by “limited electoral competition”, while after independence, “no external power insisted that elections be held” (Cooper 2002: 88). Independence was followed by a gradual closure of political space and marked by “developmentalist authoritarianism” in the 1960s, from which “only authoritarianism was left” in the late 1970s and 1980s due to the loss of resources following the export and debt crises (Cooper 2002: 89). In the 1990s, finally, many African leaders “were unable to resist demands from below or outside to reform” (ibid.), which led to a new wave of democratization.

While the history of human rights in Africa is inextricably linked to the history of development (see Uvin 2004), if we turn to the initial question of this chapter – “What is Africa for human rights and development?” – and the tentative answer that Africa serves as a *setting*, as an *agent*, and as a *signification* for human rights and development, the histories of human rights and development have to be narrated in different ways. While for human rights, the establishment of an “African human rights regime” (Udogu 2008) and the negotiations involved in this process bear testimony to the negotiation of Africa as a setting and as an agent (and, accordingly, as a signification), the history of development – or an analogous “development regime” is not as easily discernable through an outline of important documents or stages. The reason can be attributed to the “amoebalike” concept of development itself, as Sachs expressed it in a widely popularised expression (Sachs 2010b: xix). Therefore, the contextualization that

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<sup>80</sup> For more detailed discussions and different positions on the history of development (thought and practice, in Africa and beyond), see also Rodney (1974), Amin (2011), Ake (1996), Leys (1996), McMichael (2004), Rist (2008), Cooper (2010). On development and neoliberalism, see Van de Walle/Ball/Ramachandran (2003), Harvey (2005), Emeagwali (2011). On scholarship on development and Development Studies as well as respective critiques, see Crush (1995), Ferguson (2005), Olivier de Sardan (2005), and Kothari (2005).

follows does not aim at providing an extensive history of neither human rights nor development in Africa, but serves as a background for understanding the references and debates found in the subsequent analysis. With respect to human rights, it is important in this regard to gain an overview over the unfolding of the African human rights system. Concerning development, on the other hand, those important shifts in the global context and crucial debates will be outlined, which feature in the analysis or constitute a background necessary for contextualizing the arguments discussed later.

Regarding the history of human rights in Africa<sup>81</sup>, while Gawanas suggests that “it is clear that the concept of human rights has strong roots in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid” (Gawanas 2009: 136), Moyn argues that “anticolonialism wasn’t a human rights movement” (Moyn 2010: 92) and points to the fact that the concept of self-determination was far more important than any inherent “logic of rights” (Moyn 2010: 85). Ibhawoh, however, suggests that it is important to recognise anticolonial struggles in Africa (and elsewhere) as “not only nationalist movements but also veritable human rights movements” (Ibhawoh 2007: 5, see also Odinkalu 1999). At the same time, Eckert asserts that the leaders of the anti-colonial movements in Africa did not rely on human rights as a crucial articulation of protest and only rarely referred to human rights discourse when pointing to the colonial powers’ double standards with respect to human rights: both Britain and France were involved in the creation of the international human rights regime after World War II, while they perpetrated human rights violations in their own colonies (cf. Eckert 2011: 286, see also Ibhawoh 2007: 159)<sup>82</sup>.

Eckel points out that in those cases when members of African anti-colonialist movements referred to human rights, they did not refer to any universal notion

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<sup>81</sup> For discussions on the history of human rights in general see, Hunt (1998), Ishay (2008), Hoffmann (2011), Moyn (2012), Neier (2012).

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of (the study) of law and colonialism, see Merry (2003). Anghie (2004) offers an in-depth analysis of the role of colonialism and imperialism in the history of international law. Grovogui (1996) analyses the links between colonial discourses, international law, and the role of self-determination in the course of decolonization. Ibhawoh (2002, 2007) focuses on law as an instrument of control by the British in colonial Nigeria. See also Howard (1984), Eckel (2010), Eckert (2011: 289) and, more generally, Cooper (2012).

of human rights but rather appropriated them for their own purposes<sup>83</sup> (cf. Eckel 2010: 113). Thus, according to Eckert, “for most African nationalists, human rights were an issue of minor interest compared to matters which seemed to be more pressing for late colonial and early independent states, such as nation building and fighting poverty”, while human rights discourse was preserved for the domain of international diplomacy instead (Eckert 2011: 285) and also played a role in pan-Africanist circles. For example, the resolution of the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester featured references to human rights language, such as the demand for a “right to earn a decent living; the right to express our thoughts and emotions, to adopt and create forms of beauty” (quoted in Eckert 2011: 295) and “the right of Africans to develop the economic resources of their country without hindrance” (quoted in Asante/Abarry 1996: 519).

At the Bandung Conference of 1955, African (and other Third World) diplomats subscribed to the right to self-determination – influenced by the Atlantic Charter (cf. Ibhawoh 2007: 160) – and affirmed a broader human rights agenda (see Burke 2006)<sup>84</sup>. Kohn and McBride suggest that “[m]oderate nationalist movements in the early twentieth century made claims based upon the dominant narratives of progress and by adopting the tools of liberal governance as their own”, but colonial powers turned down any opportunity for them to further these claims (Kohn/McBride 2011: 24). However, at the All-African People’s Conference held in Accra in 1958, a Committee on Racialism and Discriminatory Laws and Practices advised the African member states of the United Nations to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and set up a Commission of Human Rights “with powers to receive and to report to it progress made in the implementation, as well as any denial, of fundamental human rights in any part

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<sup>83</sup> In a (to a certain degree personal) reflection on the meaning of human rights in Africa since anti-colonial struggles, Houser remembers that „[i]n the midst of the fast moving events of the later 1950s and 1960s it seemed almost irrelevant to ask what kinds of governments would be established and how human rights would be protected after independence. It would have seemed almost as out of place as to ask a victim of apartheid while being tortured to give a considered comment on whether he favored a bill of rights after he was released from prison.” (Houser 1990: 10).

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the Bandung conference with respect to the development agenda, see Amin (2011).

of the continent of Africa” (Eckert 2011: 286). The discussions following the Conference in Accra influenced the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 (cf. Eckert 2011: 297), which, however, did not emphasise human rights as a core concern. Despite a reference included to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the OAU Charter, which reminded member states to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its explicit goals aimed at the promotion of solidarity, development, decolonization, the advancement of sovereignty, the principle of non-interference, and international cooperation instead (cf. Shaw 2007: 213, Gawanas 2009: 136).

The reasons for the OAU’s member states’ reluctance towards human rights must be drawn also from a wider political context. Gibson and Grant emphasise that while towards the end of colonialism, “developing nations struggled with the conflicts between universal rights and national sovereignty and between economic development and civil liberties, the *language* of human rights was still a powerful tool for challenging imperial domination and domestic discrimination”, with Kwame Nkrumah and Léopold Sédar Senghor, for example, referring to human rights in their calls for decolonization in Africa (Gibson/Grant 2010: 52, original emphasis; see also Eckert 2011: 298).

Kannyo (1984: 129) identified a number of regional and international factors that ultimately led to the drafting of the African (Banjul) Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights in 1981, 18 years after the founding of the OAU<sup>85</sup>. He suggests that the main reasons for the establishment of the Charter within Africa were first, the acceptance of the OAU “as the principal forum for the resolution of African problems”, including domestic ones (ibid.). Shaw notes that moreover, the OAU was the only regional organization to which almost all African states were members (Shaw 2007: 219). Another factor was the “embarrassment caused for the OAU and African leaders” through the regimes of Idi Amin (Uganda), Jean-Bédél Bokassa (Central African Republic), and Francisco Macías

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<sup>85</sup> For discussions of the weaknesses, challenges, and peculiarities of the African human rights system since the initial stages, see, among others, Gittleman (1984), Okere (1984), Umozurike (1988), Ojo/Sesay (1986), Odinkalu (2001), Allain/O’Shea (2002), Murray (2008), Okafor (2007), Shaw (2007), Evans/Murray (2008). For discussions preceding the establishment of the African Human Rights Court, see Mutua (1999), Eno (2002), and Murray (2002).

Nguema (Equatorial Guinea). Finally, a debate at the 1979 OAU summit caused by the Tanzanian invasion in Uganda that led to the downfall of Idi Amin was critical in this respect. For the international context, Kannyo stresses the emphasis of the United Nations on the establishment of regional human rights commissions and the international attention paid to human rights violations in Africa, which was intensified since the mid-1970s (cf. Kannyo 1984: 129, see also Normand/Zaidi 2008). Furthermore, the conditionality approach adopted by the Carter Administration and general international pressure made African leaders believe “that there would be economic costs to opposing the creation of regional human rights mechanisms” (Shaw 2007: 219). Shaw further adds that while these international and regional factors had the greatest impact on the creation of the Banjul Charter, “with domestic and cultural factors actually serving as counterpressures for the protection of human rights”, it was, in contrast, regional and domestic factors that were crucial in the discussions prior to the creation of the African Court on Human Rights, with international pressure being rather secondary<sup>86</sup> (cf. Shaw 2007: 218).

The African Charter is distinct from other regional instruments in several points (see Gittleman 1984, Flinterman/Ankumah 2004, Gloppen/Rakner 1993: 8-9). These can be ascribed to the African leaders’ aspiration to make the Charter “distinctly African”, as expressed in the preamble, which suggests the Charter drew upon Africa’s “historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterise their reflections on the concept of human and peoples rights” (quoted in Welch/Meltzer 1984: 317). As Mutua outlines, the Charter was thus based on a broader understanding of human rights as “it codifies the three generations of rights, including the controversial concept of peoples’ rights, and imposes duties on individual members of African societies (Mutua 2002: 71, see also Okoth-Ogendo 1993).

An African Commission on Human Rights was established already in 1987. It implements tasks assigned to it by the Banjul Charter (Shaw 2007: 215). Initially,

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<sup>86</sup> At the same time, she stresses the changed climate after the end of the Cold War, which allowed international actors to strengthen their role with respect to human rights in Africa, among them the Clinton administration and international human rights NGOs (cf. Shaw 2007: 221).



in the course of the drafting of the Banjul Charter, the establishment of an African Court of Human Rights was rejected by African leaders, as they preferred the settlement of disputes via non-judicial means (cf. Shaw 2007: 219). In 1998, however, its formation was established through the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court of Human Rights, which entered into force in 2004 (cf. Shaw 2007: 216).

This narrative of the history of human rights pertains if human rights are understood legally, referring to "the body of international law that emerged in the wake of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and follow-on instruments" (Goodale 2007: 6). Such a legal(istic) view most explicitly sees Africa primarily as the 'setting' where human rights need to be implemented. That Africa increasingly became an 'actor' for human rights is clear in such a context from the distinctiveness of the Banjul Charter, and the fact that important steps in the creation of the African human rights system were promoted by the OAU.

It is, at the same time, and more importantly in our context, through the involvement of African scholars in the scholarship on human rights that the concept of Africa is negotiated in this respect (see Appiagyei-Atua 2000). In this sense, human rights constitute an influential discourse, which encompasses different ways of conceptualising and studying human rights. Such a discursive approach "radically decenters international human rights law", whereby the "normativity [of human rights] is understood as the means through which the idea of human rights becomes discursive, the process that renders human rights into social knowledge that shapes social action", as Goodale (2007: 8) argues. Such a perspective opens up possibilities of a re-negotiation of human rights discourse. According to Neocosmos, the latter is not useful for emancipatory politics in its present hegemonic form, because it "is ultimately a state discourse of passive citizenship which interpellates people as juridical subjects while what are required as a precondition for emancipation are active citizens" (Neocosmos 2008: 13). A discursive approach does, furthermore, allow for a counter-hegemonic engagement with international law (see Rajagopal 2006). Part and

parcel of processes of negotiation of human rights concepts and understandings<sup>87</sup> is therefore also the negotiation of representations of Africa and the opposition against fixed representations of “savages”, “victims”, or “saviors” (Mutua 2002) inherent in the respective discourse.

In this process of negotiation, the impact of Africa as the ‘signification’ of human rights is equally being negotiated, and I want to argue that with respect to those crucial issues that feature prominently as controversies in human rights scholarship, it is not only the respective positions with regards to human rights that are crucial, but also the different concepts of Africa that are at stake. In other words, different positions with respect to these debates feed into the different representations and understandings of Africa created.

This is equally true for development discourses. With respect to the concept of development, the crucial issue that needs to be contextualised is the question of self-determination and development or, in other words, the search for “African solutions for African problems”<sup>88</sup>. In the “era of development” after World War II, Andreasson argues,

“the process of privileging external solutions remains firmly rooted at the ideational and discursive levels, whether or not it is the objects of development themselves who are to adapt to and implement these solutions. The main problem remains the inability of African governments (and the African individual) to properly harness (Western) notions of law and order, markets, good governance, transparency and pluralist democracy that are, according to development orthodoxy, prerequisites for development to proceed” (Andreasson 2005: 975).

An important symbolic reference point is historically given by the Lagos Plan of Action for African Development, adopted at the 1980 meeting of the OAU “in the tracks of the euphoria that five years earlier had marked the Third World’s adoption of a charter for a ‘new international economic order’” (Amin 2011: 74,

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<sup>87</sup> For critiques of human rights from a variety of perspectives, see Esteva/Prakash (1998), the anthology published by the Just World Trust (1996), Spivak (2004)

<sup>88</sup> For a wider context on Africa as part of the Third World, see Edmondson (1993).

see also Arnold 1980). The Lagos Plan of Action constitutes one of the earliest “endogenous” African efforts for development<sup>89</sup> and aimed at an elaboration of alternative paths to economic development in Africa. Adedeji argues that all of the African initiatives were

“opposed, undermined and jettisoned by the Bretton Woods institutions and Africans were thus impeded from exercising the basic and fundamental right to make decisions about their future. (...) Instead, the implementation of exogenous agenda has, perforce, been pursued” (Adedeji 2002: 34-35).

Adedeji’s contribution outlines continuities and discontinuities between the Lagos Plan and the New Partnership of Africa’s Development (NEPAD, adopted by the OAU in 2001) and reflects the high relevance that the engagement which African initiatives has in African scholarship on development. The NEPAD itself has been contested and criticised by scholars engaging with both development and human rights<sup>90</sup>. While it has been ascribed considerable importance over the last decade and “endorsed by virtually all international agencies and bilateral donors as the general framework for development efforts in Africa” (Manby 2004: 968), NEPAD’s emergence seems to be a logical step in a range of several frameworks, programs, and declarations that in the late 1990s formed “a concerted attempt by a select few African presidents to repackage and exclusively define the question of Africa’s development to the wider world” (Taylor 2005: 32). Its origin is suggested to coalesce with the concept of African Renaissance, propagated by Thabo Mbeki during his first office term, and formalised in the Millennium African Renaissance Program (see Bond 2000). The latter constituted a “declaration of a firm commitment by African leaders to take ownership and responsibility for the sustainable economic development of the continent” that entailed an assignment by those interested in participation to “be prepared and ready to commit to the underlying principles guiding the initiatives” (Adesina 2000: 13). In this respect, the NEPAD constitutes one of the

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<sup>89</sup> For an overview of both endogenous and exogenous programmes, see Nanjira (2010: 413-414).

<sup>90</sup> See, among others, Appiagyeyi-Atua (2006), Adesina/Graham/Olukoshi (2006), Bond (2002), Taylor (2005), Melber et.al. (2003), Loxley (2003).

most recent instances around which the link between concepts of human right, development, and Africa is being negotiated. This negotiation is linked to the diverse theories that have been used to explain Africa's underdevelopment and called on as models for possible solutions for its development<sup>91</sup>.

These theories do, I argue, draw on diverse concepts of Africa – homogenizing, differentiated, strategic, or apolitical. Cooper argues that in their colonial development policies, “the Africa [that] France and Great Britain sought to develop was not the complex, varied, changing social field African historians have now shown it to be, but a flat, unchanging, primitive landscape. Development was something to be done *to* and *for* Africa, not with it” (Cooper 1997: 65, original emphasis). In the present form of the hegemonic development discourse, post-developmentalists argue, the West's understanding of Africa underlying its development programs is characterised by a similarly one-dimensional Orientalist concept of Others, which is seen as serving the perpetration of unequal power relations between the West and the so-called Global South<sup>92</sup>. That, however, not all non-Western, or, in our case, African concepts of Africa are automatically multidimensional, oppositional, or emancipatory, will be discussed in detail below in the main part of this thesis.

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<sup>91</sup> See Leys (1996), Mehmet (1999), Munck/O'Hearn (1999), Peet/Hartwick (2009), Nederveen Pieterse (2010).

<sup>92</sup> See Escobar (1995), Rahnema/Bawtree (1997), Ziai (2007), Sachs (2010a).

## **CORPUS AND APPROACH: SELECTING A SEGMENT OF AFRICAN DISCOURSE**

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Before turning to the main part of this study, the reader will be familiarised with the analysed material and the process of actual realization of the project. In other words: we will have a close look at the data and what was done with it in order to reach the aims of this study. This description should serve as an embedding of the outcome of the analysis. If the object of a research is not only studied but also created through the process of the research itself, as argued before, then the selection of the material that makes the object of study accessible and tangible constitutes a critical moment in this process.

In our case, there are at least two different approaches to the selection of data possible. One possibility to choose appropriate material for a study like this would be based on the aim to create a 'representative sample'. This approach would be based on the assumption that there is something like the 'totality of African discourse' somewhere out there, consisting of a certain number of publications by a clearly defined set of authors. The aim of a study 'on African discourse' thus would be to first find objective criteria that give a clear and representative picture of this discourse, while the main emphasis would be on fulfilling the criteria of validity and representation. While the latter are by no means inherently questionable, they rest on an epistemological grounding of research that is different from the one employed in this context, and are clearly linked with research projects manageable with the use of quantitative methods. Furthermore, it was only possible to utilise material published in English (because of missing language competence in other languages relevant in Africa), and out of all these publications, only a small part could be actually accessed. Therefore, also pragmatic reasons work against the construction of such a seemingly representative sample. The second possibility is thus to construct a representatively more limited sample upon different grounds, understanding the selection as an open and flexible process.

These two possibilities to collect material or construct a corpus are located on different sides of Burawoy's distinction between a *positive* and a *reflexive* approach to science (Burawoy 1998: 5):

“In the first strategy [i.e. positive science], we minimize our predicament by limiting our involvement in the world we study, insulating ourselves from our subjects, observing them from the outside, interrogating them through intermediaries. (...) [In contrast, p]remised upon our own participation in the world we study, reflexive science deploys multiple dialogues to reach explanations of empirical phenomena. Reflexive science starts out of dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself.”

While in this case, Burawoy relates his words mainly to ethnographic research (and, specifically, to the ‘extended case method’), the idea conveyed applies to (social) science in general and is often, as indicated above, linked to the assumed inherent contradiction between quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Flick, qualitative research has gained relevance over the last decades due to a rapid “diversification of life worlds”, which increasingly forces social scientists and researchers in general to abandon “traditional deductive methodologies” (Flick 2009: 12). Instead of using quantitative research to test and validate hypotheses, inductive methodologies are increasingly used in order to generate theories from particular social contexts. It is not within the scope of this section to engage in a discussion on a comparison between quantitative and qualitative methods, their respective advantages or shortcomings, and claims about the superiority of any of the underlying ‘paradigms’ (see Bryman 1984). It seems necessary, however, to postulate at this point that the choice of a particular methodology is not only a matter of personal preference and the simple question whether a particular method is appropriate for a particular subject. Therefore, the decision for or against a particular strategy for the selection of a corpus and

the choice for a particular approach to deal with it already carries heavy epistemological implications.

The first issue to be considered when selecting a certain corpus for analysing 'African discourse(s)' seems to be the need for a definition of 'the African discourse'. After the first part of this study, it will hardly come as a surprise that I do not intend to provide such a definition here either. What could qualify as an *African discourse* and what, actually, it could mean to *be African*, are questions extensively dealt with in the previous chapters. Even there, however, the reader won't find a clear-cut list of criteria or anything that comes close to an explicit definition of an African discourse<sup>93</sup>. Rather, it is argued on a theoretical basis that the concept of Africa conveyed in this study is both inclusive and dynamic, allowing for the flexibility of identities and the contingency of knowledge. Furthermore, the concept of *discourse* itself is not necessarily graspable by invoking definitions of the discourse at hand but rather through the argumentative process that follows later.

Nevertheless, any notion of an impalpability of discourse does not help if one is required to select concrete material for analysis. Therefore, a more technical examination of the material should now follow these introductory remarks. A corpus of data is what makes the 'discourse' to be analysed accessible. Following Landwehr (2008: 102-103), the totality of all utterances belonging to a discourse constitutes the *imaginary corpus*, which, in most cases, is not accessible (any more) in this totality. Therefore, he terms the actually available elements of the corpus *virtual corpus*. 'Available' in this case does not relate to the availability

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<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, (the lack of) this definition was a recurrent theme during the research process, demanded for on many occasions when this study was discussed. It is more than anecdotal that there were at least three remarkable types of responses to the concept of „African discourse(s)“ (or the project in general) when I explained to others what my research should be about: at times, I was objurgated for using the notion of “African discourse” at all because of the alleged generalization and homogenization of Africa it conveys. In other cases, it was stated that I have to give an exact list of criteria for both, what is an “African discourse” and who is “an African”, in order to operationalize the concepts subsequently. From time to time, the reaction was mere nodding and a general approval, which at least in some instances might stem from the assumption that it is “obvious” who or what is *African*. I do not arrogate to myself to present these reactions as “wrong” or “problematic”, even if they at times might have been based on misunderstandings. This short anecdote should only serve to illustrate, somewhat redundantly, the (probably obvious) difficulty of combining dynamic and complex concepts with empirical strategies.

from the perspective of the researcher herself but rather to theoretical availability due to actual physical existence. The *concrete corpus*, which is then finally the one used for the analysis, is extracted from the *virtual corpus* through “purposeful collection, inspection and evaluation” (Landwehr 2008: 103; own translation). What Landwehr omits in his typology is the ‘intermediary space’ between the virtual and the concrete corpus. If the virtual corpus comprises all utterances belonging to a discourse that are physically available *anywhere* in the world, the concrete corpus can still be selected only out of those elements that are actually accessible to the researcher herself, taking into account her own location and resources.

Correspondingly, in the case of our study, the *imaginary corpus* then would be *all* scientific publications ever published on human rights and development with respect to Africa. In the course of the research process, it took several ‘spins’ until the concrete corpus was compiled in its final form. The reasons can be found, on the one hand, in the quantity of the material available and the sheer impossibility to take into consideration all publications available. Many of the strategies used proved to be inappropriate for the compilation of a manageable amount of material, or yielded results that had lost their relevance for the research focus on the way. Thus, it was only in the process itself that the selection criteria were differentiated more and more and adopted to the necessities of the scope of the research. At the same time, this iterating procedure in the data gathering is also attributable to the very nature of this kind of research: for the sake of openness and in order to allow for the consideration of unexpected outcomes, it is necessary to avoid defining the final corpus too early (cf. Landwehr 2008: 102). Keller stresses in this context that the construction of a corpus requires the constant re-examination “according to the targeted composition and the necessary level of completeness” (Keller 2008: 86; own translation). However, before we turn to an account of this process, those strategies that failed will be discussed shortly regarding their respective disadvantages for our case, as they might be useful for the consideration of corpus selection approaches in future projects.



The choice to focus exclusively on scientific articles was made in a very early stage of the project, as it is articles in journals and anthologies that make ideas accessible more easily than monographs, and, furthermore, the consideration of the latter would have biased the amount of text in an inappropriate manner, while, at the same time, articles tend to reflect the current state of debate in a more direct way than books. After an initial mapping of the field, the limitation to *all volumes of certain selected journals* (between 1980 and 2011; in the fields of African Studies, Development Studies and Human Rights) seemed to be a useful way to limit the material to a reasonable amount of publications. However, this approach would have carried with it several implications detrimental to the research and contradicting its epistemological foundations. Not only would, in such a case, the material chosen reflect mainly the selected journal's theoretical, political, and content-wise orientation. Many relevant publications would also have to be *a priori* excluded from the analysis and sacrificed for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, this choice would only serve to perpetuate inequalities in knowledge production and the power structure that determines who is able to publish in "important" journals and who not. Therefore, this strategy was abandoned soon, even though most of the articles selected were, admittedly, still published and available through 'international' journals. The selection of material according to frequency of quotation or due to its appearance in certain prestigious databases was, however, rejected for similar reasons.

The road taken thereafter was an open search in an online database of Africa-related scholarship<sup>94</sup>. The immense amount of material resulting from the search for the keywords 'human rights' and 'development' resulted in the exclusion of case studies from the material. Nevertheless, even the whole of literature focusing on Africa as a whole is impossible to be used for a qualitative study. Therefore, bibliographic data were subsequently examined for main topics and themes in order to gain a broad overview of the literature. Again, the choice of particular topics was not justifiable given the vast amount of literature dealing with human rights and development with reference to Africa in general. For that

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<sup>94</sup> The database of *Africana Periodical Literature* covers the content of 521 scientific journals from various disciplines and fields. It can be accessed online at <http://www.africabib.org/periodio.htm> [last access: May 4th, 2012].

reason, articles focusing only on particular issues in the two key fields were also excluded from the material. However, the utilization of a database should not dictate the ultimate constitution of a corpus, and with the articles covered, several relevant works (especially articles available through online and contributions in anthologies) would not have been incorporated. Hence, the material acquired in this way was only used as the basis for further steps.

Finally, the combination of a 'snowball sampling' approach (see Noy 2008) and the simple collection of literature from different sources, including libraries, various databases and the Internet, proved to be the most suitable solution. While the former leads to 'clustered samples'<sup>95</sup> because sources are derived from already identified material, which involves brachiating through an endless chain of references, the latter serves to extend the scope of the material beyond these very oft cited or at least *already* cited publications. At this step, the *contents* of the material gained more importance than randomly constructed criteria for *ex ante* selection. It is this very difference that distinguishes such a method of *theoretical sampling* from other methods of sampling: "[t]he basic principle of theoretical sampling is to select cases or case groups according to concrete criteria concerning their content instead of using abstract methodological criteria. Sampling proceeds according to the relevance of cases instead of their representativeness" (Flick 2009: 121). In this way, theoretical sampling is a method appropriate for exploratory studies, derived from Grounded Theory (see Glaser/Strauss 1967).

The material analysed thus consists of articles published by African scholars in and outside Africa since the beginning of the 1980s, while works by non-African scholars are only exceptionally used for reference in the analysis. Both the self-understanding of the respective author (i.e. her or his explicit location *in an African discourse* and/or *as an African*) and biographical research (especially on places of university education) were critical if the location of the author was not obvious (for example from information provided directly in the source). An exclusive consideration of sources published in Africa or by authors

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<sup>95</sup> See Flick (2009: 168) with respect to the selection of interview partners for qualitative research.

geographically located in Africa was rejected, as it would have excluded many important contributions by scholars residing outside of Africa and works published in the West.

In the subsequent process of analysis, different steps of dealing with the material were involved. Out of all the material collected, a first analytical framework was created – often-recurring arguments and themes were noted, diverging positions with respect to the core topics mapped. This first phase of mapping was followed by a closer reading of a restricted amount of data, which, in reference to Landwehr, I would then term to be the ‘concrete corpus’, as it served as an immediate basis for the creation of the analytical typology and the elaboration of the features of the particular ideal-types of discourses discussed in the next chapter. For this last step, i.e. the more in-depth analysis in the process of writing itself, another step of selection was undertaken with a total number of 50 articles that were excerpted in detail and clustered in accordance with the discourse types of each main discourse (see annex). In contrast with the ‘concrete corpus’, this last and most concrete restricted corpus should be termed the ‘examined corpus’ here, as it constitutes the material that is actually visible in the analysis as it was written down.

For the sake of convenience (i.e. again, to limit the amount of material found), the works had to have a reference to Africa with respect to either human rights or development in their title to qualify as part of the corpus. However, some exceptional contributions were added to the corpus even though they did not fulfil these primary selection criteria. In those cases, the works either added an important position or aspect not represented yet, or a sufficient part of the publication was dealing with Africa and human rights and/or development in general so that the text could be considered as a contribution to the ‘discourse on Africa’ in connection with those two themes. Issues or fields related to human rights or development such as scholarship on democracy, law, governance, state, welfare, aid, social security, or international (development) co-operation were excluded from the analysis.

The material selected in this way features two important qualifications. The first results from the fact that an overwhelming majority of the works analysed was written by male scholars. This might be traced to the gender-specific pattern in the visibility and accessibility of publishing and scholarship, which is linked to the under-representation of women in academia and the prevalence of male scholars in science in general due to inherent patriarchal power relations (see Mama 2003, Valian 2004, Monroe et.al. 2008, Okeke-Ihejirika 2011). The reasons and implications cannot be scrutinised in the context of this study, it is, however, important to bear in mind that the discourse represented in the analysed material is dominated by male perspectives.

A second important limitation of the material is the restriction to English-speaking sources, with exceptions in cases when sources originally composed in other languages were accessible in English through translation. What I deal with in the analysis is thus rather a part of the “Anglophone African discourse” than African discourse in general. This part of the discourse can, however, be understood as part of the African discourse, pointing to structural features of a wider discourse. While the implications of the language problematic were discussed in the previous chapter, from a methodological point of view, it seems necessary to stress that such a restriction does not oppose the aims of the research. Instead of aiming at a complete picture of what could be understood as ‘African discourse’, the analysis shows which discursive modes and patterns of argumentation can be found in certain parts of it.

For the selection of the period of analysis, both pragmatic and content-related reasons can be identified. While the accessibility of the data was very limited for publications that were written prior to the 1980s, important shifts in both the human rights field and the development discourse took place in the course of the 1980s, leading to changes in the respective discourses. As Boele van Hensbroek suggests and the discussion in the preceding section outlines in detail, “African political thought changed radically from the late 1980s onwards” (Boele van Hensbroek 1998: 158).

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**READING 'AFRICA' THROUGH  
'HUMAN RIGHTS' AND 'DEVELOPMENT'**

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The following chapter constitutes the core of this study. It presents a possibility of interpreting African discourses on human rights and development by offering a way of structuring them that evolves around the concepts of Africa inherent in these very discourses. These concepts of Africa differ according to the relationships they ascribed Africa in relation to the key concepts (human rights and development), whereby they draw on different notions of Africa to create their respective discursive constructs. The patterns of argumentation that form the subordinate discourses identified are discussed. The main task is hereby not to reflect commonly examined schools of thought on either human rights or development – some of the findings might even contradict traditional classifications – but to structure the respective discourses according to diverse references that are made to Africa as a whole in the rationalization of an assumed necessity of either human rights or development.

The creation of such a structure is already part of the analytical and interpretative process. In this respect, it is necessary to stress that for the analysis, the material was segmented into the various individual lines of argumentation, whereby it was these argumentative utterances that were subsequently analysed. Therefore, the contribution of an individual author can be located in different types of discourse, which again have different theoretical and analytical implications. At the same time, one discursive framework or subordinate discourse can involve argumentations that lead to different outcomes even if they evolve around the same relational logic. In other words, one text can involve fragments of different discourses, while the discourses themselves can consist of argumentations stemming from various theoretical schools. The selected discourses should, therefore, not be seen as rigid entities but rather dimensions of the analysed problem.

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN/FROM/FOR/WITH AFRICA

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Most classifications of human rights thought in Africa (and beyond) refer to the debate between advocates of universalism and relativism. While this is a very general albeit fundamental division, critics who ask for more complex approaches (f.e. Maluwa 1997: 63) seem not to question the dichotomy itself as one of the main (and most contested) features of that discourse. Howard, for example, wrote in 1992 that “[s]cholars writing on human rights in Africa presently fall into two camps, communitarian and liberal” (Howard 1992: 2), touching on the analogue distinction between communitarian and individualistic argumentations which is anchored in the very debate on universalism and relativism. Lawrance comments in this respect:

“The scholarship on rights in the African context is thus divided into two camps: one views Africa as primitive and without legal standing, incapable of assimilating western notions of human rights for a variety of reasons; the other romanticizes the pre-colonial past to some degree, contending that African culture(s) recognized rights in a western sense in communities, persons and/or families, a heritage obliterated by colonialism.” (Lawrance 2004: 41)

As this study of the African human rights discourse does not take human rights, but Africa, as the critical element, an initial imagined deconstruction of this dichotomy is necessary for the purposes of analysis in order not to remain stuck in common schemes. While it is part of the argument that the picture is painted with more than two colours – and universalism and relativism even cannot be clearly separated when taking Africa as the reference point – it has to be acknowledged that such a classification cannot be completely abandoned even from the position taken up here. Let us, however, first try to square the circle instead of reinventing the wheel.

Whether it is argued that Africa has to implement human rights for the sake of democratization or as the basis for development, whether Western understandings of human rights are accused to be part of an imperialist strategy or blamed for not taking into consideration African traditions or its history,



Africa always seems to be primarily different. It is different because of its supposed “backwardness” and deviation from human rights norms, different from the West within relations of global inequality and discrimination, or different due to certain conditions that have to colour the concept of human rights before accepting it. However, this difference or alterity takes diverse forms, serves diverse purposes and to a certain degree questions and resists orientalist notions of postcolonial Otherness in reversing certain argumentations. Furthermore, it leads to very different outcomes if used in different frames of argumentation.

Out of the variety of utterances in African writing on human rights in Africa, this study identifies four of such frames (or subordinate discourses) as the most relevant one in the structure of the discourse and within the discourse as a whole: (1) the equality discourse, (2) the resistance discourse, (3) the pragmatic discourse, and (4) the adaptation discourse (see figure 2). The *equality discourse*, finally, stresses not Africa’s difference (while acknowledging it), but Africa’s comparability (through the reference to universalist norms) and its ability to teach the West or to contribute to universal conceptualisations of human rights. In the *resistance discourse*, which aims at the reversal of global power relations, Africa (as a whole) serves as a strategic unit primarily in opposition to the West. The *pragmatic discourse* aims at the effective implementation of human rights in a seemingly neutral way, constructing Africa mainly as a geographical and political unit. The *adaptation discourse* emphasises distinctive features of Africa that need to be considered regarding human rights. Contrary to the resistance discourse, here Africa is *different from* the West, not predominantly opposed to it.

The adaptation discourse and the pragmatic discourse, at first sight mirroring the relation between communitarian and individualist positions, both directly relate to issues of utility and implementation and are more linked to human rights practice and debates surrounding it. The resistance discourse and the equality discourse encompass positions that more explicitly engage in a strategic positioning towards the West.

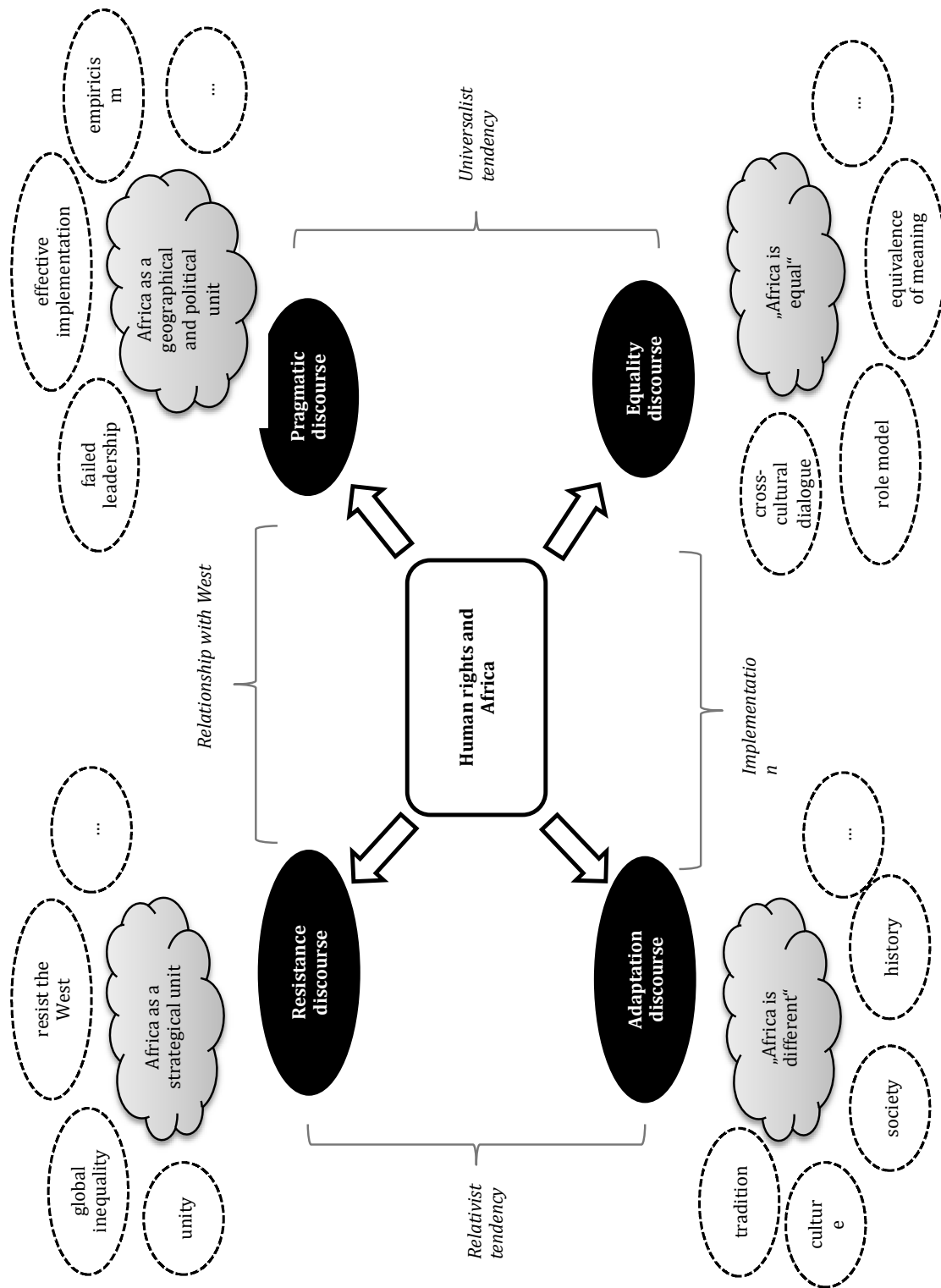


Fig. 2: (Subordinate) discourses on Africa and human rights.

There have been numerous accounts to verify the existence and enjoyment of human rights in pre-colonial Africa and the traditions of particular societies. In her study on “universality and diversity” of human rights, Brems collected an overview of these accounts, useful to illustrate the variety of different rights that have been pointed out by various authors, which therefore should be reproduced here at full length:

“The rights that are put forward include respect for the elderly (though not a classic human right), basic rights to life, food, shelter and security, the right to property, the right to marry and to found and be part of a family, the freedoms of belief, association, assembly, expression and movement, and limitations to the exercise of power. Lists vary according to authors, and some researchers manage to find a long list of human rights in a particular historical African society. Iba Der Thiam discovers in pre-colonial Wolof society (equivalents of) the freedom of assembly, of association and of expression, a general right to free choice, the right to property and to work, the right to education and to culture, the right to a private life, the right to happiness and peace, special protection of children[,] women and the elderly, the right to maternity, the right to separate oneself from the community, the protection of foreigners, the right to solidarity, the freedom of movement, the right of access to public functions and the right of access to justice. Kwasi Wiredu analyses traditional Akan society and finds a right to be nursed, a right to protection of person, property and dignity, rights of political participation, the right to a trial, the right to land and religious freedom.” (Brems 2001: 151-152)

Yet, while Brems states that “it is hard to find equivalents of all contemporary human rights norms in traditional Africa” (Brems 2001: 151) and proceeds to argue why “the protection of certain goods in traditional Africa does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that these were experienced as rights by

African people” (Brems 2001: 152), I want to suggest that by referring to the deficiency of the accounts stated above and their reading exclusively through the normative framework of international human rights norms, such a judgement is not only inevitably biased by Eurocentrism but it also misinterprets the very accounts that it wants to qualify. Rather than reviewing how well authors have done in demonstrating parallels between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and African “traditions”, this chapter, therefore, aims at an interpretation of *why* they do so at all.

It is argued here that by finding equivalences for codified and allegedly universal human rights in African societies and/or traditions, the emphasis lies not on the equivalence in relation to content but on the equivalence with respect to their worth. That implies that it seems to be less important in the African human rights discourse to merely show that there are certain elements in present and past societies that can be regarded as conceptually equivalent to human rights but, instead, the aim is to prove that there is more than these (Western) human rights norms. It is therefore not the concrete content of the human rights identified in (pre-colonial/traditional) Africa that is relevant but what it means to find them for the position of Africa towards the West.

This allows the ideas involved to remain valid despite criticisms such as the following one:

“These historical formulations have been criticized because they essentialize the legal capacity of pre-colonial cultures, have dispersed notions of power, homogenize an ‘African identity,’ neglect or ignore African agency, exaggerate the extent of colonial state control, and rest on flimsy or discredited evidence.” (Lawrance 2004: 41)

In distinguishing between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ human rights conceptions, Marasinghe argues that “the rights to family membership, to freedom of thought, speech, beliefs, and association, and the freedom to enjoy property” as “fundamental human rights have a wide range and general application in most traditional societies, particularly in Africa” (Marasinghe 1984: 33). Their understanding is bound to the context of a particular group, contrary to modern human rights concepts that “are considered universalist in nature”, because it

was central for these societies to control their membership. He does not only give the above examples of rights, but also broadens the human rights concept itself by stating:

“When one speaks of the violation of human rights in Africa, one refers mainly to the violation of human rights as guaranteed by the externalized constitution or by the *Grundnorm*. But if one were to conduct empirical research into the internalized conceptions of human rights recognized by a traditional society, one would find enormous satisfaction as to the basically democratic way in which the society protects its own human values.” (Marasinghe 1984: 43)

Marasinghe thus distinguishes between internalised and externalised conceptions or mechanisms and turns against the mainstream (Western-dominated) human rights discourse (“one refers mainly to...”) by using its very vocabulary – questioning the common concept of a violation of human rights. He suggests that by using different criteria, one would reach different outcomes that might be not accepted in the logic of the mainstream discourse but are valid according to the values of respective societies.

Against this backdrop, I want to argue that the search for equivalents (in relation to meaning or worth) in traditional African societies serves a similar purpose. It is suggested here that African authors hereby do not only want to prove the occurrence of certain human rights in Africa, but they aim at questioning the mainstream human rights discourse and, as a consequence, position themselves as *African* authors against a discourse dominated by Western concepts (and scholars). They create a discourse of equality, making Africa either comparable/similar to the West or different but equally worth. They argue in this way that Africa is either able to live up to the demands of the West or that it doesn't need to live up to them, being 'equal' (equally valuable) to the West in both cases.

When Okoye writes that “[f]rom time immemorial Africans have enjoyed” certain rights (Okoye 1987 in Ojo 1990: 118) or Ojo refers to Keba M'Baye, the Senegalese judge, who was the first to propose a right to development, saying that he “argued forcefully that not only did these rights exist in pre-colonial

Africa but also that they were promoted and protected” (Ojo 1987: 119), the scholars do not only emphasise the *existence* of rights but primarily stress the existence and enjoyment of rights *prior to any prescriptions* that could have come from the West. Okoye further states that “this [pre-colonial enjoyment of rights] is not much different from the modern formulation of human rights” (Okoye 1987 in Ojo 1990: 118), again suggesting the very equality of Africa and the West that is part of my argument.

It is, furthermore, also argued that the traditional mechanisms are more effective for the enjoyment of rights and that certain principles can have a higher value than particular rights and might, consequently, serve as limitations for them. Marasinghe exemplifies this by elaborating on the freedom of speech, which can be limited both in ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ societies, but in the latter the “manipulation of freedom of speech is internalized and therefore becomes a part of the common weal of the traditional society” (Marasinghe 1984: 37). Again, we can observe that the author distinguishes between internalised and externalised processes, drawing a comparison between them and thus stating their equal value, while clearly favouring internalised mechanisms as being more relevant for the respective society. He goes even further by arguing that externalised mechanisms are irrelevant to Africa, while traditional concepts are directly linked with the basis of the society:

“The abrogation itself of a constitution will (...) have no effect on the traditional concepts of human rights that are peculiar to each African society. The best guarantees of human rights in Africa are to be found by preserving conceptions of human rights recognized by each society’s law and custom. Such conceptions of human rights are so closely associated with traditions of an African society that their strict observance becomes a basic concern for its members. The cohesion and stability of that society are considered to be dependent upon the preservation of such traditions.” (Marasinghe 1984: 32)

Such a claim for specific African notions of (human) rights goes beyond the mere identification of (equivalents of) rights in pre-colonial Africa and forms the second variation of the equality discourse. Already in 1969, shortly after Africa’s

decolonization phase, Asante wrote that he “reject[s] the notion that human rights concepts are peculiarly or even essentially bourgeois or Western, and without relevance to Africans” and that “[s]uch a notion confuses the articulation of the theoretical foundations of Western concepts of human rights with the ultimate objective of any philosophy of human rights” (Asante 1969: 95). He further asserts his argument by breaking the question down to the protection of human dignity and “the intrinsic worth of the individual”, “an eternal and universal phenomenon” (Asante 1969: 95). Similarly, D’Sa argues 15 years later that “although the struggle for human dignity remains universal, it may be argued that the African people have to respond to these challenges in their own way” (D’Sa 1985: 74). These sequences can be seen as an illustration of the ambivalence of the equality discourse – comprising both a universalist and a relativist moment, stressing the difference of Africa and its concepts, while pointing to the universal nature of the questions concerned. Africa hereby assumes its place in a universal struggle, which in my understanding is the crucial aspect of this argumentation.

The question whether Africa has its own (or, less frequently, whether *Africans* have their own) concept(s) of human rights plays an important role in the academic human rights discourse on and in Africa. It is embedded in the very dispute between universalists and relativists and led to a long-lasting and still on-going controversy between Western and African authors. On the one side, there are Western scholars, among them Rhoda Howard and Jack Donnelly, two prominent figures of human rights scholarship on Africa, who negate that there was anything like a human rights concept in pre-colonial Africa or that something like a distinctly African concept of human rights exists. Their positions are central in the debate and some space has to be devoted to them here. They certainly do not constitute part of the material systematically analysed for this study, yet the meaning of the whole debate points to issues that are critical for the understanding of the African human rights discourse.

For Donnelly, who sees human rights essentially as “an artifact of modern Western civilization”, the lack of any concept or practice of human rights actually applies to “most non-Western cultural and political traditions” (Donnelly 1982: 303). It is, however, not “their cultural ‘Westernness’” but the “socio-structural

'modernity'" that Donnelly understands to be critical and that makes human rights relevant wherever "social, economic, and political transformations of modernity" occur (Donnelly 2007: 287). Obviously careful not to proclaim any moral superiority of the West, Donnelly turns to an evolutionist argument, implying that modernity with its supposedly inherent concept of human rights has to 'arrive' at Africa at a certain moment in history. For both Donnelly and Howard, this moment was constituted by the independence of African countries (cf. Appiagyei-Atua 2000: 76), which led to Africa's transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society, as Howard writes in the singular. While she admits that "[m]odernization is neither a unidirectional, a continuous, nor an inevitable process" (cf. Howard 1986: 27), she also claims that "the 'modern man' (and woman) has been emerging in Commonwealth Africa" due to "social-psychological processes of individuation" (Howard 1986: 27-28). Hence, it becomes clear that the time for human rights in Africa has come, with modernity creating the necessary conditions for Africans to finally internalise the universal nature of human rights.

Donnelly, who enunciates that the "[r]ecognition of human rights simply was not the way of traditional Africa", distinguishes between concepts of human dignity and human rights and acknowledges only the existence of the former in the African context (Donnelly 2003: 79). Howard, unanimously evoking similar arguments on the non-existence of an African concept of human rights (and equally juxtaposing the concept of human dignity), explains that rights in traditional Africa were not inherent in a person's humanity but "contingent upon one's 'fulfilment of one's obligations to the group'" and "dependent on one's status" (Howard 1986: 14). Therefore, one could only speak of privileges in this case, while human rights are inherent in a person's humanity.

Both authors' positions have been sharply attacked by African scholars as a "popular myth", as Marasinghe puts it (Marasinghe 1984: 42). El-Obaid and Appiagyei-Atua identify two shortcomings in their argumentation. Firstly, they argue, in traditional Africa, rights were not absolutely tied to a fixed and exclusive group membership but also to an acquired form of 'citizenship'. In certain cases, strangers and slaves could be permitted into the group and receive the status of an ordinary citizen, being granted the same rights as a result.



Secondly, during the Enlightenment, “the concept of natural rights was largely only a means for middle-class men to argue for the right to own property”, while the same rights were denied to women, slaves, serfs and colonised peoples. Thus, they argue, the Western concept of human rights was never “truly based on universal humanity” (El-Obaid/Appiagyei-Atua 1996: 831-832), an objection that leaves the Howard’s and Donnelly’s theses without a foundation.

Moreover, Mutua adds, while the emphasis on individual rights was not comparable to the one within the Western liberal tradition of human rights, African societies did indeed “*know* the conception of individual rights” (Mutua 1995: 348, emphasis added; see also Ilesanmi 1995: 308). Mutua, an important opponent of the two authors at stake, offers a salient critique of Donnelly and Howard’s work. Being an advocate of universal human rights as well, he points to the fact that both authors’ implication that “only European liberalism – a philosophy they seem to think inevitable under modernization – can be the foundation for the concept of human rights” (Mutua 1995: 357) reduces their claim to universal human rights to absurdity, attaching the ability to come up with human rights to a certain culture and historical condition. Furthermore, he highlights another troublesome implication that evolves out of the first observation, namely the subsequent duty of the West to impose the supposedly universal concept on non-European cultures ‘for their own good’. He concludes by insisting that “such a view barely masks the historical pattern by the West – first realised through colonialism – to dominate the world by remaking it for the benefit and in the image of Europe” (ibid.).

However, it is not only the claim of moral authority to identify ‘true’ concepts of human rights and the dismissal of alternatives that are problematic in the debate. However “narrow, rigid, and static” both authors’ understanding of human rights is, making “it difficult to conceive of the relevance and legitimacy of (...) [the] concept of human rights in other cultures other than upon paternalistic or imperialist terms” (Addo 2010: 606), the debate itself manifests serious parallels to earlier denials of certain concepts or moral attributes to non-European people(s). These issues are of particular relevance when we think of the attributes of what I call the equality discourse: the affirmative account of an

equal relevance of African notions and their comparability (or, in some cases, moral superiority) to Western concepts.

It can be therefore argued that the Western authors' denouncement of any African concept of human rights and African authors answering back and defending the existence of such a concept is not the result of a coincidence but rather the reflection of a specific configuration of power in knowledge production on Africa. Both sides claim the validity of the respectively produced knowledge also by referring to certain representations of Africa. When Howard repeatedly speaks of "nondifferentiated", "ethnically homogeneous", "simple societies of pre-colonial Africa" (Howard 1984: 174) and finds the comparison of human rights in Africa in the 1980s "with human rights in the Western world at similar stages of national consolidation and economic development" more appropriate than a "comparison of Africa with contemporary Western societies" (which she, nevertheless, undertakes) (Howard 1984: 176), Africa remains the deviant Other, trapped in the "alterity of negative difference embedded in Eurocentric epistemology" (Zezeza 2005c: 2). The seemingly empirical grounds on which Howard argues do not make up for the evolutionist implication of the "appropriate comparison" of Africa's presence with former development 'stages' of Europe.

It is this very construction of Africa in the argument that African scholars confront and that is also inscribed in Donnelly's reluctance to engage in a debate by stating that arguments challenging his view are "simply not true", "not true" and "certainly (...) not the case" (Donnelly 2003: 84). The denial of a dialogue, a dogmatic adherence to an exclusive position and the persistent creation of dichotomies that are heavy with meaning (underdeveloped-developed, simple-complex, traditional-modern) perpetuates the same mechanisms of discursive power.

In a recent contribution, Wingo points out the underlying problematic in the following paragraph:

"The unquestioned assumption that human rights are truly and universally the rights of the individual has led many from the West to the study of non-Westerners, whom they scrutinize in the ways that ethnologists study animals, seeing them as something to be

understood as some primitive, undeveloped, distant cousins from elsewhere. But the implications are even worse: What could it mean, after all, that whole civilizations in places like Africa, the Middle East, and Asia somehow have missed a universal truth about human rights? Is it just that they're less advanced? Or incompetent? Or do they simply *choose to ignore* that universal truth?" (Wingo 2009: 122, original emphasis)

Wingo rejects the epistemological exclusion of non-Western societies and peoples out of the study of human rights. He adverts to the very fact that it is not a mere co-incidence that the West claims a "universal truth" and refuses to concede the ability to find this truth to others (as Others). The author then makes a contribution to the equality discourse by distinguishing between different concepts of freedom relevant for particular societies because of their historical conditions. Similar to rights conceptualised as individual rights in Western philosophy, freedom has also come to mean personal freedom in the West, he writes<sup>96</sup>. Yet in other circumstances, for example in African, more "communalistic societies", the relevant notion of freedom is that of relational freedom, which receives its meaning through relations with others. It is not "the right to be left alone" (Wingo 2009: 126), but a freedom that "emphasises the obligation to interfere in the lives of others" (Wingo 2009: 129). To explain further, Wingo refers to a dictum by John Mbiti, a Kenyan priest and religious philosopher, who is often quoted to illustrate the relationship between the individual and the community in African societies: "I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am" (Wingo 2009: 125).

Wingo thus pleads for thinking of human rights as historical phenomena, "the outcome of the combination of human will, material constraints, and historical contingency, rather than residing in some immaterial substance or a philosopher's metaphysical, rational nature" (Wingo 2009: 132). This characterization forms the background for the embedding of his argument in the equality discourse.

The conviction that first, human rights arise out of certain historical conditions

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<sup>96</sup> See also the section on the adaptation discourse below.

through the agency of concrete people, and second, people therefore have very different conceptions of human rights, emphasises the equal value of all of the respective conceptions, in our context especially the equal value of African and Western conceptions. Mutua would call this a “cultural relativism in human rights as an anti-imperial device”, which according to him is admirable per se but has its roots in a misunderstood nationalism (Mutua 1995: 345) and thus becomes dangerous. I wouldn't necessarily agree with such a conclusion, especially if such a ‘cultural relativism’ is interpreted as a reaction to the processes of exclusion outlined above.

Ojo refers to the “psychological impact” that the past had on Africans, leading to the “African attempt to emphasize the ‘Africanness’ or the global nature of many of the contemporary political concepts” (Ojo 1990: 117-118). Furthermore, such a resistance also does not necessarily imply an undifferentiated understanding of ‘African culture’ or African societies. Ilesanmi stresses that culture and tradition are a “morally ambiguous component of life” and pleads for correcting myths about “the moral purity of African culture” through an “emancipatory interpretation” of it, leading from a “nostalgic idealization” to “liberative engagement” (Ilesanmi 1995: 308). He also notes that there were “institutionalized derogations of human rights” in traditional African societies (Ilesanmi 1995: 309). This point even strengthens the argumentation of the equality discourse: while contributing to a critique of pre-colonial African concepts of human rights, it also confirms their existence and their relevance. Through the reference to limitations and, more importantly, to violations, an important concept in the Western liberal human rights discourse, it further stresses the comparability of African concepts – in this case through their differentiation.

A final important discourse strand that forms part of the equality framework refers to relations between Africa and the West in a more immediate way. It aims, on the one hand, at a co-operation with the West (or the co-operation among all cultures and peoples) in the reformulation of a human rights concept. On the other hand, it stresses Africa's potential contribution and the importance and universal relevance of its concepts, making it a possible role model for the West.

This first argument in this context is the appeal for a cross-cultural dialogue in order to create a 'truly universal' concept of human rights, recognised globally. This is linked to a criticism of existing documents and a questioning of their legitimacy, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Had the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights been the outcome of cross-cultural dialogue, I believe that we would have had different documents from the present ones. (...) The aim of cross-cultural dialogue is not to uncover some underlying universal truth or a single destiny for mankind; it is to provide a patchwork of a document as a guide on the endless journeyless-journey of freedom.”

(Wingo 2009: 135)

At the beginning of the 1990s, the conviction about the necessity of such a cross-cultural dialogue has been exemplified by an anthology edited by An-Na'im and Deng, bearing the title *Human Rights in Africa – Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1990). In their introduction to the volume, the editors state that despite all the “cultural diversity and mixed motivations” of the authors, leading to a very heterogeneous accumulation of perspectives, “most of us seem to agree that the contextual cultural approach is the appropriate means by which to promote universal recognition of the concept of human rights” (An-Na'im/Deng 1990: 1). This “dialogue among civilizations” (Murithi 2011: 277) can, however, lead to at least two possible rationales behind the cross-cultural exchange involved, which are contradictory to a certain extent. One approach is a dialogue that aims at translating already established international human rights norms into concepts that are more appropriate for the respective 'culture' or context and that draw their “moral legitimacy” from “several sources” (Ghai 1989: 45, cited in Pityana 2002: 227), represented by Ghai in this quote:

“Such processes provide a basis for inter-cultural dialogues and for adjusting rights to the exigencies of different societies. But they provide for the balance to be struck in a principled way, with a measure of rationality, justification[,] and proportionality, within a framework of generally accepted values. In increasingly complex and globalising societies, such a regime of rights provides both a

universalising framework and the means of adjusting rights to local circumstances. It facilitates pluralism without compromising essential principles. Without such a binding framework, fair and peaceful co-existence of diverse peoples and cultures would be placed in dire jeopardy.” (Ghai 1989: 46; quoted in Pityana 2002: 228)

With his reference to a “framework of generally accepted values”, Ghai approximates the third, most radical interpretation of this argumentation strand, which aims at the re-interpretation and re-formulation of accepted human rights norm: the creation of a “new, legitimate narrative [that] should be a democratized one, which reflects values-producing and sustaining institutions, diverse cultures and circumstances that people in different corners of the world face” (Wingo 2009: 137). It is this third interpretation of the meaning of a cross-cultural dialogue that is found in what is termed the equality discourse here. It forms part of such a discourse through the emphasis of the equality among all involved “parties” in the dialogue, where Africa’s input is supposed to be equally valid as all the other contributions. It aims at “jettisoning regional ethnocentricities and developing bases and processes of norm setting that involve as much of the international community as possible” (Zezeza 2005c: 489).

Pityana argues that such a process is not only necessary to challenge the Western embedding of rights but also to allow for changing contexts of rights and accommodate the dynamic nature of rights. He thus combines a strategic argumentation with a more pragmatic one:

“It is evident (...) that rights, as part of the fabric of society, must similarly reflect the changing values, perceptions and power relations within and between different worlds. (...) What is required is the legitimising of all cultures as sources of rights. More importantly, rights – or understandings of them – change and vary; they are vibrant and dynamic. Having said all that, it must also be conceded that humanity best exists in a rights world. All human beings are bearers of rights.” (Pityana 2002: 227)

The last strand of the equality discourse is put forward explicitly by the

Africentric work of Cobbah, who states that “Westerners may indeed have a lot to learn from Africans” (Cobbah 1987: 310). He thus reverses the hegemonic power relations that are constructed upon the notion that it is Africa that has to learn from the West and contends that African concepts are equal in their value for societies worldwide. Such a discursive valorisation of Africa is criticised by Lawrance, who states that Cobbah’s “formulation serves to ensconce the romantic, communitarian past and entrenches the notion that rights are inherently western in conception and deployment. It offers no tangible framework for historical research” (Lawrance 2004: 40). The point here is, however, that it is not the aim of arguments as those put forward by Cobbah to offer any framework for historical research, but rather to question Africa’s role in the global human rights discourse. Cobbah does not write that ‘the rest of the world’ can learn from Africa but chooses to focus on ‘Westerners’ deliberately. His argument is thus directed towards this very West to maintain that what Africa has to offer is, the least, equally valid as what comes from the West.

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#### *THE RESISTANCE DISCOURSE*

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The African scholars’ resistance discourse on human rights in Africa is expressed through different variations of the demand to reconfigure global power relations and, particularly, to change Africa’s relationship with the West, which has been detrimental for Africa until now. This rather defensive argumentation evolves around three different understandings of human rights. One strand of the discourse sees a reversal/change of global power relations as the condition not only for a change of Africa’s global role, but for the implementation of human rights themselves in Africa. In a second strand, human rights are constructed as the instrument for this reversal of global power relations, for example through the claim for certain specific rights, such as the Right to Development or the Right to Self-determination. In a third line of argumentation, human rights themselves are seen as the weapon of the West, used to subjugate Africa as a global political actor. Mutua, for example, suggests that “the grand narrative of

human rights (...) keeps intact the hierarchical relationships between European and non-European populations” (Mutua 2001: 243). Finally, human rights are also understood as an appropriate means to improve Africa’s situation without any explicit reference to the West. The last two positions have in common that they stress that the solution for Africa’s problems can only come from Africa itself, opposing Western paternalism.

Africa is thus on the one hand constructed in a relative way, with the concept being bound to the history of imperialism and neo-colonialism, inextricably linked with the concept of the West. On the other hand, it is also defined through self-involvement and self-determination, for the sake of Africa itself rather than for the sake of a reconfiguration of global relations. Yet, also the second understanding is closely linked with the relationship between Africa and the West and involves the understanding of Africa as a relational concept.

In his article on human rights and self-reliance in Africa, Anikpo does not only establish a direct link between local settings and global power relations, but creates an equation between them, rendering the external forces responsible for local conditions. He argues that “no meaningful conditions of life can be achieved on the [African] continent, even at the individual level, as long as the continent remains under imperialist influence” (Anikpo 1990: 214, cited in Maluwa 1997: 65). In his discussion of different theoretical approaches to human rights in Africa, Maluwa adds that “a proper appreciation of the structural inequality endemic to the existing international system and inherent within the post-colonial State in the developing world is central to any analysis of the human rights problem in Africa” (Maluwa 1997: 66), as contended by whom he calls the ‘traditionalists’ and the ‘radical Marxist’ authors.

Ojo broadens the substance of this theoretical assumption by asserting its importance for ‘the ordinary people’, stating that “[t]he generality of Africans have come to regard colonialism and neocolonial arrangements as part of the root causes of their economic plight” (Ojo 1990: 117). He is hereby claiming to represent the perspective of ‘the Africans’, while he is emphasizing the relevance of the theoretical elaborations for the African people and stressing his own



argument. Similar to Anikpo, he links the global power relations to local conditions. Yet, contrary to Anikpo's determinist argumentation, in Ojo's account, the ordinary people have the agency to reflect on the causes for their situation and possess an awareness of possible solutions, as "[t]hey have consequently rejected the present international order" (Ojo 1990: 117). In granting different positions to 'the Africans', both authors also assign different roles to Africa itself. While in Anikpo's argumentation, Africa's global role hinges on the performance of external forces, making it a passive victim of Western imperialism, in Ojo's account, Africa is still victimised, yet aware of the circumstances and regaining a certain agency.

In contrast, Effeh, whose work can be largely located in the pragmatic discourse on human rights, refers to the ordinary Africans as "a remarkably self-reliant and resourceful people – a people quite capable of liberating themselves from economic misery if given the chance", yet he demands change to come from outside and turns to the help of the West to solve Africa's problems (Effeh 2005: n.pag.). What could be understood as an empowering conception of Africans and Africa is, again, made contingent on external factors. However, in Effeh's writing, it is not the external factors or the West that has to be changed but, instead, Africa should be changed with the help of the West. The comparison of these argumentations reveals how different the outcome of a statement of self-assertion can be, when used on the basis of different theoretical premises, leading to profoundly different outcomes according to the role assigned to Africa and its people.

Both Anikpo and Ojo link their charge of imperialism to the demand for certain human rights, which are constructed as crucial for the emancipation of the continent. Anikpo writes that the "African concept of human rights will make sense only in the collective context of people's rights or group rights as against individual rights in terms of ensuring [t]he right to development" (Anikpo 1990: 214, cited in Maluwa 1997: 65). Ojo, again claiming to represent the popular conviction, affirms that "[i]t is widely believed that the implementation of the economic rights would not only free them [i.e. the generality of Africans] from neo-colonial bondage but that it would improve their economic fortunes" (Ojo

1990: 117). Both authors concentrate on certain rights and extend the relevance of human rights an individual through a collective to a global level. Human rights become an instrument to emancipate from the West and to counter its global hegemony.

The afro-centric author Cobbah, whose seminal article on African values and the human rights debate is a crucial contribution to the discourse on human rights in Africa (Cobbah 1987), is among the most cited authors when it comes to cultural questions and references to cultural relativism. Contrary to some authors discussed before, Cobbah does not only refer to the external relationship between Africa and the West on a global level, but deals with what could be called 'Africa's inner West', namely a process of Westernization and it's meaning for an understanding of human rights in Africa. For him, a basic misconception in the human rights discourse on Africa is the attempt "to make Westerners out of Africans" (Cobbah 1987: 326). He turns against Western cultural and scientific hegemony, while acknowledging that "[t]here is no doubt that within African societies injustices of many types exist and human rights activists, both African and non-African, should be concerned about these injustices" (Cobbah 1987: 328). The element of resistance in his writing is thus not directed against human rights *per se* but rather against their Eurocentric epistemological foundation in Western academic and political discourse. In addressing human rights activists, he accepts human rights as the basis for social activism, while questioning 'the Western human rights concept' at the same time.

A comparable reference to the usefulness of human rights as an instrument of social activism is made by Ake, who argues that "the idea of human rights will become an asset of great value to radical social transformation" (Ake 1987: 89). Ake describes a twofold process, with human rights being both the means of transformation and the aim, as "[t]he realization of rights is best guaranteed by the power of those who enjoy the rights", whereby "what is needed is the empowerment by whatever means" (Ake 1987: 88). In his work, Ake explicitly rejects a Western hegemonic conceptualisation of human rights:

“The idea of human rights, or legal rights in general, presupposes a society which is atomized and individualistic, a society of endemic conflict. It presupposes a society of people conscious of their separateness and their particular interests and anxious to realize them. The legal right is a claim which the individual may make against other members of society, and simultaneously an obligation on the part of society to uphold this claim.” (Ake 1987: 83)

He declares the lack of relevance of such a concept of (legal) rights for African societies, by which he can be located in the adaptation discourse. However, it is not only the lack of relevance that is important for him. He opposes the structure of the (‘Western’) society that makes such a conceptualisation of rights possible, formulating not only an attack of the human rights concept put forward by Western authors and organizations but also adding a categorical critique of “atomized and individualized” societies “of endemic conflict”. Ake thereby rejects both the West as an implicit norm, brought forward through Eurocentric concepts of human rights, and the underlying Western prescriptions of how societies should work, i.e. these concepts’ universalist features. The West thereby gains a symbolic meaning by being constructed primarily as an oppressive power subjugating Africa. Africa itself is conceptualised both through the external distinction from the West – not only different from the West but opposed to the West – and through a discursive internal coalition of Africans. The latter is visible for example in the following quote:

“We Africans never had it so bad. The tragic consequences of our development strategies have finally come to us. Always oppressed by poverty and deprivation, our lives become harsher still with each passing day as real incomes continue to decline.” (Ake 1987: 85).

Against the backdrop of Ake’s affirmative argumentation when it comes to possible solutions in terms of social transformation, such a statement cannot be read as an expression of ‘Afro-pessimism’. Rather, it can be understood as an implicit reference to unequal power relations and as an alert to the role of the West in Africa’s situation, in other words, the West’s accountability. Such an interpretation can explain the seeming contradiction between the element of

self-accusation (“consequences of our development strategies”) and the charge of oppression, that is to say the accusation of external actors responsible for the oppression (“always oppressed by poverty and deprivation”). By pointing to development strategies that have their roots in Africa’s interaction with the West, and not for example to ‘failed leadership’, as other authors have done, Ake adverts to the global political economy of which development is a part.

The proclamation of certain concepts as African concepts is part of several of the discourses of the typology suggested in this study. In the writings belonging to the resistance discourse, this *Africanness* is emphasised in an indirect way through references to the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the reception of the genesis of the Charter. Ojo and Sesay, for example, point to the fact that during the discussions preceding the drafting of the Charter, “emphasis seemed to concentrate on ensuring that the final document was strictly ‘African’” (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 94). They quote the Report of the Secretary-General of the OAU on the Draft African Charter, which asserts that the drafters aimed at “show[ing] that African values and morals still have an important place in our societies” (cited in Ojo/Sesay 1986: 94).

Ojo explains this claim for *Africanness* within the OAU through a psychological process resulting from Africa’s history:

“African past had a visible psychological impact on the Africans. Since independence, there has been a very strong desire to emphasise the ‘Africanness,’ or to put an African imprint on whatever political or economic programs they embark upon.” (Ojo 1990: 117)

It is against this background, Ojo clarifies, that the drafters of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights aimed at making it particularly ‘African’. Again, this proclaimed Africanity served on the one hand as a distinction from others, as the OAU Secretary General “encouraged (...) [the experts drafting the Charter] to come out with a charter that is distinct from other conventions already adopted in other regions” (Ojo 1990: 117). On the other hand, again, it should unite and strengthen Africa itself, showing that it is able to come up with an initiative without (explicit) external intervention. Aidoo demonstrates this aspect by

highlighting that the African Charter “represents the most important African human rights initiative to date at the international level. (...) It codifies, for the first time in Africa and for Africans, state commitments devoid of any superpower influences or considerations” (Aidoo 1993: 710). The notion of the African Charter being written in the first place ‘for Africans’ is reflected also in D’Sa’s comment on the section on duties, which, as she says, is “reflecting African cultural values, [but] is probably not to be strictly regarded as capable of effective implementation but as a code of good conduct for all citizens of African countries” (D’Sa 1985: 77).

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### *THE PRAGMATIC DISCOURSE*

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As the label chosen for it already indicates, the pragmatic discourse aims at the implementation of human rights in Africa in an apparently pragmatic manner. While such a pragmatic approach is attended by an underlying assumption of objectivity and neutrality, the assumption put forward here is, however, that like every discourse, it entails (a) political position(s) that has a direct effect on the subjacent understandings of both Africa and human rights. This strand of the human rights discourse is preoccupied with questions of implementation and utility of human rights in Africa, including diagnoses of the human rights situation, recipes for improvement, and prognoses about the development of human rights in Africa.

In his article on human rights and democracy in Africa, Aidoo expresses succinctly what could be seen as the essence of the pragmatic discourse. He distinguishes his own position from earlier ‘radical’ writings, stating that the “radical tradition in social science (...) devoted much of its attention to theoretical critiques that were more concerned with a Eurocentric ideological agenda of capitalism versus socialism than with understanding what was actually happening on the ground in Africa” (Aidoo 1993: 704). If we leave aside the controversy between capitalism and socialism as an issue that was relevant mainly because of historical circumstances, it is remarkable that Aidoo

dissociates himself from “theoretical critiques” and the preoccupation with a “Eurocentric ideological agenda”, breaking down the necessity of human rights to things “actually happening on the ground” – suggesting that what is happening is clearly identifiable, understandable, not necessary to theorise upon, not even linked to theory, and, all in all, not contested.

The pragmatic discourse is thus characterised by an unambiguousness or decidedness in argumentation that is peculiarly evaluative and empirical. Against this backdrop, Africa is seen as “a neophyte within the human rights community” – an expression used by Ilesanmi to describe the perspectives of international (i.e. Western?) analysts, which in this case seems pertinent to convey the underpinning of the (African) pragmatic discourse as well (Ilesanmi 1995: 302). The major issues in the discourse also seem to resonate with concerns that are dominant in Western discourses on human rights in Africa, ranging from the failure of African leaders (being despots) to the effectivity of the African human rights system. An overarching belief in the utility of human rights to ‘save’ the continent is predominant, while the ‘human rights situation’ in Africa is being represented mainly in terms of deficiency and failure<sup>97</sup>.

Ojo and Sesay, for example, write in 1986, that the “African record in the protection and promotion of human rights is appalling” (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 89). They provide us with a list of factors that they regard as responsible for such a situation, based on an evaluative and empirical approach, combining historical, cultural, political, and social explanations. All factors listed are of endogenous nature, with political aspects (touching upon questions of governance and democracy) receiving major emphasis: (a) the emergence of one-party states after independence, (b) state repression and violence leading to values hindering the enjoyment of human rights, (c) human rights violations as a result of coups or attempted coups. The remaining two factors are also endogenous, yet focusing on the level of society more directly: (d) human rights infringement stemming out of “ethnic and religious differences” and (e) a limited awareness of rights on

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<sup>97</sup> The failure aspect is, however, not as emphatically developed as in the development discourse, therefore, it seems not useful to speak of a separate ‘failure discourse’ with respect to human rights.

the side of the majority of the African population, adding that while “most Africans feel moral aversion to cases of human rights violation”, many “resort to self-help which ultimately results in the violation of the rights of more citizens” (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 89-91).

It is thus remarkable that Ojo and Sesay relate their outline of the African human rights record merely to processes taking place in Africa and don't take into consideration any global processes or power structures. Western countries are mentioned twice (once indirectly, once directly), being ascribed the role of a (indirect and direct) role model for Africa (ibid.). When the authors assert that the post-colonial multiparty systems were inherited from the countries' colonial past (and their dismantling led to human rights violations through the establishment of one-party systems), the former colonial powers are seen solely as devisors of positively connoted political structures (cf. Ojo/Sesay 1986: 89). Moreover, in their reference to state repression and violence in Africa, the authors not only point to subsequent human rights violations but bring in the question of (again, positively connoted) values being impeded as a result. These values, “such as freedom of association, freedom of the press, free and regular elections and the right to life and property”, are “enshrined in most Western Constitutions”, while in Africa they are “at best luxuries that are difficult to come by” (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 90). The West is taken into consideration solely as the role model, the norm against which Africa's deviance and failure is measured. Its role or responsibility regarding any kind of human rights violations in Africa is not being brought up as an issue.

In a later passage, the role of an initiator of (positive) change joins the authors' list of the West's positive attainments. The emerging interest in human rights issues within the OAU since 1979 is explained as “to a large extent externally induced”, being the effect of Western policies of aid conditionality in the beginning of the 1980s and Western critiques of human rights violations in Africa and elsewhere as a consequence of the ‘human rights crusade’ initiated by President Jimmy Carter (cf. Ojo/Sesay 1986: 92).

However, the role of African leaders in Africa's human rights performance since

independence constitutes one of the leitmotifs in the pragmatic discourse. It is also the one theme most closely linked to Western dominant discourses on human rights in Africa, not only due to the relevance of the issue itself but also through the composition of the surrounding discourse. African leaders in this understanding are a peculiarly oppressive and manipulative species whose role concerning human rights is essentially destructive and impeding any positive development.

In this context, the first generation of leaders after independence seems to have laid the grounds for later failures of leadership. Having been the bearers of all the hopes of liberation, the “inheritance elite” proved to be overchallenged with the colonial heritage and the subsequent “toxification of power” (Udombana 2002: 1218), or as Ojo writes:

“A good number of these leaders, who themselves suffered deprivations of their individual rights in the hands of the colonizers, were fascinated by the ruthless efficacy of the colonial practice which they imbibed.” (Ojo 1990: 116)

The explanation for the rights related failure of the leaders here seems to be twofold: on the one hand, there was an easy opportunity to gain power, as Ojo puts it bluntly in the fore-cited quote. On the other hand, the particular post-independence challenges are argued to have created a similar situation in Africa – unstable states being independent mainly on paper:

“The concerns of the leaders were therefore focused less on human rights than on forgoing nation-states out of the disparate conglomerates of ethnic, religious and geographical entities that constitute each state.” (ibid.)

Thus, the role of African leaders in the post-independence account of human rights is ascribed firstly to personal failure that becomes a collective failure of a whole generation of leaders and, secondly, to historical conditions, which led to questionable albeit comprehensible priorities.

In this picture, Africa as a historical concept is affected by the common history of



colonialism, decolonization and independence, and structural necessities that were a consequence of those factors (e.g. nation-building). As a result, in what could be termed the political line of argumentation, post-independence Africa is characterised by a power vacuum collectively occupied by *African* leaders not able to fulfil the requirements of proper leadership. It is already in this period after independence and its reflection in scholarly writings that rulers and leaders in Africa are more often than not referred to as *African leaders*, with the expression becoming more a technical term than a category of description or geographical location and *African* becoming an attribution involving certain negative qualities. It therefore often seems enough to talk about *African leaders*, instead of talking about a *certain type or group* of African leaders.

While the evaluation of the post-independence generation of leaders is measured by the missing fruits of liberation and their performance therefore understood in terms of betrayal and disappointment, later generations and contemporary leaders are characterised in a less emotional way in the pragmatic discourse. However, the negative characterization of the collective of African leaders is being preserved.

In a recent article, Effeh examines various theoretical explanations for “Africa’s misery” and grounds his analysis on a justified generalization of (human rights in) Africa, building on “certain common features that have to come to define much of the region” (Effeh 2005: n.pag.). These are empirically argued and construct a generalised Africa mainly in terms of political performance. Effeh writes, in particular, that

“[m]any of its countries, for example, have either experienced fratricidal armed conflict of some kind in their post-colonial history, or are still enmeshed in one. Almost without exception, they have, at some stage, been ruled by obnoxious regimes of one description or another – from oneparty or military dictatorships, to what are, in essence, criminal gangs operating under the legitimacy of statehood – and in some cases, all of these combined. Except for very few exceptions, (...) no government within the region is willing or able to

create the basic institutional and infrastructural capacity necessary for supporting any level of sustained economic activity, and by extension, the realization of basic economic, social and cultural rights.” (ibid.)

In a subsequent examination of theories that explain “Africa’s inability to develop”, the author takes a position clearly founded in what is called the pragmatic discourse here, using empirical arguments to counter the theories and eventually to trace back all maldevelopments to the failure of leadership on the African continent. He examines discourses on “Africa as a victim of history and culture”, “Africa as a victim of Berlin” (i.e. the partitioning of the continent in 1885 by the colonial powers), the “economic dependency thesis” and “Africa as a casualty of the global economic regime”, all of which he rejects as inappropriate and as merely distracting from the very responsibility that African leaders’ have for “Africa’s misery”, with “the so-called new breed of leaders (...) in no way different from their immediate post-independence contemporaries (...) [but even] in many ways worse” (Effe 2005: n.pag.).

Effe devotes much space to prove the “the catastrophic failure of leadership”, stating, however, that Africa is by no means unique in this respect, because “elitist exploitation is not a peculiarly African problem”, “[n]either are dictatorial regimes an African invention”, and “[e]ven poverty itself is evidently not a uniquely African experience” (ibid.). He concludes that the “African experience” is instead unique due to a combination of internal and external factors, whereby it is again the “African rulers’ determination to preserve the status quo”, which matters internally. Interestingly, also the external dimension leads back to the problem of African leaders, being occupied by Western rulers who readily see “even the most atrocious among” African rulers as “partners” “in the development of the continent” (ibid.).

For Effe, various aspects and effects of autocratic rule are determining for or typical of Africa as a political entity. While the antagonists of the ‘African leaders’ are Western governments and leaders, ‘ordinary Africans’ are given a rather passive, victimised role. They have to face the conditions created by the rulers, experiencing their “contemptuous disregard for the[ir] basic needs and

interests” (Effeh 2005: n.pag.). The author states, for example, that “[a]rmed conflicts have become something that ordinary Africans must learn to live with” (ibid.) – suggesting not only that armed conflicts are a common feature of Africa as a whole, but also that “ordinary Africans” do not even react, they merely bear the conditions. The paralysis of the population is pictured as an instrument of the rulers, with poverty becoming “an effective means of mass disempowerment by rulers” (ibid.), while “a combination of illiteracy, poverty, hunger, homelessness[,] and disease has rendered its [i.e. Africa’s] people simply incapable of demanding political and economic change” (ibid.). Yet, while ordinary Africans are “a remarkably self-reliant and resourceful people”, “quite capable of liberating themselves from economic misery if given the chance”, it is unlikely that they would get the chance any soon, Effeh forecasts (ibid.). The author thus does ascribe some potential to people themselves, makes it, however, depending on outer opportunities, which are to be created by more powerful sources that have to ‘give the people a chance’. This again makes it necessary to intervene from outside, preferably from the side of the West, mainly with the use of (aid) conditionality and legal instruments, in order to create a basis for people’s empowerment and enjoyment of human rights:

“To be sure, any permanent solution to Africa’s problems will have to come from Africa; this, if nothing else, is the very essence of the right to self-determination. However, given how disempowered many of its people have become, this cannot be a practical possibility in short term. Neither can the world afford to wait for long-term solutions to emerge, given the urgency of the situation. The international community cannot therefore afford to abandon millions of helpless people to the whims of rulers who have proved themselves so instinctively contemptuous of their basic needs, and totally insensitive to their suffering.” (Effeh 2005: n.pag.)

In suggesting that an ultimate solution of “Africa’s problems” have to come from Africa, Effeh seems to protect his argumentation from critique. The “African solution” serves as a rhetorical additive and remains undiscussed. Instead, he focuses on mainly legal instruments that could ensure an effective external

(read: Western) intervention aiming at antagonizing “leadership [that] constitutes the obstacle to the realization of human rights in Africa” (Effe 2005: n.pag.). He stresses, that “concerted political pressure”, “essentially economic measure” and “targeted sanctions” are necessary amongst other strategies, because “the necessary change would have to be initiated from outside the region” (ibid.). His argumentation here correlates with certain Western discourses on ‘good governance’ that conceptualise external intervention as a necessary prerequisite, while, albeit rhetorically, at the same time acknowledge the importance of internal strategies and reforms. In Effe’s argumentation, Africa needs human rights first of all to avoid bad leadership. He thereby emphasises civil and political rights as instruments to ensure economic and social rights, while the role of the West is incontestable (or criticised merely with reference to the treatment of despots) and global power structures remain unquestioned. The West regains the moral authority to intervene and judge developments taking place in Africa, while Africa is constructed as a paralyzed continent, not yet capable of taking care of herself. The ostensible concept of Africa is one of a political and geographical space, yet the strategies outlined suggest that this concept is not as neutral as the author might want to suggest.

While for Effe (2005), what he perceives as an overarching passivity of the people is one of the factors making him ask for external intervention, other authors, who also contribute to the pragmatic discourse, do not only have different solutions to offer, but also grant ‘ordinary people’ a different role. For instance, Ojo observes an increase in people’s interest in and awareness of human rights since the 1980s (Ojo 1990: 115). Aidoo, in turn, takes ‘people’ as a twofold departure for his conception of human rights. He argues, firstly, that African human rights scholars, activists, and organizations have to understand “how people themselves are working for their rights” and “what problems and challenges they face” (Aidoo 1993: 713), thus combining an empowering argument (that links his argumentation with the resistance discourse to a certain degree) with a procedural argument that aims at a more useful and holistic implementation of human rights:

“For example, working to protect and defend the civil and political rights of refugees ought also to include activities that would enhance their food security. Working with rural dwellers to enhance their food security also ought to include addressing issues such as land rights, security of tenure, and their capacity to defend their rights through existing legal means.” (Aidoo 1993: 712)

Secondly, he argues that it is necessary to „move from thematic conceptions and categories of human rights (...) to social conceptions and categories that focus more on the rights of vulnerable individuals, groups and collectives” (Aidoo 1993: 714). Thereby, he suggests that human rights in Africa need first of all a social relevance, while he, nevertheless, understands Africa as a descriptive term naming a geographic and political entity.

Another strand of the pragmatic discourse dealing with the prominent and problematic issue of “African leaders” refers not only to their impairing role for human rights in general but perceives their engagement in human rights as a mere political fallacy. Ojo argues that the leaders’ preoccupation with human rights, particularly in connection with traditional concepts and cultural issues, instrumentalises human rights for political expediency (Ojo 1990: 122). It seems that when the leaders are perceived to have an active role with regard to human rights within the discourse, it is mainly restrained to manipulation and misuse of their leadership with a subsequent abuse of human rights as a concept or, more directly, through human rights violations.

As Effeh writes, “the very notion of democracy itself [is] yet another instrument in the arsenals of the region’s merciless despots” (Effeh 2005: n.pag.). With respect to human rights, Ojo states that “African leaders have conceived human rights in its broadest sense, to encompass civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights, as well as collective and peoples’ rights” out of political expediency (Ojo 1990: 122-123). Effeh supports this view by adding the notion of a ‘false’ cultural relativism, an issue not discussed by Ojo. He argues that “many African rulers have often sought to justify their human rights violations by appealing to a perverse notion of what advocates often describe as ‘cultural relativism’ (...) invoking certain alluring (if ill-defined) notions such as ‘African

culture', 'African values', or 'African civilization'" (Effe 2005: n.pag.). While some authors refer to these supposedly African values or entities in order to strengthen African unity and uphold the role of Africa globally – out of strategic reasons, as I argue elsewhere –, Effe rejects any notion of 'Africity' as an instrument of manipulation and deception. Similarly, Ilesanmi argues that the "[h]uman rights language faces the danger of being stripped of its moral force in Africa under the pretext of cultural renaissance or development exigencies". He adds that "[t]he language of rights currently functions in Africa as a mere rhetorical appendage to the more important political agenda of hegemony, national security, and trade" (Ilesanmi 1995: 316). In like manner, Rukokoo asserts that "it becomes safer for leaders (...) to resist the implementation of human rights (...) because if they do [support human rights], they open themselves to challenge by those demanding human rights" (Rukokoo 2010: 27).

The discussion on human rights strategies of African leaders thus comprises two issues: first, an interpretation of the (supposed) general rejection of human rights by leaders and second, their preference of collective rights at the expense of individual rights. Both are explained through opportunism and political expediency. The attitude of the leaders is given a prominent place in the debates on human rights in Africa, especially in the pragmatic discourse discussed here. Yet, the theme at stake is not the only aspect common in the contributions analysed. They also refer to a similar understanding of human rights, praised by Rukokoo as a "tool of measuring civilised behaviour and a positive way of realising and fulfilling human potential" (Rukokoo 2010: 26). The necessity of an implementation of human rights on the basis of their universal nature and, accordingly, the removal of all obstacles in this respect, is an axiom in the writings. It is then the similarity of the obstacles with respect to leadership that unites Africa and hinders the peoples' enjoyment of human rights. Africa constitutes a political space, where the negative side of authority is receiving much attention.

As Ojo and Sesay put it, "there is nothing to discourage a determined African leader from obstructing the Commission's work" (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 100). In examining the role of African leaders in the Organization of African Unity and

their relations with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, they create a link to another important issue, African human rights instruments and bodies. In the 1980s, reflections on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, its efficacy and implementability, played an important role in the African human rights discourse. Most of these reflections can be located in the pragmatic discourse, as they clearly aim at implementing human rights in the most efficient way, including discussions of shortcomings of the Banjul Charter, whereby they rely mainly on a legal concept of human rights.

The Banjul Charter has been praised as an "important landmark in the protection and promotion of human rights on the African continent" (D'Sa 1985: 72; see also Ojo/Sesay 1986: 101), again leading to an understating of Africa as the political and geographical space where certain developments should be enforced. Yet, many authors concentrate on the deficits of the Charter, its legal shortcomings, and the lack of enforcement power. The shortcomings are discussed also through comparisons with other declarations. D'Sa, for example, draws the comparison with the European and US-American conventions, pointing out similarities, but also drawing on the Western systems as standards against which the African human rights system has to be measured (D'Sa 1985: 75). Similarly, Ojo and Sesay write that the enforcement mechanisms of the African Charter are "a poor contrast to the practice of the European system for the protection of human rights which has a procedure for the judicial resolution of human rights violations" (Ojo/Sesay 1986: 96).

Finally, one last mode of argumentation can be related to the pragmatic discourse. Here, Africa seems to be itself the obstacle to its enjoyment of human rights. This can be noted when Tlakula writes that the "African continent [is] characterized by civil strife, poverty, famine, disease, and other evils", which "reduce the chances of national development and respect for human rights" (Tlakula 2004: 119). The author summarises the human rights understanding of the pragmatic discourse succinctly by making clear that human rights constitute the desired end, rather than the means, of political processes. When poverty "breeds social ills such as crime, violence, displacement, and so on" (ibid.), the poor are constructed as a threat of the social order, which is represented by

human rights in the discourse. At the same time, she also draws a link between (here: sustainable human) development and human rights, with human rights becoming the aim of development:

“If Africa is serious about promoting human rights in the continent then the challenge we are faced with in the new century is to create a climate conducive to sustainable human development because development increases the chances for respect and observance of human rights.” (ibid)

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### *THE ADAPTATION DISCOURSE*

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If the message of the pragmatic discourse is that Africa has to change in order to incorporate human rights, in the adaptation discourse, the exact opposite forms the basis for the involved argumentations. The adaptation discourse thus centers on the conviction that human rights as both a concept and as practice have to be adapted to the African context because within Africa, the realities are different from those ones in the West that served as a basis for the establishment of the dominant human rights paradigm. Cobbah, for example, suggests that it is necessary to consider the centrality of the extended family in African communities and, as a consequence, “it is imperative to seek to explore the implications of this reality rather than attempt to obscure the reality through conceptual analyses that seek to superimpose Western-derived individualistic paradigms” (Cobbah 1987: 321). In this sense, one variation of the adaptation discourse is explicitly located in the communitarist school of thought, which argues against individualism and, in this sense, relates to African notions of human dignity, which are seen to “emphasise groupness, sameness, and commonality” and delineate a particular “African worldview” (Cobbah 1987: 320). On a more general note, Maluwa argues that “[e]ach constitution must reflect the particular society for which it has been designed: its history, economy, traditions, culture and political ideology, among other factors” (Maluwa 1997: 70). In his relativist argument, Maluwa summarises those factors that are most



often used as an foundation for the adaptation of human rights to the African context or, to “African society”, as Mwenda (2000: n.pag.) suggests: common history, similar economic structure or similar position in the global economy, similar and unique tradition(s) and culture(s), and a common ideological or political background (cf. Maluwa 1997: 70).

For Ake, there is generally “not enough concern for the historical conditions in which human rights can actually be realized” (Ake 1987: 83). In the context of Africa, the necessary condition that has to be taken into consideration is its “long (we might well talk of permanent) crisis”, which is a consequence of political and economic factors (Ake 1987: 85). In his argumentation, Ake emphasises the common ‘destiny’ of Africans and positions himself as part of this destiny, as part of an encompassing African ‘we’ that has been “[a]lways oppressed by poverty and deprivation, our lives become harsher still with each passing day as real incomes continue to decline” (ibid.). It is within this construction of an African self that Ake links the argument of relevance or adaptation to Africa’s peculiar conditions with power relations, whereby he locates the collective African self in the global power structure. The African collective is idealised and set in opposition to the Western other, as Ake states that “[w]e assume harmony, not divergence of interests, competition and conflict; we are more inclined to think of our obligations to other members of our society rather than our claims against them” (Ake 1987: 83). Later he adds that “[o]ur people still think largely in terms of collective rights and express their commitment to it constantly in their behaviour” (Ake 1987: 87, emphasis added), linking the present to a collective African past. Similarly, Okoye constructs a harmonious African collective and positions himself as part of it:

*“For us in Africa, the welfare of the African community has always been supreme although (...) we did not dispose of the rights of citizens in an arbitrary fashion (...). [In traditional African culture(s), there was] no contradiction between personal and communal interest and we accepted that both were dependent on each other.” (Okoye 1987, cited in Ojo 1990: 120, emphasis added)*

In this context, Cobbah similarly draws upon the notion of an “African worldview” or “the worldview of African culture” (Cobbah 1987: 324). He suggests that

“African communalism is more than a mere lifestyle. It is a worldview. (...) The African worldview places the individual within the continuum of the dead, the living, and the yet unborn. It is a worldview of group solidarity and collective responsibility. (...) This worldview is for all intents and purposes as valid as the European theories of individualism and the social contract.” (Cobbah 1987: 322)

With his affirmation of the validity of what he sees to be the African worldview, Cobbah offers a link between the adaptation discourse and the equality discourse discussed above. He, however, suggests that turning to the African worldview is the only possibility to build a “more solid foundation for modern human rights” (Cobbah 1987: 318).

The other side of the valorisation of African values and societies is, at times, the rejection of Western values and what is seen as a Western societal structure, providing a link to yet another variation of the human rights discourse, the resistance discourse. Ake, again, is particularly strong in this respect, linking the rejection of particular features of Western societies with the rejection of human rights in the way they stem from these very societies, even if (or even more when) they are stated as universal. He asserts the following:

“I am in no position to say with confidence why Africa has not taken so much interest in human rights but I see good reasons why she should not have done so. (...) The idea of human rights (...) presupposes a society which is atomized and individualistic, a society of endemic conflict. It presupposes a society of people conscious of their separateness and their particular interests and anxious to realize them.” (Ake 1987: 83)

Just like Ake and Cobbah, Wingo relates his argument to a collective, but contrary to the two authors above who create an imaginary collective of Africans, he turns

to his community of origin to suggest that individualised conceptions of rights do not have any relevance in a society where people have to rely on their own community to provide for security and support:

“For us [in the community], human rights started with the right to be helped, and that is why an ululation [seeking for help] would have gotten a response (...) in a well-ordered communalistic African indigenous polity.” (Wingo 2009: 137)

Wingo suggests that in the West, governments are the ones to respond to urgent calls, whereby they seem to “produce individuals who, in an important sense, are not comfortable with the idea of a *community*” (Wingo 2009: 121, original emphasis). Contrary to that, “for an average African who lives with (or perhaps in spite of) her non-responsive, dysfunctional government, a familial network is a far surer measure of wealth, guarantor of survival, and protector of freedom than is government-issued currency” (Wingo 2009: 121). The author thus simultaneously demands to broaden the concept of human rights and freedom beyond individualist understandings – calling for a differentiation between “episodic” or “personal” freedom and “relational freedom” (Wingo 2009: 125) – and reifies what he sees is the contextual society of ‘the average African’ as the necessary and, at the same time, valuable context. He warns that “Western-trained political philosophers in search of the idea of freedom in non-Western cultures conflate personal freedom with the concept of freedom, as well as individual rights with the concept of right – or else they risk seeing nothing beyond the Western conception at all” (Wingo 2009: 127). Human rights as individual rights thus cannot be simply transferred “to Africa, *the circumstances of which are vastly different from those that produced and have sustained the Western conception*” (ibid., emphasis added).

Ilesanmi extends the notion of African particularity to augment conceptualisations of human rights in order to reflect not only “the intrinsic worth of the human person”, but also “the historicity of human experience” (Ilesanmi 1995: 296). In arguing against narrowly relativist positions, he suggests that variability in thinking about moral choices does not lead to “incommensurability” of different experiences and notions. In this sense, African

concepts can serve to broaden Western notions, which is an argument found also in the equality discourse discussed above. Similarly, Appiagyeyi-Atua examines the concept of civil society and suggests that in order “to be beneficial to African and other less industrialised states, it needs to be structured on the lines of the traditional African political systems”, for only through such an extension, Africans will be afforded “the opportunity to attain holistic, sustainable and alternative forms of development” that do not reflect exclusively Northern values (Appiagyeyi-Atua 2002: 20). Likewise, Mutua argues that the “transplantation of the narrow formulation of Western Liberalism cannot adequately respond to the historical reality and the political and social needs of Africa” (Mutua 1995: 341).

Thus, the concept of African values that is extensively called upon to allow for a re-consideration of human rights is important in the adaptation discourse not only because these values are ‘African’ and different from what are seen to be ‘Western values’ but, at the same time, because they more closely reflect the societal conditions that are understood to be prevailing in Africa. Again, the most important feature of African societies is their “communalistic” character, as historically, “political institutions were developed in response to harsh environments that required individuals and groups to band together for survival”, and roles of individuals have become interdependent (Wingo 2009: 125). As outlined above, this “unique importance of the group in African societies” has also formed the distinct character of the Banjul Charter (Diagne 2009: 10). At the same time, the historicity of this aspect tends to be over-emphasised in the discourse and fixated not only as the predominant factor that needs to lead to an adaptation of human rights but as the one factor that has not changed over time, whereby structural changes in societies are side-lined and the latter homogenised. Ojo, for example, suggests:

“Things have not much changed in Africa. (...) [Africans] therefore still think largely in terms of collective rights. (...) [T]he community’s interests in traditional society *were always supreme*, although these were thought to be always in harmony with individual interests.” (Ojo 1990: 120)

Interestingly, Ojo argues here that the collectivist character did not exclude the consideration of individual interests – a point rarely referred to in rejections of the communitarian school.

Another strand of the adaptation argument deals explicitly with human rights practice. For example, Ojo states that Africans are not “totally opposed to the internationalization of the promotion and protection of human rights. But (...) they are more particularly concerned with the material scope and the degree of enforcement of such institutionalized rights” (Ojo 1990: 118). The implementation of norms is thus set to be dependent on the context. This is also to be linked with the understanding of violations of human rights, whereby the concept of violations is not necessarily questioned, but rather the underlying reasons for violations are emphasised (instead of mere accusations). Thus, according to Okoth-Ogendo,

“the assessment [of human rights in Africa] must go beyond what has become the stock-in-trade of Western human rights activism concerning Africa, namely, the endless recital of civil and political rights violations with very little appreciation of the material conditions under which these occur. (...) If we are to put the human rights situation in Africa in its proper perspective, it is important that rights violations be seen as indicators of a deeper and more basic malaise. Although part of that malaise is clearly political, or related to the problem of governance, its epicenter is developmental. From this more widespread malaise, best described in material terms, stems what many now regard as Africa’s chronic inabilities to attain an acceptable level of performance in human rights demands broadly conceived.” (Okoth-Ogendo 1993: 82)

In his discussion of Akan conceptions of rights, Wiredu suggests that one of the most important challenges in practice is the merging of human rights with particular contexts:

“How to devise a system of politics that, while being responsive to the developments of the modern world, will reflect the best traditional

thinking about human rights (and other values) is one of the profoundest challenges facing modern Africans. A good beginning is to become informed about traditional life and thought.” (Wiredu 1990: 260)

Traditional thinking is thus to be evaluated according to its usefulness in order to prepare the grounds for significant implementation. Similarly, Deng views culture to be a decisive factor for any meaningful local human rights practice, which is, at the same time, compatible with the conviction that human rights are a universal concept (i.e. they cannot be seen as peculiarly Western):

“To argue for the principle of universality is not to deny the significance of the cultural context for the definition, the scope, and the degree of protection of human rights. In a world that is paradoxically shrinking and proliferating at the same time, it is by seeing human rights concretely manifested in a particular context that we can fully appreciate their form and content in a comparative framework. To understand the diversity of the cultural contexts and their relevance to the conceptualisation and protection of human rights is to enhance prospects for cross-cultural enrichment in defending and promoting human rights.” (Deng 1990: 261)

Ugochukwu adds that in spite of various studies that show how human rights norms constituted a part of pre-colonial African societies, “this is not reflected in contemporary practice” (Ugochukwu 2010: 1). Instead of turning to “largely borrowed human rights norms”, human rights documents at the national level need to be “Africanized” (ibid.). Ugochukwu refers to An-Na’im to support his claim that local capacity needs to lay the grounds for any improvement of human rights conditions in Africa, stating that “such efforts must build on what actually exists on the ground because attempting to impose norms and models developed elsewhere is both objectionable as a colonial exercise in cultural imperialism, and unlikely to be workable in a sustainable manner in practice” (An-Na’im 2003: 3, cited in Ugochukwu 2010: 2). A similar argument is drawn upon with regard to procedural questions, when, for example, Ojo refers to Okoye, who has argued

that “the African tradition prefers compromise to forcing a decision in favor of one side” (Ojo 1990: 118).

Rukokoo adds that for the particular case of poverty reduction in Africa, human rights are a valuable source, but the sheer necessity to turn to these norms has historical reasons, as “in traditional Africa, [the relationship between human rights and development] (...) was recognised and responded to through communal social security mechanisms but this has been turn tailing under the forces of globalisation, modernisation and capitalism” (Rukokoo 2010: 30). In this sense, human rights are utilised in a particular African context, where the emphasis needs to be on economic and social rights due to historically determined conditions (ibid.).

Similarly, the understanding of a domestication of human rights constitutes another argument in the adaptation discourse. Ake, for example, states:

“I do not see how we can mobilize the African masses or the intelligentsia (...) by accepting uncritically the Western notion of human rights. We have to domesticate it, recreate it in the light of African conditions.” (Ake 1987: 85)

While in the quote above, Ake is widely rejecting the Western human rights concept, Mwenda argues for a combination of Western and African elements, whereby he refers to ‘Western capitalist values’:

“There are elements which are progressive in both the traditional African set-up and the Western capitalist system. What is important therefore is to identify and rationally stitch together into one fabric, and in a pragmatic way, such progressive-looking constitutional elements.” (Mwenda 2000: n.pag.)

Likewise, Ojo suggests that the “importance of culture and tradition has been reinforced by the African concern to show that they have something distinctly African to offer” (Ojo 1990: 119). Thus, the ‘adaptation’ of human rights in the adaptation discourse encompasses diverse understandings of adaptation: the adaptation of human rights practice to local contexts, the adaptation of a

Western notion of human rights to African thinking, and the creation of new concepts informed by what are suggested to be positive values from both African and Western traditions (which is an element found also in the equality discourse).

A final important argument in the adaptation discourse relates this 'domestication' of rights to the question of priorities. Arguing against the indivisibility of human rights, which implies that all human rights are equal in value, within the African context, some authors argue that out of existential reasons, there is an undeniable need for the prioritization of particular rights. Thus, Ake, for example, writes:

“The Western notion of human rights stresses rights which are not very interesting in the context of African realities. (...) The appeal of these rights is sociologically specific. They appeal to people with a full stomach who can now afford to pursue the more esoteric aspects of self-fulfillment. The vast majority of our people are not in this position. They are facing the struggle for existence in its brutal immediacy. (...) They have little interest in choice for there is no choice in ignorance. There is no freedom for hungry people, or those eternally oppressed by disease.” (Ake 1987: 83)

Linked to Ake's claim, Maluwa asserts that the scholarship on rights in Africa “has generally been about the relevance of the first generation of human rights” (Maluwa 1997: 63). In this context, the drafters of the Banjul Charter “warned that civil and political rights may have to suffer until they can satisfy economic, social and cultural rights” (Ojo 1990: 116). Furthermore, that human rights have to be focused on particular aspects of African realities and thus serve a special purpose with respect to the continent is suggested by Odinkalu, who writes that “realizing human rights in Africa is an economic and political project of eliminating poverty, disease and their adverse consequences and liberating the citizens and inhabitants of the continent to realize their fullest potential” (Odinkalu 2003: 3).



## **DEVELOPMENT FOR/IN/WITHOUT/AGAINST/WITH AFRICA**

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The discourse on development and Africa evolves around a seemingly apparent consensus: Africa definitely “has a problem” and this problem has grown over the last decades (even if it might have been smaller in the past, for example after independence). This is, however, the sole common denominator of the different positions in the discourse. Already the obvious questions that follow, namely what exactly this problem is, and whether it equates to a “lack of development” (and, accordingly, whether development is the suitable cure) lead to a broad set of contradicting answers. Furthermore, of course, even when there is an agreement on the necessity of development for Africa, many conflicting understandings and implications of development can be found.

Similar to the discourse on human rights and Africa, the relationship between the West and Africa plays a crucial role for the structure of the African development discourse. The different positions involve disparate relations between Africa and the rest of the world generally, while the West features prominently as an actor (as a point of reference or an opponent) in the discourse. Five basic ways of reasoning can be identified as Africa-related threads of the African development discourse: (1) the failure discourse, (2) the damage discourse, (3) the pragmatic discourse, and (4) the emancipatory discourse (see figure 3). These strands differ in the aims that they set for Africa and, while all of them aim at a transformation of the present situation, both the direction to which Africa has to move and the aim of the change are conceptualised differently in each case. Equally, the concept of development and the purpose that development has (or is supposed to have) varies.

In the *emancipatory discourse*, Africa is understood as being kept down by the West. The aim of the desired transformation is Africa’s liberation from the West, but also its appreciation by the rest of the world. Development is understood in both normative and descriptive terms. While it is a harmful means of control and oppression by the West, normatively it can also mean true emancipation and be

the outcome of change. Africa wants to transform itself on its own terms, without the influence or dictate of the West. The latter is seen as an enemy, an exploiter or an offender and perpetrator of inequality. Africa wants what it deserves, be it its rightful place in a just world or meaningful development. While it has been a victim of the West, it doesn't want alms or continuing manipulation.

The *utilitarian discourse* stresses the usefulness of development for Africa. It aims at keeping up with the West and concentrates on pragmatic diagnoses and solutions. The discourse is based on the premise that Africa lags behind the West, which includes elements of inferiority and also a concept of backwardness. While development constitutes a legitimate desirable goal and serves the benefit of all, Africa is supposed to remorsefully acknowledge what went wrong in the past and "just develop". Normatively, Africa has to develop in harmony with the West and move into the same direction as the latter. In the descriptive part of the argumentation, Africa is underdeveloped (or un-developed) and plunging into ruin.

The aim of the *paternalistic discourse* is to make Africa finally "grow up". The West is given the role of the parent, who supports Africa on the way to parenthood. While Africa is moving away from the West at present, it is supposed to get closer. The West is the facilitator of development, a role model, a humble partner on the way to improvement. It acknowledges its past as a coloniser and offender, while it wants to be on eye level with Africa now. Africa's independence is conceptualised not in terms of liberation but rather in terms of its maturation. Development does both; it harms the maturation process (because it keeps Africa dependent) and benefits Africa, because it finally allows it to become more similar to the West. The normative dimension - how Africa is supposed to become - is in the foreground.

The *deterministic discourse*, finally, also aims at making Africa move closer to the West. At present, the situation of Africa is clearly deteriorating. The discourse focuses on the diagnosis of what is going wrong. Africa has to change, but it is being incorrigible and at times stubborn. The West is again the role model and

the touchstone of development. Africa not only has to change that is to develop, it is also necessary that for her to change to be able to develop at all. Development can be harmful, because it maintains Africa's stubbornness, but it is also the right cure.

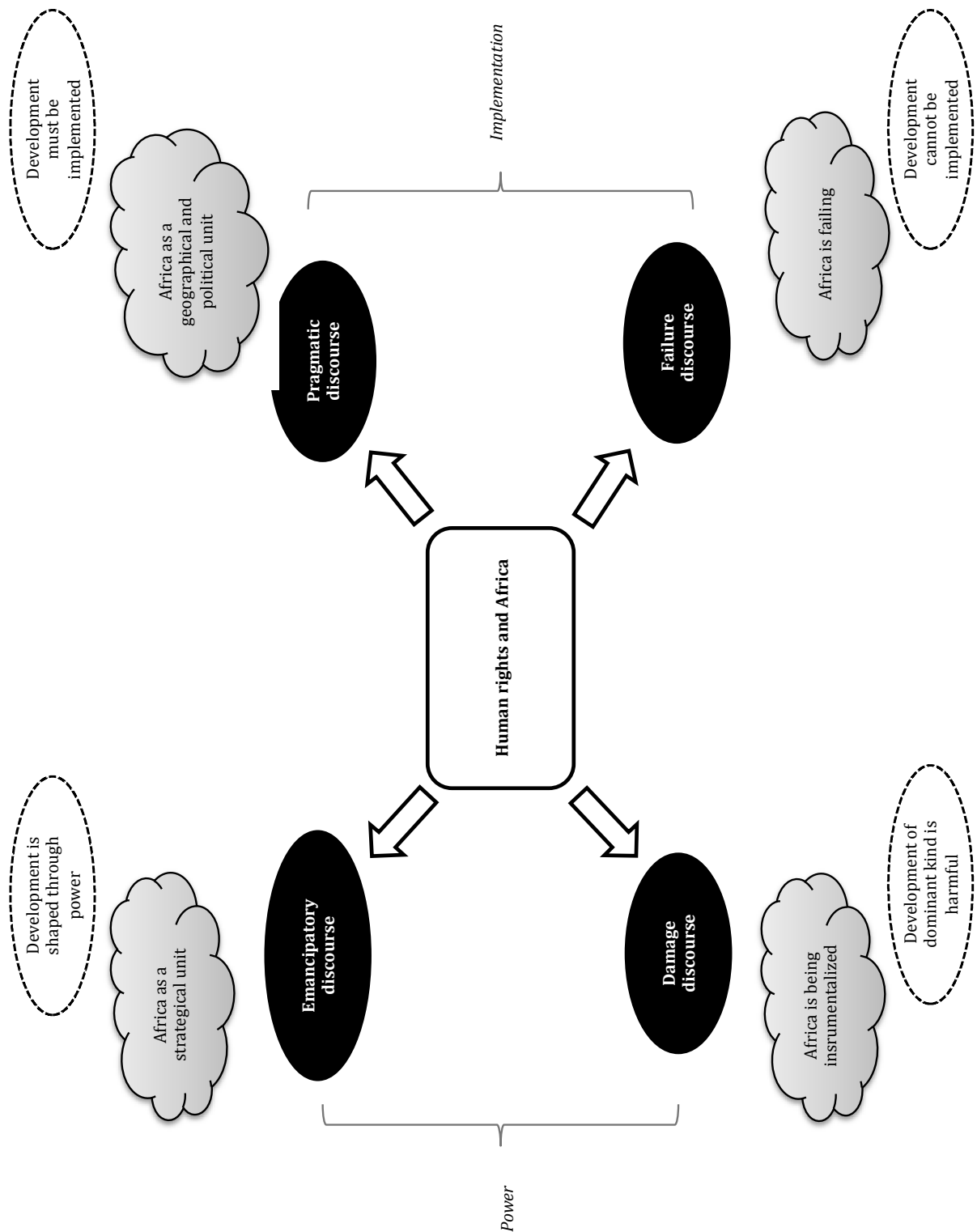


Figure 3: (Subordinate) discourses on Africa and development.

It is in the *failure discourse* on development that puts the greatest emphasis on what is seen as Africa's underachievement. Its variations stress different aspects of Africa's failure, incorporating deterministic and paternalistic modes of argumentation as well as emotionalising and pathologising rhetoric. The failure discourse features links to Afro-pessimistic positions that equally focus on Africa's crisis and its problems (see Rieff 1998). As Aina noted in 1993, "rather than talk of Africa's development, [observers] tend to refer more to Africa's crisis. That, it seems, is an indication of the extent to which there is a consensus that Africa's development process is in crisis" (Aina 1993: 11).

The *failure discourse* thus draws its legitimacy from pessimistic diagnoses of Africa's 'misery' that are in part based on ('disappointing') statistical indices of human well-being and economic progress. These are often introduced by emotionalizing depictions of the conditions. Nel, for example, characterises "Africa's recent past (...) [as] one of the most traumatic on the planet" (Nel 2011: 485), while Udombana writes that "massive poverty, unemployment, homelessness and other pathologies plague Sub-Saharan Africa and show no signs of abating" (Udombana 2005: 10). "Africa is a huge paradox", he adds (ibid.). Kempe speaks of "blunders of the past[, which] must now give way to much more sober thinking", referring to domestic policies, or, as he writes, "policy experimentation" (Kempe 1997: 35). Aina, in turn, characterises "the African condition" as "desperate and frightening", but points to "external forces and overall global dynamics" that complicate and, at times, worsen the situation (Aina 1993: 11).

It is remarkable that there are different terms being used to denote Africa, depending on the data or phenomena that are referred to. Generally, the more technical 'Sub-Saharan Africa' tends to be applied when authors make reference to statistical data (cf. for example El-Issawy 1985: 140-142). The general hypernym Africa is the one referred to the most, especially in the context of programmatic and absolute statements, prescriptions, and appeals. The

countries that are supposed to be subsumed under this term are, however, rarely defined, especially the question whether North African countries are included tends not to be dealt with. Aina, on the other hand, explicitly excludes South Africa from his analysis – his article was published in the year 1993, with the Apartheid regime still in power (Aina 1993: 12). Moreover, he refers to ‘Africa’ in his description of the negative processes that the continent is confronted with – suggesting an overall negative balance for Africa as a global actor – and refers to “some African countries” when speaking of punctual exceptions from this detrimental tendency (Aina 1993: 15). What seems little surprising and trivial, given that the author writes about phenomena that according to his statistics were only observable in a few African countries, reveals the underlying discursive conceptualisation of ‘Africa’ as a predominantly deficient category. In general, statements about Africa’s misery are usually made with reference to the whole of Africa, at times with the addition that the continent is certainly too complex to be homogenised with generalised statements (e.g. Nel 2011: 485; Aina 1993: 12).

The most striking (yet admittedly not very prominent) element of the failure discourse is reminiscent of modernist thought in that it conceptualises Africa’s situation mainly in terms of alleged ‘backwardness’ and establishes a comparability with either ‘developed countries’, or subsumes it in a category together with other ‘developing regions’, whereby the latter usually are even ‘better off’ than Africa. In line with this, Africa is *supposed to* develop – just as those others who already did or are in the process of developing – but has *not yet* succeeded in doing so.

For example, Madavo elaborates his understanding of Africa’s development around the notion of the continent “lagging badly behind” the rest of the world (Madavo 2005). According to the author, this ‘lag’ leads not only to Africa being worse off than others; it actually causes the situation to deteriorate further, “increasing poverty on the continent” (Madavo 2005: 1) and leading to “gradual decay” (Madavo 2005: 2). If Madavo conceives development as the movement towards a certain direction, Africa is clearly moving slower than others, which is in effect even retarding it further. In addition, he directs our attention to, on the

contrary, the very accelerated movement of 'the others', who all seem to be part of a 'game' that Africa is excluded from. To make matters worse, Africa is "missing out on the technical transformation critical to laying the investment foundations for the future" (ibid.); an argument that adds another level of deterioration, directed towards the future: Africa is failing and will continue to fail because of the present failure.

Doumbé-Billé seems to ascribe this lag, or, in his words, the "gap between the African nations and the developed countries", to "African leaders", calling for "a clearly affirmed political will" in order to overcome the difference between Africa and the rest of the world. He states that for the political will to be taken seriously, the "fight against poverty [must be made] a top priority" (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 142).

An extreme case of argumentation around the supposed 'backwardness' of Africa can be found in an article written by Inokoba, Adebawale, and Pereprehabofa. They ascribe "the prostate condition of backwardness" in Africa to its "metaphysical worldview" (Inokoba et.al. 2010: 28). The authors work with the premise that it is possible to generally distinguish between two different types of worldview (*Weltanschauung*). The "scientific worldview" or culture that is based on "rational, logical, inquisitive and analytical reasoning" can be found in "advanced western societies" (ibid.). In contrast, the "metaphysical worldview", which is, as the authors state, prevalent in Africa (and the 'Third World'), "is permeated by perceptions and belief systems that encourage superstition, magic, animism, cosmetology (...) and theology" (ibid.). Thus, this "African perception of social reality has (...) contributed and reinforced the continent's perennial condition of ignorance, poverty and backwardness" and "retarded the scientific, technological and industrial and socio-economic development of the continent" (Inokoba et.al. 2010: 23). With their contribution, Inokoba and his colleagues aspire to draw attention to the "role played by the African make-up in its crisis of development" (Inokoba et.al. 2010: 24), which, as they argue, has been neglected by the "escapist orientation" of the "radical dependency explanatory framework" of development in Africa (Inokoba et.al. 2010: 23). It is, however, not a neutral debate on adequate attention towards external or internal factors that the

authors engage in. Rather, it seems to be ideological disparities that are on hand. Inokoba and his colleagues locate their theses in a modernist framework, which becomes very explicit in the rhetoric they use when they state that “the metaphysical worldview is like an albatross that is holding Africa bound to the *rudimentary era of Western European dark ages*” (Inokoba et.al. 2010: 29; emphasis added).

A common and less objectionable way of addressing Africa’s ‘lag’ and its failure to develop is the reference to its economic performance and according statistical data. Benedict, for example, states that “from a global perspective, Africa has fallen steadily behind the rest of the world” in terms of its economic output (Benedict 2010: 193). Rasheed and Chole add that “the region has the unenviable distinction of being the only region in the world to suffer from such a sorry economic performance for such an extended period of time” (Rasheed/Chole 1994: 2). While the reference to statistics and economic indicators carries an indisputable legitimacy, the strong link that is being established between the former and development generally suggests that it is not only Africa’s economic performance but also its development that is being conceptualised in a quantifiable and comparable manner.

Furthermore, economic failure is also a central aspect of those elaborations that deal with Africa’s underachievement in a more explicit way. Rwegasira, for example, points out that in Africa, “the economy, on the whole, has failed to recover systematically because of a combination of economic vulnerability and weak domestic policies” (Rwegasira 2003: 385). Again, a reference to the GDP emphasises the comparability of economic performance by different regions (ibid.). Nel suggests that “Western-style interventions such as a focus on development of growth centres and support for international development nodes” should have elevated African economies but “failed to ‘take off’” (Nel 2011: 487), a terminology that reminds of the last of Rostow’s stages of economic growth (Rostow 1960) and locates this element of Nel’s argumentation within a modernist framework. The presumption here is that Africa could have done better (concerning development or mere growth) but has failed to do so. It thus did not make use of the opportunities that certain structures provided.



Other authors stress Africa's missed opportunities in a comparable way. Consider the following quote by Mbirimi:

“(...) [Another problematic issue] concerns the actual practice of development in Africa as distinct from the visioning and management of development. African countries obviously failed in this sphere (...). A key issue here is that Africa does not fully use all the resources available to it.” (Mbirimi 2005: 134)

In the same line, Lipumba argues that Africa's “enormous growth potential” after independence “has [not only] not been realized”, but the performance of “African countries” regarding poverty and peace even deteriorated (Lipumba 1995: 54). No systemic or structural reasons for this are mentioned or analysed. Generally, the argumentation built around the notion of failure focuses almost exclusively on the failure of “African countries” or “Africa” as a category and blinds out the role of other actors or the influence of global power relations. This seems logical, as failure as a concept has to be bound to a certain actor that fails in one or the other respect. However, it is worth remarking that this concept does not occur equally in relation to any other actor or group of actors who might be responsible for Africa's “delayed development” (Benedict 2010: 206), particularly the West.

Another significant aspect in this context is that the notion of failure goes hand in hand with the conviction that ‘development’ is definitely necessary in order to rectify what went wrong and to bring Africa (back) on the right track. Wai (2010) represents an exception to this tendency; however, with his understanding of ‘failure’, he seems to prove the correlation between the discursive construction of ‘Africa's failure’ and the necessity for development. Being critical towards the hegemonic concept of ‘development’ in his article, Wai argues that

“[d]evelopment failure in Africa is (...), in part, a result of marginality, which V.Y. Mudimbe has sought to understand and explain as a condition brought about by schizophrenic pairing of two or more dissimilar and unequal systems, ways of life, institutional practices

and worldviews. This pairing was engineered by colonialism; a condition that has created an intermediate space between indigenous African traditions and European modernity, but to neither of which that intermediate space belongs.” (Wai 2010: 5)

Wai’s conceptualisation of failure differs from the other positions in two respects. First, he does not speak of *Africa’s failure* but of ‘development failure *in Africa*’; he thus leaves open whose failure he is speaking about and instead suggests that ‘development as such’ has failed. Second, while he equally relates this failure to Africa as a whole and locates it spatially within Africa or African societies, the reason he provides is historical and structural: an effect of colonialism.

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#### *THE DAMAGE DISCOURSE*

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The damage discourse is formed around the argument that development (or certain elements or manifestations of it) is essentially harmful for Africa, whereby development is mainly used to refer to the ‘mainstream’ understanding of development<sup>98</sup>. Within this line of argumentation, two broad chains of reasoning can be identified. The first refers to development in descriptive terms, arguing that it is the actual *practice* of development that is damaging Africa. The second is the more fundamental analytical conviction that already the *conceptualisation* of development in the mainstream is not only questionable but should be either altered or dismissed altogether. These two positions are interrelated and depend on each other. In other words, because development is based on a faulty conceptualisation, the implementation has been faulty as well. Furthermore, these two arguments tend to occur in combination.

The critique of development is based on the assumption that development is not a question of neutral policies or mere technocratic management:

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<sup>98</sup> Aina speaks of the „conventional development paradigm” (Aina 1993: 17).

“(…) development (…) in Africa (…) is not a neutral nor innocent package, but rather a series of policy and political instruments that derive from a specific set of world-views and a development paradigm containing its own values, methodology, and a network of vested interests” (Aina 1993: 11-12).

That ‘development’ can be a label stuck on certain policies which do not necessarily serve the benefit of the countries or people they are aligned to is explained by Nel with regard to development during colonialism:

“That ‘development’ did take place is undeniable; however, this often took the form of linking the colony to the mother country through defined systems of transport and resource abstraction, which made once economically independent areas dependent on external economies for inputs, jobs, products and even food, as economies were restructured, often becoming mono-economies to supply products such as cotton (…) and copper (…) to Europe.” (Nel 2011: 486)

What could Nel mean by stating that it is “undeniable” that ‘development’ took place? Putting development under question marks suggests that certain interventions were either termed ‘development’ by colonial governments themselves<sup>99</sup> or that they retrospectively could be conceived as part of the authors’ understanding of development. Whichever interpretation is preferred, the paradoxical nature of development becomes very obvious in this short quote. Nel does not write that colonial authorities *claimed* that development took place; he states instead that it actually (and undeniably) *did take place* but puts the term into perspective at the same time. He thus links an descriptive conceptualisation of development – describing what was termed as development during colonialism – with a normative concept, criticizing that this very development was not of any benefit for the African population in the colonies themselves, even though it should have been, were it part of true ‘development’.

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<sup>99</sup> Which was, indeed, the case (see Cooper 1997).

Wai describes development as “disastrous” for “both society and ecology” in Africa (Wai 2010: 6). His critique points to the same paradox of development that can be observed in Nel’s statement: “Africa’s experience *with the forms of development pursued* [has been] disappointing” (ibid., emphasis added), which implies that there would have been also other forms possible. In a similar line, Aina asserts that “contemporary African development” is characterised by “rapid population growth and increasing environmental degradation” and a “[s]ocio-cultural malaise, particularly in terms of the crisis of culture” (Aina 1993: 14). A *particular form* of development is thus seen as destructive for both nature and society. Interestingly, within this line of argument, these destructive elements do not prevent the authors from terming the respective processes ‘development’.

It is particularly the capitalist manifestation of development that is being questioned by many authors and said to have a “damaging effect on the self-perceptions and understandings of the recipients” (Gyekye 1997: 225, quoted in Odhiambo 2002: 6). Garba goes to the lengths of arguing that “sovereign rentier capitalism and social development in SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa] (...) are mutually exclusive” (Garba 2007: 79).

According to Aina, such a problematic concept of development could be made more meaningful through the inclusion of “indigenous and endogenous popular definitions of priorities, objectives, paths and problems” (Aina 1993: 12). Doumbé-Billé makes a similar point in his assessment of NEPAD’s “neoliberal type development”, which is “highly controversial” and “for the moment” not suited for Africa” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 143). He, however, qualifies this clear challenge of the suitability of NEPAD’s development concept by asking whether “it [can] really be said that Africans are at the centre of the new development strategy” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 145). That means that even a questionable – neoliberal/capitalist – form of development could be accepted if “Africans” were truly at its centre. Again, we can observe the contradictions inherent in “development” and the paradox inscribed in it.

The Nigerian scholar Claude Ake has summarised this paradoxical nature (or, as he terms it, this “confusion”) of development in the following trenchant statement:

“To begin with we have pursued development with a confusion of purposes and interests and with policies full of ambiguities and contradictions. It is not that we could not find suitable notions of development or ways to apply them to our experience. The problem lies with the major agents of development; our governments, the multinationals, the IMF, the World Bank, and the Imperial powers. Each of them propagates an idea of development corresponding to its interests and images of the world. All the talk of development and partnership in development does not really reflect a consensus on what development is or how it might be realized. Below the surface appearance of common concerns is a cacophony of voices talking different languages... In the meantime the common man who is the *raison d’etre* of development remains silent, so that in the end nobody really speaks for development and it never comes alive in practice.”

(Ake 1989: 49, quoted in Aina 1993: 16)

To speak of a “confusion of purposes and interests”, as Ake does in the quote above, lays the ground for a more fundamental critique of development, which reveals ‘the failure in the system’ behind it. In an article on aid, Samir Amin understands aid as a mechanism established for the perpetuation of unequal power relations. Even though the concept of ‘aid’ has been excluded from this analysis, Amin’s argument is relevant for illustrating the logic of such a fundamental critique, when he states that “[f]oreign aid fulfils (sic) an important role in the maintenance of states as client states” (Amin 2009: 66). It is thus the requirement of the capitalist system to utilise development and aid for sustaining exploitative global relations. This points to the very nature of the problem with development that utterances in the damage discourse assert. As Wai argues, “Africa was not ‘underdeveloped’ or poor before Europe defined it as thus” (Wai 2010: 5). He explains further that

“discursive practices, underlined by material conditions and relations, have enabled the West to expropriate African resources, engineer conditions of ‘underdevelopment’, define and construct African societies using concepts deeply etched in Eurocentric worldviews, and have created conditions for the internalisation of these categories by African elites (...).” (ibid.)

One essential problem with ‘development’ is thus the process of Westernisation of knowledge that it is based on. Asante made a similar point when he argued that the concepts and theories that were used to explain Africa’s underdevelopment until the 1970s were meant to fail because they were located in a Western political tradition and understanding of development (Asante 1991, quoted in Benedict 2010: 196).

Westernization in this context refers to a process that does not have any connection with local or regional socio-economical dynamics and cultural practices and makes development “very difficult, if not completely impossible to work in Africa” (Wai 2010: 8). Wai, furthermore, portrays globalization “as a development language” in that it is “just another vicious Western cultural and economic tool of domination and exploitation operating in the modernist logic of progress” (ibid.). Development is seen as harmful because of unequal power relations and the hegemony of the West that enables the latter to define Others as underdeveloped and deficient:

“Development was originally packaged as part of the practice of transforming and rescuing African societies, which had been constructed as ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ by European colonialists, from their ‘primitivity’ and ‘backwardness,’ through modernisation, technological advancement, economic growth and Westernisation. This became, and has remained, the main discourse, practice and conceptualisation of development.” (Wai 2010: 3)

The process of Westernization, however, does not only concern externally induced policies and concepts; it is also reflected in problems that are identified *within* African societies. As Bolarinwa writes, “foreign models have tended to

separate people from their culture and consequently, modern Africans tend to be confused, aping ideas from everyone but themselves” (Bolarinwa 1994: n.pag., quoted in Benedict 2010: 204-205).

According to Garba, there is a particular mechanism that serves to maintain the inferior position of Africa within the exploitative logic of development: ‘development advice’. Different phases of development advice have served as tools of control and ensured that development has not been questioned to any extent that would have threatened the system as a whole. Garba explains that over the last decades, there have been four “sets of advice (the state as primary agent of development, get prices right, get policies right and comprehensive reform) reflecting four distinct diagnoses about the causes of development failures in SSA” (Garba 2007: 56). Each type of development advice has not only failed to lead to the very development it had promised to bring forth but has also set the ground for the next one. The capitalist logic of development – or, in the diction of Garba, “sovereign rentier capitalists” (Garba 2007: 79) – thus makes sure that what has become the ideology of development (a term not used by Garba but appropriate in this context) creates the conditions to be able to perpetuate itself. Similar to the arguments mentioned above, Garba is also using two different concepts of development in his analysis, as can be seen from the following statement:

“[T]he regression of social development of post-colonial SSA provides strong evidence that dependence on foreign intellectual and financial capital would be more likely to advance the interests of sovereign rentier capitalists and their agents than to produce the type of social policy that can facilitate the social development of SSA countries.” (Garba 2007: 79).

In this understanding, Garba, on the one side, understands development as a normative concept, suggesting that development how it is supposed to be is not possible under capitalism. Contrary to that, capitalism engenders a different form of development, sustained through “orthodox development advice” (Garba 2007: 78), which is damaging Africa. He thus operates with two different notions of development: one inherent in what he calls sovereign rentier capitalism

(‘orthodox development’) and another desirable form (‘social development’), which is impeded by capitalism. Again, the author himself does not disclose this contradiction inherent in the term ‘development’.

A similar distinction is also found in Doumbé-Billés critique of sustainable development, “which can be regarded as a Trojan horse for liberalisation with respect to future control over environmental resources that have until now basically remained commercially unexploited” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 142). If a Trojan horse is a threat wrapped in misleadingly beautiful fancy paper, there must be something about it that makes it desirable on the first sight. Development (or sustainable development, as in the author’s quote) thus must be a desirable asset that turns out not to be what it promised. Again, we can identify a dual notion of development, interconnecting a normative and critical understanding.

In a general dismissal of the “developmentalist discourse” (meaning the mainstream discourse of development), Odhiambo sarcastically comments that “[t]he developmentalist discourse – although one might better call it a lecture, since the developmentalists hardly listen – mostly defines modernity as what Africa is not” and focuses on what needs to be changed in Africa (e.g. culture) in order to clear the way for development (Odhiambo 2002: 2). Development is thus understood as an external project imposed on Africa that serves other needs than those of Africa itself. It is, however, specifically the “developmentalists’” notion of development that is being criticised. Accordingly, El-Issawy differentiates between an exogenous concept of aid and a normative understanding of development when he implies a hidden agenda in stating that aid “was not originally designed to help Third World countries achieve economic and political independence and establish conditions conducive to self-reliant development” (El-Issawy 1985: 136).

Within the damage discourse, the paradoxical nature of development thus becomes most visible, as most authors operate with a dual understanding of development. This encompasses first, a descriptive/analytical approach, which is very critical towards mainstream understandings of development and thus



presents development as a body of knowledge and practices accessible and analysable from the outside (as a critic). The second concept of development evoked by the positions in the damage discourse is a normative one, which entails ideas of how development is supposed to be (or a mere reference to this “other” development). The very “damage” that Africa is exposed to is ascribed to the first concept, while the implementation of the second is rendered impossible by external (Western, hegemonic) forces, which have the “power (...) to define material and social relations, realities, conditions and phenomena (...) [in] the non-West (especially Africa) in a particular way” (Wai 2010: 5).

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### THE PRAGMATIC DISCOURSE

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The pragmatic discourse on development among African scholars is, analogically to the corresponding discourse on human rights, based not only on the assumption that ‘development’ is categorically possible in Africa; it does, furthermore, claim to either outline concrete *obstacles* to development that need to be overcome (in other words, how Africa needs to change or, better, what it needs to “get rid of”), or it defines the steps necessary to *achieve* development (i.e., what Africa needs to do). The pragmatic discourse on development thus constructs the notion of a clear doability of development and asserts the possibility for Africa to achieve it. Hence, development only needs to be ‘designed’ in a proper way, as the title of Mbirimi’s article, *Designing for Development in Africa*, implies (Mbirimi 2005). Africa is, then, conceptualised as the ‘not yet developed but developable’ space, where it is only necessary to implement the necessary steps to achieve the desirable outcome. Africa is constructed as one region or continent among many similar units, where particular policies might be necessary due to certain differences, but where development is ‘simply necessary’. In the pragmatic discourse on development, Africa is thus not a political (or politicised) concept but a geo-political unit, similar to the corresponding conceptualisation in the pragmatic discourse on human rights.

Doumbé-Billé states clearly that development is possible in asserting that “there is the need to establish long-term programs and specific measures (...) to plan the welfare of all, including future generations – based on the theme of sustainable development” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 143). According to him, the need for “a new action strategy [for sustainable development] seems self-evident” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 142). Statements like the one quoted above can be located in the pragmatic discourse due to their emphasis of “action” and “strategy”; terms again pointing to the doability of development.

The notion of ‘doability’ can be distinguished from the notion of ‘implementability’ in that the former either leaves the planning open or does not emphasise it in a strong manner, while the latter rests on an already established – seemingly implementable – “blueprint” for development. To make this blueprint or plan implementable, the ‘management’ of development (or of the processes that are supposed to lead to development) is necessary. In this context, Mbirimi refers to the “management of economic development” as one of the major issues relevant for Africa’s development (Mbirimi 2005: 134). The problem with contemporary development management is suggested to be that it “is mainly in the hands of political apparatchiks rather than economic professionals” (ibid.). Even though the demand to withdraw control from those termed “political apparatchiks” does not automatically strip the management question of its political brisance, Mbirimi nevertheless seems to suggest - in asking to appoint “economic professionals” as the highest authority in this respect – that the ‘management of development’ is more of a technical question than a political one.

While such a technocratic approach does not prescribe any concrete origin for the policies used and might also involve a call for the implementation of models developed outside Africa, Mbirimi brings in the issue of relevance. According to him, “the hidden assumptions of outside advisors may not reflect the reality in African economies” (ibid.). This argument might be as well part of an emancipatory understanding of African development as outlined in the emancipatory discourse; here it is, however, linked to a paternalistic element:

“(…) African countries often find themselves having to adopt economic programmes developed elsewhere because they do not have their own well thought-out programmes. (…) Heavy reliance on outside expertise also limits opportunities for learning from one’s own mistakes, a vital element in all learning.” (Mbirimi 2005: 134)

Mbirimi’s point here is in line with his technocratic understanding of manageable development and carries several assumptions and assertions on both ‘development’ and ‘Africa’. The role and agency of Africa is put into a paternalistic framework, which pictures Africa as a child forced to follow an externally imposed path due to its own inability to create relevant strategies. On top of that, Africa even is an idle child; with the externally drafted path being used as a mere escape from the responsibility that would be necessary to ‘learn from own mistakes’. According to the author’s depoliticised understanding of economy, which seems to dismiss questions of power as irrelevant, both the structural forces and the power relations responsible for Africa’s supposed ‘idleness’ (meaning the reasons for Africa adopting externally imposed policies) are blanked out in Mbirimi’s argumentation.

An argument against external intervention or advice is also made by Mshomba, who, however, foregrounds the question of appropriate knowledge. According to him, “recommendations from ‘expatriates’” are not necessarily adequate for development projects or the search for solutions to “economic decline”, because “[s]ome of these individuals may have substantial knowledge in their specialized (narrow) fields, but only a tourist’s knowledge of the cultural, social, and economic features of the countries they are advising” (Mshomba 1997: 51). It is thus not dependence or oppression that needs to be overcome through a reconfiguration of power relations but rather the inadequacy of solutions. In the pragmatic discourse, Africa is thus mainly *different from others* – be it the West or other regions that are compared with it, but does not necessarily need to liberate itself from the West or emancipate itself in general. Moreover, Mshomba explicitly excludes the question of responsibility from this point. In saying that “assessing who is responsible for the economic decline in Africa is much more complex than first appearances suggest”, which is “especially true when

domestic factors and external factors are intertwined or interdependent” (Mshomba 1997: 51), Mshomba avoids to position himself in the debate on responsibility in this context.

This avoidance of the question of responsibility within the pragmatic discourse tends to be related to the responsibility *for problems*. In contrast, the responsibility *for solutions* is indeed an issue, with a number of statements agreeing that it the latter mainly on the side of Africa itself. That it is, ultimately, *Africa* that should take up this responsibility becomes clear when Mshomba writes:

“For Africa to free itself from the chains of poverty, it must first honestly and objectively determine the primary causes of its economic problems. African countries must have the courage to recognize the shortcomings of some of their domestic policies and operations, as well as the wisdom to improve them. (...) Africa can and should inform the world about its problems, point out contributing factors, and seek assistance. At the same time, Africa must be willing to take responsibility for its own shortcomings. (...) Exaggerating the impact of external factors and unduly blaming others may diminish the validity of genuine complaints and the likelihood of Africa finding solutions for its problems. To find effective solutions, African countries must be realistic, responsible, and creative.” (Mshomba 1997: 52)

Underlying the prescriptions for Africa is a determinist conviction that it is Africa’s ‘time to act’, noticeable, for example, in the following quote by Rwegasira:

“(...) Africa will (...) need to situate its development efforts explicitly in the evolving contexts of globalization and the new political realities. Africa will have to find ways and means of gainfully opening up to these evolving contexts and competing in the global economy; otherwise they will face the risk of increased marginalisation.” (Rwegasira 2003: 388-389)

Rwegasira constructs a threatening scenario (which, interestingly, concerns 'them'), underlining the danger of Africa's passivity, while simultaneously outlining a clear path that has to be followed. His arguments serve to support the conviction that "developmental states" need to be established in Africa, leading to a "sustained pro-investment climate" and "reflect critical aspects of good governance, paying attention to issues relating to social development and matters like corruption" (Rwegasira 2003: 391). These developmental states would be primarily in the service of economic growth, linked with a "wider set of development objectives" (ibid.). While appealing to a very general economic framework, Rwegasira points to "specific circumstances of SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa]" that need to be taken into account. Here, we can find another element supporting the logic of the pragmatic discourse: a sort of dialectical and ambivalent positioning between the outline of almost universalistic models and the evoked necessity to take into consideration the specific conditions of Africa. This is one of the common themes of the pragmatic discourse: Africa should be 'same' as the West (i.e. developed), but its difference needs to be taken into consideration in order to make it same.

In this context, the 'observable difference' (or alterity) of Africa refers to two kinds of peculiarities: first, factors that 'are given' and need to be taken into consideration because they cannot be or can hardly be changed, such as, for instance, "the tropical location of SSA and its large number of land-locked countries" (Rwegasira 2003: 386). As opposed to this, the second group of factors that is pointed out as critical consists of 'alterable' or 'flexible' conditions, for example culture. According to Serageldin, for example, culture needs to be taken into consideration, because it is the basis for "relevant, effective institutions rooted in authenticity and tradition and open to modernity and change" (Serageldin 1996: 106). Culture needs to be used to make development possible and lead to change.

Taking into respect Africa's peculiarities is one side of the argument that focuses on the necessity for development to be relevant for Africa. In the case above, certain factors have to be considered for the implementation of universal, or at least more general models of already existing notions of development. In

contrast, the issue of relevance is interpreted differently in the following argument:

“A practice that should be guarded against is developing abstract conceptions, be they of development or proposed alternative futures without development, which have no practical relevance to commonsensical notion of the reality of ordinary social life. Specific understandings of social life and how they affect well-being are therefore necessary building blocks for any reformulation of development.” (Wai 2010: 11)

While Wai could be located in the emancipatory discourse when he suggests that it might be necessary to reformulate development for the benefit of Africa, what is more relevant for us here is his appeal to “practical relevance”. He is, thus, pragmatic in assuming that development needs to be made relevant to work. At the same time, he not only leaves open what kind of development should stem out of the “reality of ordinary social life” but, moreover, also does not exclude the possibility of other concepts of change as more appropriate than development itself. As a matter of fact, he understands his paper as “a preparatory work for a future reformulation of development from an African perspective” (ibid.). The mentioned quotes are illustrative of the fact that an author can be – and, in fact, most authors are - located within different ‘discourses on Africa’ identified and elaborated in this study. Thus, even though Wai is predominantly situated in an emancipatory discourse, his argumentation contributes also to the establishment of other discourses.

A similar point with respect to relevance is made by Benedict, who states that “[t]he cultural milieu of a people is a major factor in the development process for that society (...) [and] a proper understanding of this local knowledge base and values must be the starting point for development.” (Benedict 2010: 208) Again, it is not an understanding of ‘culture as an obstacle’ that is foregrounded here. Instead, culture is conceptualised as a resource that can be utilised for development:

“This is not to assume that all aspects of Africa’s cultural milieu are negative and problematic. There are many aspects that are positive and could be *exploited* more successfully for development.” (ibid., emphasis added)

In the pragmatic discourse in general, it seems, however, that the overall goal of development is disconnected from ‘people’ that form societies. Certain aspects of development that are supposed to concern ‘people’ or ‘society’ are subsumed under the term ‘social development’, while ‘development’ *per se* can also ‘make use’ of these people for its own sake. Hereby, development does not necessarily become an end in itself, but as a concept, it is elevated above other concepts, which are, on the other hand, turned into mere auxiliary constructs. It is then interesting that even though, for instance, ‘empowerment’ and ‘participation’ are linked to the (questionable concept of) ‘well-being of ordinary people’, Aina degrades them in the way suggested above when he writes:

“As paradigms guiding development strategies, development as empowerment and participation contains several potentials and opportunities. First and foremost, it opens up the issue of incentives and motivation for production and productivity. The rewards are both individual and collective, and the factor of involvement becomes a central element of resource-mobilization. Choice of focus is derived from the people and the feeling of commitment and integration can be a further source of motivation towards productivity. This has been a *major human element inhibiting development* in Africa.” (Aina 1993: 22; emphasis added)

Nel is less technical in his understanding of ‘the human element’ but also adds to the instrumentalising notion of participation, stating that the latter will need to be strengthened in future strategies if recent trends and realities are to be considered (Nel 2011: 493). He, however, uses his belief in the crucial role of participation as a basis for extending the notion of development. In his argument, he distinguishes different forms of development, stating that

“(...) it is apparent that for a significant number of Africa’s residents (...) ‘local development’ is critical to their survival. Future research and policy in these areas will be critical for the long-term well-being of Africa’s residents.” (ibid.)

In other words, because Africa’s residents are *a matter of fact*, local development is necessary to be considered in future models of development. Contrary to other argumentation lines in the pragmatic discourse, in this sequence, the pragmatic move is derived from the identification of a status quo, which is used as a point of departure for future strategies, instead of the drafting of models that are prescribed as action plans for Africa.

Thus, it seems that in the pragmatic discourse, people (who, in a wider sense, might be the beneficiaries of development) become one of the resources utilised ‘for the benefit of development’. In line with the neoliberal utilization of empowerment of people-as-entrepreneurs (see Parpart/Rai/Staudt 2002), empowerment and participation are emphasised for their contribution to production and enhanced productivity. Capacity is the keyword here. Rwegasira, for example, states that improved growth is “based, on a significant extent, on greater utilisation of existing capacity” (Rwegasira 2003: 386). Later he adds that “policies to liberalise trade will be of limited benefit to Africa as long as the countries lack not only the supply but also the human and institutional capacity to take advantage of new opportunities” (Rwegasira 2003: 395). In other words, there are both, an already existing capacity that needs to be utilised, as well as more capacity that is missing and that needs to be created. In both cases, the path of development and the necessary steps are already clear and it is only implementation (or creation of capacities or grasping of opportunities) that needs to be tackled<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> Capacity as a keyword constitutes a direct link to the Western hegemonic development discourse. Consider the following quote from a report by the Blair Commission for Africa: „Africa’s history over the last fifty years has been blighted by two areas of weakness. These have been capacity – the ability to design and deliver policies; and accountability – how well a state answers to its people” (quoted in Shivji 2006: 9). The Tanzanian scholar Issa Shivji observes in this context that „Africans are told they have no capacity to think and African states are told they have no capacity to make correct policies” (ibid.).



It can be argued that each subordinate discourse has certain elements that are characteristic for that particular discourse and form the specific configuration of discursive elements that generates it. This configuration can, however, also accommodate concepts or terms that are characteristic for another discourse, which might even stand in opposition to the one at hand. In this case, the elements are appropriated and given a new meaning. This is, for example, the case for the concept of 'autonomy', which in the pragmatic discourse serves a different purpose than it does in the emancipatory discourse discussed later, as a quote from Lipumba illustrates. He states that "[t]he external debt burden and dependence on foreign aid have eroded the autonomy of the African states in policy formulation and implementation" (Lipumba 1995: 55). While 'dependence' does link the sequence with the issue of power, autonomy is not primarily referred to in an emancipatory sense but, instead, because autonomous policy formulation and implementation is target-aimed and purposeful. Autonomy and the striving for independence are thus understood as instrumental for the overall aim of development *for the sake of development*.

A similar interpretation can be observed in relation to the concept of co-operation, within the pragmatic discourse understood mainly as regional co-operation and integration. Contrary to the emancipatory discourse evolving around Pan-Africanist ideals and the constitution of Africa as a powerful entity against Western hegemony, in the pragmatic discourse, (political or economic) integration serves another purpose: ultimately it should feed into Africa's 'integration into the global economy' and needs to be strengthened because of its overall benefit. Global power inequalities are not part of this logic. Rwegasira adds to the 'opportunities-talk' mentioned above when he argues:

"The new and positive mood for economic integration in the continent should indeed be welcome, as one looks ahead into the likely realities of the twenty-first century. The Africa that has severely suffered from the 'lack of growth' for so long should seize every opportunity to expand internal markets, to attract investment, and to raise significantly the rate of economic growth, or it can risk being increasingly marginalised in the rapidly evolving world of global

competition. Regional cooperation and integration (RCI) is one important opportunity to be seized by African countries in their quest to participate meaningfully in the global economy.” (Rwegasira 2003: 393)

Contrary to a politicised construction of Africa as a strategic unit through integration in an emancipatory understanding, the pragmatic discourse understands Africa as a region that is supposed to integrate due to the economic benefit that regional integration is supposed to bring forth. Correspondingly, Kempe argues that “nationalism should be directed towards the accomplishment of socio-economic advancement” (Kempe 1997: 37). Furthermore, in stressing the opportunities that are seen to already exist and in calling upon Africa to seize those opportunities, the image of a passive continent is conveyed. Lipumba criticises this passivity in suggesting:

“The government as a whole and the leadership in particular must believe that the poverty of African countries is not an inevitable aspect of global capitalist development and nothing can be done about it unless external factors become more favourable. External conditions impose constraints which are, however, insurmountable.” (Lipumba 1995: 56)

It is also this conceptualisation of Africa as passive that the abovementioned calls for action can be located in. In this context, another strand of the pragmatic discourse appeals to ‘indigenous African’ knowledge or strategies. Again, within the emancipatory discourse, such an appeal would primarily serve the emancipation of Africa, while in the pragmatic discourse it is identified most importantly as an appropriate strategy for development. As Benedict writes:

“In many respects, as far as development is concerned, African countries, and the continent as a whole, stand at a crossroads. Past strategies appear to demand a thorough re-examination in order for the potential opportunities for higher and more stable rates of growth to be exploited. Hence, in recent years, there has been a desperate search for new approaches and methods for development. These

approaches should not be focused on poorly imitating the strategies and life styles of societies with different historical, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds.” (Benedict 2010: 196)

On the other hand, co-operation (presumably with the West) is seen as desirable, while the goals of this co-operation seem obvious and are usually either not mentioned or stated in very general terms. Rwegasira, for example, commends new forms of development co-operation based on “partnerships” as “more meaningful” but stresses that Africa (in this case substantiated through local ‘partners’) has to be ‘ready’ to grasp the corresponding opportunities because such partnerships “require (...) local capacity” (Rwegasira 2003: 392). In a similar line, Udombana adheres to the necessity of co-operation and, simultaneously, emphasises Africa’s own role as fundamental when he argues that while “Africa needs the international community’s support [in] capacity building, it must take up the challenge of accountability and pull itself by its bootstraps” (Udombana 2005: 9). The reference point in this sequence is Africa, who *needs* support but has to act herself. Contrary to that, in Kempe’s evaluative statement on the contribution of the World Bank, Africa keeps its passive role. According to him, “the World Bank has been *assisting* African countries to *adopt* a supporting, or enabling, environment for private-sector development so that they *can obtain the advantages* of private initiative and market discipline in promoting efficient development” (Kempe 1997: 37; emphasis added). Clearly, Kempe’s point refers to a different understanding of partnership or co-operation than the authors quoted above assert. The active part in the co-operation that Kempe indicates is the World Bank, which gives African countries the possibility to enter into its ‘space of advantage’ through adopting the necessary policies, while they should “not intervene unnecessary in the workings of the market mechanism” (ibid.). Through this fundamental conviction that the market will regulate whatever is necessary, an image of Africa being an empty container that just has to be filled with the right policies comes into view.

The emancipatory discourse is the one strand of the Africa-related development discourse most heavily concerned with global power relations. It thus draws its conceptualisation of Africa primarily from its reference to the unequal distribution of power and control between the West/North and Africa. Within the emancipatory discourse on development, the notion of inequality is historicised, while development is primarily meant either to serve the liberation of Africa or, vice versa, should be achieved through liberation.

According to one basic conviction within the discourse, “[w]hatever happens to the economies of the nations of Sub-Saharan Africa must be seen in relation to their position in the global economy (...)” (Aina 1993: 15): Its ultimate goal is the metaphoric “rebirth of the continent” (Benedict 2010: 194) through a transformation of global economy and a reconfiguration of roles. While the (global) economic dimension is only one among several dimensions that are in the focus of the discourse, it is by far the most prominent one.

According to the corresponding argumentation in the discourse, the most important feature of the global capitalist system is that it is not just a condition or a factor that needs to be taken into consideration but rather a deliberately oppressive structure that serves the exploitation and subjugation of non-Western regions. Wai, for example, argues that the New Economic Order<sup>101</sup> should have been accepted by the West as “a better alternative (...) if they were genuinely interested in fighting poverty and promoting ‘development’ in the Third World”, whereas it was “flatly rejected” (Wai 2010: 8). An unjust economic order, which is explicitly blamed to produce poverty in Africa, is therefore not an accidental circumstance, but the outcome of self-involved interests of the powerful:

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<sup>101</sup> The New International Economic Order (NIEO) refers to a set of demands put forward in the 1970s by countries of the Global South united in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (see Cox 1979). Ibhawoh (2011: 81-82) argues that the formulation of the NIEO contributed to breaking up the dichotomy between human rights and development through the included articulation of a right to development. For Africa-related accounts of the NIEO see Arnold (1980 and D’Sa 1984).

“The truth is that much, certainly not all, of African poverty results from the ‘winner-takes-all’ global economic system that is geared towards protecting the rich at the expense of the poor. Decades of unequal development and unfair IEO [International Economic Order] have contributed to the stalled development of most developing countries and to poverty.” (Udombana 2005: 13)

In Udombana’s argument, Africa is represented as “the poor”, while the West is represented as “the rich” – an interpretation that seems valid due to the author’s reference to the global economic order and ‘developing countries’. The incorporation of power as a critical dimension thus happens through the articulation of strategic oppositions, with clear-cut entities of powerless and powerful actors creating a binary structure. This does not necessarily take place at the expense of differentiation. At the same time, however, Africa is absorbed in the totality of under-development, doomed to vulnerability as long as the system does not change:

“[T]he euthanasia of sovereign rentier capitalism is critical to the social under-development of regions of the world such as SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa].” (Garba 2007: 81)

The reasoning around global inequality evolves between two poles of argumentation that focus on different actors’ agency. One side thus stresses the nature of the global (economic) order as one that purposefully subjugates Africa and foregrounds its responsibility and accountability for Africa’s problems. It elaborates on the consequences that the global configuration has for the latter and ascribes Africa a rather limited radius of operation, inclined to see it as the victim of external forces. In this structure, Africa is one victim among many, while the West is the reference point, keeping “developing regions” inferior and powerless. It is thus the agency of the West that is in the centre. On the other end of the spectrum, the argumentation foregrounds Africa itself as a reference point, stressing its unique position in the global system and concerting its argument not around the interests of the West but around Africa’s interests and its agency.

El-Issawy provides us with an example located in-between the two forms when he states with respect to the framework of the New International Economic

Order that “Africa cannot wait for the New International Economic Order to arrive. It must help create it” (El-Issawy 1985: 134). The first sentence quoted refers to the necessity of Africa’s own actions, speaking against passivity and the often criticised expectation that external factors would need to change before any endogenous action could be taken. It is, however, qualified by the second sentence, which limits Africa’s role to the one of a contributor to a common project in which the other contributors remain unmentioned. The inclusion of the term ‘help’, then, makes the difference; it points to a benefit greater than just for Africa itself, to a common good created and enjoyed by those unmentioned ‘others’ as well, who are connected with Africa through the bonds of solidarity against the current world order.

Later, El-Issawy makes this point more explicit, stating that “in the long run both North and South will benefit from a change in the world economic order, which initially compensates African and other Third World countries for the historical loss of a substantial part of their economic surplus.” (El-Issawy 1985: 149). This collective benefit (of a NIEO, not of development, at this point) is different from the way it is conceived in the implementation discourse. Again, the difference is made through the incorporation of power: A change of the global economic order is not useful for the sake of itself or because it would enable the world (or development) to be managed ‘more easily’ but because it reconfigures power relations and works for the emancipation of those who have been denied power. El-Issawy’s call for change is based on the notion of ‘compensation for historical loss’ and feeds into an important and contested issue debated over the last century: reparations for slavery and colonialism (see Howard-Hassmann 2008). As Udombana writes, “[i]t was the wealth of Africa and the sweat of Africans that developed Europe, in the same way that the IEO [international economic order] continues to effectively ensure Africa’s subjugation and neo-colonization” (Udombana 2005: 13). Such an argument is not merely a rhetorical device to claim a ‘rightful’ position for Africa in the global system but entails an implicit yet unmistakable positioning in these wider debates. It is, again, El-Issawy, who writes that “African countries, like all other Third World countries, have a historical right to a transfer of resources from the North. (...) Moreover, this historical right to assistance remains valid irrespective of the manner in which

such aid may be utilized by the recipients and independent of the domestic and external policies that the latter may pursue” (El-Issawy 1985: 136). If we consider the historical context of El-Issawy’s text, published in the mid-1980s, when the structural adjustment programmes were at their peak, it is more than clear that the issue included in the debate without being vocalised is that of conditionality (see Uvin 2004).

It is not the aim of our interrogation here to delve further into the issues of restitution payments or conditionality. Instead, for our purpose, these references need to be questioned in terms of the meaning they have for the notions of Africa created by the authors. The relationship between Africa and the West is contextualised historically, legitimizing present demands for change through a historical debt that the West has towards Africa. Africa’s lack of power is not ascribed to any genuine failure attributable to the nature of its politics or culture(s), but to the historical process of exploitation and oppression that led to the global status quo. This move is then a rejection of positions that equate the lack of power or resources to a lack of worth and importance or to evolutionist positions.

Such an argumentation is linked to the valorisation of Africa and, more importantly, of African agency and ability. El-Issawy suggests that “*Africa must show*, through drastic reorientation of national and external policies, as well as through the collective efforts of its governments and peoples, that it will *no longer accept the role of the dependent, exploited, and powerless victim* in the international economic order, no matter what the amount of foreign aid may be” (El-Issawy 1985: 138, emphasis added). The valorisation of Africa is thus not only focused on a change of awareness within Africa but, moreover, directed to the rest of the world: Africa must prove that it is more than a victim. Interestingly, for this double process, it also needs a greater understanding from the West: “What Africa needs from public opinion in the North (...) is a sympathetic understanding of its problems, greater appreciation of the specificity of its conditions (...)” because “in the long run both North and South will benefit from a change in the world economic order, which initially compensates African and other Third World countries for the historical loss (...)” (El-Issawy 1985: 149). Africa’s emancipation, then, serves the benefit of all

through the reconfiguration (or, rather, correction) of power relations.

Most authors, however, discuss this awareness-raising with respect to the benefit it has for Africa or, inversely, emphasise that the ascription of an inferior role to Africa is not only a question of representation but is detrimental to its material well-being. In this sense, Zeleza suggests that the present notion of African renaissance reflects the

“enduring deprecation of Africa in the Euro-American imaginary rooted in the racisms of slavery and colonialism, as well as concern and censure by Africa’s dispirited friends and delirious foes pretending to be friends of the continent’s recurrent economic, political and social crises.” (Zeleza 2009: 155)

Samir Amin offers a provocative challenge to the conceptualisation of Africa as merely dependent on the West:

“The South can do without the North, the reverse is not true. But for that, the elites of the South must liberate themselves from their internalised dependency thinking. They must stop thinking that aid is a condition for development of their societies.” (Amin 2009: 75)

Africa’s dependency is, in Amin’s understanding, an intellectual one, while it is the West who is materially dependent on Africa. He thus discursively foregrounds Africa’s agency and turns against understandings of global power relations that distinguish between the independent centre and the dependent periphery.

It seems, however, obvious that the primary aim of the positions gathered in the emancipatory discourse is Africa’s overcoming of this very dependency (cf. e.g. El-Issawy 1985: 133), while the different strands of the discourse deal with particular elements or particular understandings of Africa’s unequal relationships with the rest of the world. In this context, African unity and African cooperation serve two aims in the emancipatory discourse: they are the necessity for both achieving liberation from the West and fulfilling the aim of a ‘true development’ in normative terms. For Benedict, the development of Africa is a task that needs to be achieved through Africa’s unity (Benedict 2010: 199). According to El-Issawy, “there is no viable alternative to foreign aid but African



self-help, cooperation, and collective self-reliance. (...) African cooperation is in fact an essential pre-requisite for a change in the global economic status quo in favor of the marginalized and exploited South.” (El-Issawy 1985: 147-8). He adds that

“African cooperation, however, ought to be perceived and designed not merely as a defensive or offensive mechanism vis-à-vis the North, but also as a permanent feature of the strategy for economic liberation of the continent and as a necessary activity towards the full realization of its potential. African cooperation is desirable, no matter what the external environment is like.” (El-Issawy 1985: 148)

Chachage argues that instead of international development aid, “[w]hat Africa needs is a renewal of the project of collective self-reliance, and work harder on the unification of the continent” (Chachage 2005: 18). In a similar vein, Shivji calls for the rehabilitation of pan-Africanist thought:

“[W]e need to revisit the Pan-Africanism of the immediate pre-independence period and bring it back to the centre stage of the African discourse. (...) Suffice it to say that, while well-resourced individual African countries can mount credible development initiatives, they cannot individually resist the imperialist *political* assault. The Pan-Africanism that we need to resurrect therefore is political Pan-Africanism at the continental level, which transcends regionalism, whether economic or political. Only thus can Africa resist present day imperialism called globalization. In short, the nationalism of the present era is Pan-Africanism”. (Shivji 2008: 22, original emphasis)

Unity as a strategic notion is an aspect mentioned in many comments on the New Partnership on Africa’s development (NEPAD), often falsely described as the ‘first true common development plan formulated by Africans’. It is, for instance, stated that in NEPAD, “for the first time, African leaders (...), united in a common vision, decided to equip themselves with a long-term development plan for the entire continent” (Doumbé-Billé 2005: 142). It is remarkable in this context that the concept of “African unity” evoked in some analyses of NEPAD differs

considerably from the abovementioned understanding of unity-for-liberation. While the notion of emancipation is involved, it stresses the ability of African leaders to 'finally' come up with a concept of their own and contribute to a global discourse. Emancipation is in this sense deprived of its radicality through the side-lining of the question of power. Here, it is not the global power relations that are supposed to change through Africa's emancipation; instead, emancipation in this sense should make Africa a less "disturbing" actor on the global arena. If we recall the two sides of the debate on global inequalities mentioned above, it is not the interests of Africa that are in the focus in a conceptualisation of emancipation. This element adds an ambivalent aspect to the emancipatory discourse, illuminating the fact that emancipation is another concept that can be drawn upon for very different – and contradicting – (theoretical) purposes.

Another strand of argumentation in the emancipation discourse focuses on the benefit of 'culture' for Africa's development in the wider context of the relevance of development in Africa in order to allow the evolvment of its emancipatory potential. Odhiambo, for example, formulates his position on development on Africa on the basis of a critique of knowledge that is being produced by Africanists and Western experts (e.g. in the World Bank). By affirming a link between culture and development and rejecting how the link has been created in recent publications (as in, for example, Etounga-Manguelle 2000), Odhiambo argues that development in Africa can only gain meaning 'from below':

"So long as governments and the academy remain trapped in this prejudice against our cultures, and as long as we, the citizens of Africa, privilege them with the plentitude of power, there will be no meaningful development in Africa." (Odhiambo 2002: 11)

'African' development thus means a process of self-determined development with a broad relevance for the people of Africa. As he argues, it has to be "built on the indigenous", and therefore must be based on a kind of knowledge peculiarly relevant for "ordinary" Africans.

In a similar vein, Ogot asks:

“Is there a cultural dimension that has been missing in this [Africa’s development] experience? Have the development processes of the past thirty-eight years ignored that ensemble of ideas, mechanisms, institutions, and artefacts that have explicitly or implicitly guided the behavior of the African people in a given group, region or country?” (Ogot 1999: 139, quoted in Odhiambo 2002: 6)

He answers with the conviction that there is “a need to put ‘cultural identity’ at the center of the development paradigm” (Ogot 1999: 141, quoted in Odhiambo 2002: 7). Similarly, Odhiambo suggests that “the cultural heritage of a people should not be viewed as an obstacle to development (...) but rather it should be considered the point of departure for dynamic development” (Odhiambo 2002: 7).

There are two different notions of culture involved in this argumentation. On the one hand, there is culture, as suggested by Odhiambo, in the sense of the local context for development, which, instead of being perceived as a threat to pre-conceived notions of development, should rather inform these very notions. On the other hand, there is a notion of culture linked to the global position of Africa as an entity (which does not necessarily involve an essentialised understanding of ‘African culture’), which foregrounds the rejection of Africa’s ‘cultural dependence’ on the West and leads to a more general dismissal of Western universalist influences. In this vein, El-Issawy suggests that

“(t)echnical assistance increases cultural dependence and weakens self-confidence – a factor of crucial significance for the initiation and continuation of self-reliant-development efforts. (...) It is a vehicle for the universalization of Western culture and life-styles, whereas self-reliant development presupposes cultural diversity and respects and adapts to traditional values and modes of life. In fact, it could be argued that a certain measure of calculated insulation from external cultural influences is necessary, at least in the early stage of self-reliant development.” (El-Issawy 1985: 143)

In simultaneously stressing cultural diversity and pleading for a certain isolation from external cultural influences, El-Issawy both stabilises and questions a one-

dimensional understanding of culture in the context of Africa. 'Internal' cultural utterances and articulations are, in this argument, perceived as automatically more beneficial for local development processes. Thus, while Western cultural influences are suggested to be detrimental to development and a global unequal power configuration is taken into account, local power structures are side-lined and not considered for this argument. It seems, therefore, that a strong emphasis on culture in the context of development in Africa is part of an outward discourse, which aims at the disaffirmation of external claims to determine the 'proper' role of culture in Africa's development. The more inward debate on the particular value of certain aspects of cultures or notions of culture would only be the next step, which then seems to take place on a different level. At the same time, while in the pragmatic discourse, culture is a factor that needs to be taken into account in order to implement a given model of development, within the emancipatory discourse, the consideration of culture as an additional dimension serves the very reformulation of development as an emancipatory tool.

Moreover, within the emancipation discourse, the emphasis of relevance with respect to development is, similarly to the notion of culture, located on (at least) two levels. The most concrete call for relevance focuses on the societal relevance of development, while the more abstract argument focuses on Africa as a whole. Aina links both levels in arguing that in order to make Africa's development 'more than Africa's crisis', it is necessary to reclaim it:

"This is best done and attained through the path of development known as empowerment and popular participation. This cannot, however, be done without struggles. There are too many vested interests both internal and external to Africa. But the fact is that the majority of the peoples and social forces in Africa know what they want." (Aina 1993: 23)

Aina thus suggests that whilst there is a variety of diverse interests involved in each case, on a global level, Africa needs to be empowered, while on a micro-level, its inhabitants need to be empowered as well. Development "is a task that must be done by Africans and left to them to do. It is a task which, in spite of the limitations imposed by history, must not have its ends foreclosed through

definitions imposed either by aliens or the African elites” (ibid.). Again, such a claim seems to be directed to the global discourse, it aims at reaffirming the legitimacy of an internal, African discourse on development regardless of external models and notions. The evaluation of inner forces and the distinction between interests detrimental to Africa’s development and those ones that are beneficial to it as a whole is, then, a step that only follows afterwards. This general albeit ambivalent nature of argumentation, which is utilised by other authors as well, seems to serve a valorisation of Africa within the development discourse in general.



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## CONCLUSION: RE-CREATING AFRICA

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*Historically the study of Africa has been premised on the fiction that the natives do not know. They do not know the Victoria Falls, the source of the Nile, Kilimanjaro exists. These had to be discovered by the Great White Explorers. The premise was essential to the colonization and subjugation enterprise. In their quest for providing “knowledge-based” justification for their precedence, the colonialist had to deny native knowledge, denigrate local tradition and, in the words of Miller, produce a “blank darkness” (Miller 1985) on which they would inscribe whatever they wanted. Much of the writing on Africa seems to be written as if it were premised on that fiction, although I cannot figure out what is the rationale for this today. Natives do know and know a lot about their condition. If in the past such knowledge was made opaque by language barriers, by the mystification surrounding it and its oral transmission, the situation today is different. Today the knowledge of the “natives” is not hidden in some mysterious shrine nor is it transcribed in some indecipherable code requiring profound ethnological skills to decode. It is written in the language and script of the master and it is made available through media with which the West is perfectly familiar-books, journals, articles, dissertations, etc.*

Mkandawire (1997: 30)

### *The Meaning of Africa*

*You are not a country, Africa  
You are a concept  
Fashioned in our minds, each to each,  
To hide our separate fears  
To dream our separate dreams*

Davidson Abioseh Nicol (1968)<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> cited in Mazrui (2004: 70)





*“While antihumanist critiques of representation have usefully called attention to the possibility that even the most seemingly transparent representational systems, in speaking for a multitude, entail the silencing of its multiplicity, this has led to an ethical quandary. If every representation is an act of domination, and if every statement, every interpretation, and every staking-out of a position means making a representation of things, then every work of art, every reading, and every political act, even those motivated by a wish to lend a voice to those who have been silenced, involves a further silencing. How, then, can we consistently think or practice in the absence of representation? The fact is that we cannot and do not.”*

*(Cohn 2006: 12)*

It is beyond question that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concepts of both ‘human rights’ and ‘development’ have grown in their influence and their relevance for very diverse and contradictory claims and interests. That the calls for an ‘eradication’ of ‘development’ have been widespread at the latest since the prominence of the post-development thought (see Sachs 2010), while the articulations of discomfort towards ‘human rights’ have not been as clear in their rejection of the concept, does not mean that the latter is a less contested concept. At the same time, given their relevance in the structure of the world, both terms cannot be simply dismissed and substituted with less problematic ones; therefore, it is crucial to engage in critical reflections (see Kothari 2005). In other words, it is necessary to engage with ‘the system’ from within in order to change it. This important albeit idealistic conviction has been at the core of the preceding study. In the course of this work, I have chosen a particular approach to deal with one aspect in the context of this set of problems: the textual level of the African scholarly discourse on the conceptualisations of ‘Africa’ with respect to development and human rights. Such an approach offers possibilities for a re-thinking of both development and human rights in theory and in practice.

The typologies outlined in the preceding chapter show different varieties of the relationships between ideas of ‘Africa’ and the concepts of human rights and development respectively. While the different types of (sub-) discourses should be understood as ideal-types in the sense that they do not connote isolated arrays of arguments and are linked at various points, they, at the same time, offer

a possibility to make the different dynamics in the concept of Africa visible. Thus, whilst Africa as a concept generally tends not to be problematised in literature on development or human rights, the analysis shows that it is worthwhile to question the seeming self-evidence of 'Africa' as a reference point and ask what meaning authors convey when they write about Africa. Whether the latter is understood as a geographic entity, a politically homogeneous unit, seen primarily as a part of the so-called 'developing world', or posited mainly in opposition to an imagined or real 'West', writing about the whole of Africa never seems to be of a merely descriptive nature. 'Africa' is thus always more than a mere *referent* (see Nöth 1995: 92). Instead, it can be understood as a *floating signifier* (Laclau 1990: 28), which gains meaning from the discourse it is situated in.

In both the human rights discourse and the development discourse on Africa articulated by African scholars in publications available in English, I have identified several sub-discourses that evolve around different meanings of Africa and establish diverse linkages between 'Africa' and the concepts of both human rights and development. Within these subordinate discourses, the meaning of Africa is striving to be established through particular notions of human rights and development. As the two key concepts are contested themselves and devoid of a given meaning, the involved struggle over their definition influences their discursive relation to the concept of Africa. In other words, the discourses reflect argumentative tendencies in the writings on human rights and development, which through their different argumentations contribute to the creation of 'Africa' as a floating signifier and at the same time derive their meaning from the spectrum of interests inscribed in it. This flexibility of 'Africa' is generated despite (or even because of) the seeming clarity that the writings 'on Africa' suggest with respect to it.

In the typologies presented, I have distinguished between four subordinate discourses with respect to each of the key concepts. For the human rights discourse, the argumentations on the role of human rights in Africa can be understood to belong to (1) an equality discourse, (2) a resistance discourse, (3) a pragmatic discourse, and (4) an adaptation discourse. Similarly, in the

discourse on development, the subordinate discourses identified are (1) a failure discourse, (2) a damage discourse, (3) a pragmatic discourse, and (4) an emancipatory discourse. The labels chosen for the particular discourses already indicate the main themes contained. It is, however, important to emphasise that while these themes seem to stand for certain emphasised contents in relation to human rights or development, the processes of negotiation involved in the creation of these discourses pertain equally (or, in our context, even more) to Africa itself. It is thus the role of Africa that is negotiated in various ways in these different strands of argumentation.

The diverse roles that are attributed to Africa are linked to a number of strategies that aim at changing them at the same time. Again, to complicate things further, there are various notions of change involved, even though change constitutes the centre of all endeavours suggested. If we assume that the discourse on the whole of Africa in African scholarship aims at a reconfiguration of global roles, i.e. the global role of Africa on the one hand, and - in an argumentatively simplistic dichotomy - the role of Africa vis-à-vis the West, the elements of change can be derived from the relationship between these two poles. This is not to suggest that African discourse or the layer of African discourse analysed here aims at a stabilisation of a simple binary opposition (Africa/West) but rather that the concentration on this relationship offers one possibility of interpretation.

In the different discourses, it is thus always Africa that is at the centre of change, but its change serves different aims. These become clear when the question of universalist norms is brought into play. Global norms with respect to human rights and development can be understood as predominantly Western norms. Within some strands of discourse, these norms are questioned and opposed, while in others, Africa is called to subject to these norms. In the human rights discourse, it is the resistance discourse, the adaptation discourse, and the equality discourse that aim at a redefinition of norms of change for Africa, while the pragmatic discourse stresses the necessity for Africa to subject to these norms and outlines routes to be taken. In the development discourse, it is again the pragmatic discourse that aims at subjecting Africa to global/Western norms,

while this is the case also for the failure discourse, where Africa is supposed to make up for past failures that are established (as failures) through the contrasting comparison of Africa's (lack of) accomplishments with normative prescriptions from the past. Here, both the damage discourse and the emancipation discourse turn against Western norms and call for a redefinition of these norms according to an assumed benefit for Africa.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify different understandings of responsibility for the role of human rights and development in Africa. In this context, there is a positive and a negative dimension attributed to responsibility. The 'negative responsibility', so to speak, refers to those actors responsible for Africa's present situation and can, therefore, be understood as accountability. The 'positive responsibility' is linked to the question of agency and points to the primary agents of change constructed in the discourses. Accountability and agency are discursively linked to each other; the comparison of the diverse argumentations creates a very clear picture of the distribution of responsibilities. It can be stated that if, by tendency, the West is seen as responsible for 'Africa's problems' and constructed as the holder of accountability, agency is ascribed primarily to Africa. This is the case for the resistance discourse, the adaptation discourse, and the equality discourse on human rights and the damage and emancipation discourses on development. If, on the other hand, it is Africa that is being held responsible and, as a consequence, accountable for its present situation, as in the pragmatic discourses on both human rights and development and the failure discourse on development, the question of agency is kept open. Thus, that agency is not problematised or brought up in the pragmatic and failure discourses seems to be linked to the question of power, which remains equally unproblematised in these strands.

It is this very failure to take power relations into consideration that leads to the construction of Africa as a merely political and economic unit in the global system in the latter three discourses. The concept of Africa, thus, seems to be derived here from its mere 'existence'. The 'fact' (i.e. the articulation) that this existence is problematic as it goes hand in hand with the conviction that not only Africa's problems are objectively detectable but, more importantly, that

there are clear models applicable for their solution. The contested nature of possible solutions is secondary, while it is their feasibility that is foregrounded instead. This objectivist manner of discourse, which is found in the pragmatic and failure discourses, establishes an according concept of Africa. The latter is constituted through the notion of *actuality* in the pragmatic discourses, while in the failure discourse it is derived from the emphasis on *comparison*: Africa has failed in certain respects in comparison to other parts of the world.

Similarly, the other strands of discourse obtain their main discursive constituents of 'Africa' from the latter as a relational concept, i.e. Africa is foregrounded 'as Africa' due to its relation with the rest of the world or particularly with the West. At the same time, this Rest with respect to Africa - to refer to Stuart Hall's notion of the discourse around 'the West and the Rest' (Hall 1992) - is questioned. In the resistance discourse on human rights, the constituent that serves to create the concept of Africa is its *opposition* towards the West. In the human rights adaptation discourse, it is predominantly Africa's *difference* (from the Rest but also, or mainly, from the West) that is emphasised, as it is this difference that needs to be taken into account for any meaningful change. The equality discourse on human rights evolves around the concept of *comparability*, which, contrary to the failure discourse, does not aim at the rejection of Africa's difference but should serve its acceptance. The damage discourse on human rights turns on *Western intervention* and relates its concept of Africa to the discursive and material consequences of this intervention. The constituent of the emancipation discourse on development, finally, is the notion of *power*.

That these features are to be read, again, as discursive tendencies, becomes clear from the elaborations on each discourse in the respective sections of this work, which show that the positions leading to particular understandings of Africa are anything but homogeneous. The establishment of the types of discourse presented does not aim at the creation of a complete picture but is itself part of the interpretative process. Therefore, it should be understood as an attempt to provide an additional inspiration for subsequent theoretical and practical work that can rely on the patterns and argumentative structures found here.

At the same time, the complexity of each subordinate discourse emphasises the variety of interests that are inscribed in each notion of Africa generated. Each discourse, albeit in itself contested, features the preference for a particular concept of Africa and suppresses other meanings in relation to it. Furthermore, there is a distinct demand linked to 'Africa' within each of them. For the resistance discourse on human rights, the demand can be read as one for *self-determination*, which is also the case for the emancipatory discourse on development. At the same time, the denotations of these two discourses differ on purpose, as the concept of Africa is an active one in one instance (emancipatory discourse) and a reactive one in the other (resistance discourse). The adaptation discourse demands the *inclusion* of Africa in the human rights discourse and system through the consideration of its difference(s), while the equality discourse on human rights, similarly, asks for inclusion; here, however, the inclusion is grounded on the *recognition* of Africa as a valuable contributor. Both pragmatic discourses demand the *submission* of Africa to established norms and concepts and interpret its inclusion as the positioning of Africa on a measurable global scale. Likewise, the failure discourse on development locates Africa in an objectifiable process of development but puts its *responsibility* to the forefront. The damage discourse on development, finally, calls for a *rehabilitation* of Africa through the acknowledgement of 'development's failure' and a redefinition of development concepts.

This spectrum of different elements of change associated with Africa corroborates the assumption that in the African scholarly human rights and development discourses, Africa has a strategic meaning, which is explicit in the more critical strands of discourse (i.e. those argumentations that are critical to the key concepts, such as the discourses on resistance, adaptation, equality, damage, and emancipation) and implicit in those discourses that are, by tendency, approving the key concepts (such as both of the pragmatic discourses and the one on failure in relation to development). This strategy behind 'Africa' explains why in both the human rights discourse and the discourse on development analysed here, Africa is a relational category, which discursively comes into being through its relationship with the world or, in most cases, with

the West. Therefore, writing about Africa as a whole with respect to development and human rights seems to aim at the assertion of its role in the global discourse. This hypothesis is further strengthened because both 'development' and 'human rights' are used as concepts that do not refer to *any kind of change* but to change that is possible within the development and human rights discourses respectively. At the same time, when power relations are discussed, external power relations that affect Africa are foregrounded, and internal, i.e. societal power relations are attributed a secondary role. Writing about Africa then can have different effects: it can, on the one hand, aim at strengthening Africa's interests towards 'the Rest', with internal negotiations being relocated to the level of other discourses, and, on the other hand, it can serve to stabilise Africa's role in global power relations through the preference of unquestionable and seemingly objective (and, therefore, hegemonic) representations.

Historically, such seemingly objective, hegemonic representations in the West have shaped scientific and other discourses on Africa. As Ramose asserts forcefully:

"For centuries, discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. Many reasons account for this state of affairs and, not least, the unjustified violence of colonization. Since colonization, Africans have had almost an infinity of spokespersons. These claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them. Thus, Africans were reduced to silence even about themselves. On the face of it, decolonization removed this problem. However, on closer analysis it is clear that decolonization was an important catalyst in the breaking of the silence about Africans. It is still necessary to assert and uphold the right of Africans to define the meaning of experience and truth in their own right. In order to achieve this, one of the requirements is that Africans should take the opportunity to speak for and about themselves and in that way construct an authentic and truly African discourse about Africa." (Ramose 2003: 1)

Similarly, in a recent interview, the Africanist historian Terence Ranger has commented bluntly on his oversaturation with analyses that aim at tracing colonial and Eurocentric discourses and seem to remain trapped in the very pitfalls they want to avoid:

“I am becoming increasingly restless with this marvellous sophisticated literature about colonial discourse, European creation of these images or that, even if it is true to say that these are then often internalised by Africans. And I am increasingly interested in work that enables one to see African conceptualisations.” (Ranger 2001: 260)

The question, however, remains what African conceptualisations ought to be. Studying African discourses ‘for the sake of Africa itself’ can be one step towards this direction, located within endeavours to contribute to the visibility of African voices. It stands in accordance with the broader aim of “[t]ranscending Africanist conceptions of the study of Africa [which] entails (...) incorporating excluded voices and agendas, such as those inspired by feminist, indigenous, and cultural studies scholarship”, as West and Martin argue (1999: 2). However, a project such as the one of this thesis involves at least two further complications. First, the claim to strengthen marginalised voices involuntarily requires the adoption of a paternalistic position, let alone the problematic appropriation of knowledge that is involved. The paternalistic momentum can be partly qualified through a definition of the assumed readership, in this case for example Western scholars and practitioners of development and human rights who could gain more access to African scholarship through the filter of a doctoral dissertation compiling different strands of thought on relevant issues. Second, the very notion of an African voice needs to be problematised. While I have tried to do so in the course of writing this study, the problematic remains unsolved, devoid of a clear solution. Mbembe reminds us of the ambivalence that is involved and calls for the awareness of plurality in Africa:

“Without erecting geography or place as an absolute in the calculus of knowledge production - and, especially, without fixating on whatever autochthony might be - this issue was conceived with the goal of



giving a voice to those who have remained in Africa. There is no presupposition that the way they see, and what they see, whatever it might be, is fundamentally different from Africanists and those in exile from Africa in the West (the “outsiders”) write on the same topic. Indeed, there is no single way of “seeing” Africa among those who have remained here. Here, as in many other spheres of contemporary African life, plurality is the norm.” (Mbembe 2001b: 2)

Equally, in their introduction to the anthology “Africanizing knowledge - African Studies Across the Disciplines”, which is devoted to the exploration of possibilities how African Studies could become “more African”, Falola and Jennings suggest that there is not a need for Africanist scholars to accept blindly “all things African” in the work they are doing. Instead, the solution or advice they offer is to “reconsider all things African within African contexts, and to be aware of the ways in which our own subjective backgrounds might blind us to those contexts” (Falola/Jennings 2002: 2-3). Their usage of the attribute ‘African’ thus refers to the location of social realities, yet it conceptually does not have to be confined to the African continent and reaches beyond the mere geographical actuality of the African continent.

Yet, against the backdrop of the power relations that are inscribed in the study of Africa both on the continent and elsewhere and that lead to the pertinent marginalisation of African scholarship outside of Africa, studies such as the one at hand might contribute to counter-act this marginalisation - despite their (seemingly) paradoxical origin in the West. In the context of the thesis established above that African human rights and development discourse on Africa (in internationally available publications) aims at the discursive positioning of scholars in the global discourse on these issues, African scholars cannot be reduced to their alleged difference or alterity but rather are reified as part of the global discourse. African discourse is manifold and generates an understanding of Africa that is equally manifold and contested. It is valuable to consider Kanneh’s assertion in this respect:

“It is vital to resist formulations of a holistic African world, culture or worldview which can be discovered, recovered or re-appropriated.

Africa, with its plural cultures and influences has no paradigm and cannot be reduced to a single political aspiration or spiritual unity. This does not mean that African literatures should be denied their specificity, their cultural differences, the complex textures of traditions, genres and influences. (...) It is a relatively simple matter to attack the theoretical inadequacies of arguments which insist on Africa's independence and (cultural) difference. It is a lot more difficult to incorporate, into reading practices, an awareness of the politics of resistance, the crises of representation and the layers of reference and signification which inform and form African texts. The most difficult point to accept, for Western literary criticism, might still be that Africa is not always thinking of or speaking to the West, and that, at moments, it escapes. Even now." (Kanneh 1998: 43)

In this sense, an understanding of 'African discourse' can be drawn from the poststructuralist "rejection of certain readily identifiable modernist conceptions of knowing, the knower, and the known. While knowledge is understood within a modernist frame as singular, cumulative, and neutral, from a poststructuralist perspective knowledge is multiple, contradictory, and powerful." (Gibson-Graham 2000: 95). The same thus has to be stated for the ('African') knowledge analysed here. The expectation of 'Third World knowledge' to be primarily different from 'Western knowledge' (see Bilgin 2008) has to be rejected. As Nyamnjoh argues, such an 'expectation of difference' tends also to be used to judge the careers of individual scholars, subjecting them to an essentializing logic and denying them the possibility to create knowledge that is valid in its own terms. He refers mainly to members of the new intellectual diaspora, who, depending on the context of reference and the needs of the representation, are either ripped off their identity or stabilised as the Other:

"(...) successes [of scholars of African origin] are seldom used to valorize Africa; rather they serve to emphasize the exceptionality of the individuals in question, and consequently, provide added reason for the nativization or ethnicization of any creativity or perspective by Africans that seems to deviate from established western norms

and traditions (...). Almost invariably, such 'exceptionally talented' sons and daughters of the Heart of Darkness are instantly fished out and celebrated by western seats of wisdom located at the metropolis, whence they can safely contemplate, theorize and speak on behalf of Africa without the risk of backsliding into the savagery that comes with ignoring the call for enlightenment. It is therefore not surprising that even in scholarship, recognition for Africans has often meant sacrificing relevance to the communities and cultures we seem so determined to outgrow." (Nyamnjoh 2004a: 342)

I have argued before that the question of relevance with respect to knowledge on Africa is not easily resolved. Similarly, while Massey, Allen, and Sarre suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between hegemonic and critical geographic imaginations (cf. Massey/Allen/Sarre 1991: 17), to transfer this distinction to our context does not automatically lead to a clear-cut categorisation of the representations uttered in African scholarship. In this sense, this study aims at contributing to "the process by which Africans can have greater autonomy over how they are represented and how they can construct their own social and cultural models in ways not so mediated by a Western episteme and historicity" (Escobar 1995: 7). Without being obsessed "with representation, to the exclusion of the attempt to grapple with reality" (Nugent 2009: 7), it offers a contribution to conceptualisations of agency with respect to Africa, for as Doty argues, "meaningful discussion of agency must perforce be a discussion of representation" because the "representational practices that construct particular identities have serious ramifications for agency" (Doty 1996: 168). To understand African discourse as global discourse instead of a local or indigenous one with restricted validity thus might be a step towards the conceptualisation of Africa "between generality and singularity", which acknowledges "the peculiar "historicity" of African societies, their own *raison d'être* and their relation to solely themselves, [which] are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualised outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized." (Mbembe 2001a: 9).



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## **ANNEX**

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## EXAMINED CORPUS

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## ABSTRACT

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What meaning does 'Africa' have when it is linked to human rights and development? The analysis of African scholarship undertaken in this study shows that writing about Africa means more than just the choice of a regional focus. The exclusive engagement with African scholarship here aims at opposing the marginalisation of African scholarship in hegemonic discourses on human rights and development. At the same time, this thesis problematises and questions the notion of a homogeneous African (counter-) discourse.

The introductory chapter captures the meaning of Africa as an object of study and deals with representations of Africa inherent in manifold discourses. Subsequently, the perspective is extended and shifted to scholarship on Africa and different groups of scholars involved in it. The past and present of African Studies as a discipline is permeated by a multitude of interests that contribute to the construction of particular images of Africa. A discussion of the historical, intellectual, and material conditions of knowledge production in Africa clarifies the roles of African scholars in a global context. The issues of language, publishing, and relevance of science are of particular concern in this respect. The African discourses on both human rights and development contain a number of subordinate discourses that involve different conceptualisations of the relationship between Africa and the two key concepts. These discourses are analysed in detail regarding the constructions of Africa that they create. The analysis shows that the representations, attributions, and meanings of Africa in these particular discourses lead to diverse concepts of Africa. These differ not only according to their emphasis on distinct or even opposed discursive elements but also in their interpretation and assessment of Africa's relationship with the West as an opponent or a role model.

From this perspective, writing about Africa in general can be understood as the positioning of African scholars in a global discourse and interpreted as a process that not only creates certain meanings of Africa but also aims at a (re-) negotiation of Africa's role in the world.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

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Welche Bedeutung hat Afrika, wenn es im Zusammenhang mit Menschenrechten und Entwicklung gedacht wird? Dass es sich bei Auseinandersetzungen mit Afrika um mehr als nur eine regionale Schwerpunktsetzung handelt, wird in der vorliegenden Arbeit anhand der Analyse afrikanischer wissenschaftlicher Literatur aufgezeigt. Diese Schwerpunktsetzung wendet sich gegen die Marginalisierung afrikanischer Wissenschaft in hegemonialen Diskursen zu Menschenrechten und Entwicklung, problematisiert und hinterfragt aber gleichzeitig die Vorstellung eines homogenen afrikanischen (Gegen-)Diskurses.

In einem einführenden Kapitel wird die Bedeutung von Afrika als Forschungsobjekt erfasst und die damit verbundenen Repräsentationen von Afrika in vielfältigen Diskursen behandelt. Anschließend wird die Perspektive erweitert und auf die Forschenden selbst verlagert. Die Geschichte und Gegenwart der Afrikawissenschaften als Disziplin ist geprägt von einer Vielfalt an Interessen, die auch in die Konstruktion bestimmter Afrikabilder einfließen. Die historischen, intellektuellen und materiellen Bedingungen von Wissensproduktion in Afrika verdeutlichen darüber hinaus die Rolle afrikanischer WissenschaftlerInnen im globalen Kontext. Eine besondere Bedeutung kommt in dieser Hinsicht den Bereichen Sprache, Veröffentlichung und Relevanz von Wissenschaft zu.

Für die Analyse wurden wissenschaftliche Artikel von afrikanischen AutorInnen herangezogen, die seit Beginn der 1980er Jahre erschienen sind und Afrika im Zusammenhang mit Menschenrechten und Entwicklung auf einer allgemeinen Ebene behandeln. Sowohl der afrikanische Menschenrechts- als auch der Entwicklungsdiskurs enthalten eine Reihe untergeordneter Diskurse, in denen das Verhältnis zwischen Afrika und den beiden Schlüsselkonzepten jeweils anders konzipiert wird. Diese als Idealtypen verstandenen untergeordneten Diskurse werden im Detail analysiert und im Hinblick auf die in ihnen enthaltenen Konstruktionen von Afrika dargestellt. Aus der Analyse wird deutlich, dass die Repräsentationen, Zuschreibungen und Bedeutungen von

Afrika in den jeweiligen Diskursen zu unterschiedlichen Afrika-Konzepten führen. Diese unterscheiden sich nicht nur durch die Hervorhebung unterschiedlicher oder entgegengesetzter diskursiver Elemente, sondern auch durch eine unterschiedliche Interpretation und Bewertung von Afrikas Verhältnis zum Westen als Gegenpol oder Vorbild.

Das Schreiben über Afrika im Allgemeinen kann in dieser Hinsicht als eine Positionierung afrikanischer WissenschaftlerInnen im globalen Diskurs verstanden werden und lässt sich als Prozess interpretieren, in dem nicht nur bestimmte Bedeutungen von Afrika geschaffen werden, sondern die Rolle von Afrika in der Welt verhandelt werden soll.

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*“[C]ontrary to the fashion in most prefaces, I will not add that ‘all my mistakes and shortcomings are entirely my responsibility’. That is sheer bourgeois subjectivism. Responsibility in matters of these sorts is always collective, especially with regard to remedying the shortcomings.”*

*Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1974)*

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### **Studies:**

2002 – 2008

Development Studies & African Studies, University of Vienna, Austria.

Diploma Thesis on gender-specific perceptions of empowerment processes in a local Community Based Organization in the Korogocho-slum of Nairobi, Kenya. Title: “I don’t know what’s wrong with us girls’ – From beauty pageants to empowerment? Interpretations, differentiations and functions of a development buzzword in Nairobi”.

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### **Academic work experience:**

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Lecturer at the Department of African Studies, University Vienna, Austria. Courses: “History of Africa”, “Why and how to think ‘Africa’? Concepts and representations of Africa in discourses on development, human rights, and gender”.

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Member of the editorial board of *Stichproben – Vienna Journal of African Studies*.

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Lecturer at the Development Studies Project and Dpt. of African Studies, University Vienna, Austria. Courses: “Whose Empowerment? Interests and assumptions behind a development buzzword”, “History of North-South Relations”, “History of Africa”.



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University Assistant at the Department of African Studies (including co-ordination of *Stichproben - Vienna Journal of African Studies*), University Vienna, Austria.

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Tutor assisting various courses at the Development Studies Project, University Vienna, Austria: “Introduction to Development Studies”, “Institutions of International Development”, “History of North-South Relations”, “History of Africa”.

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Organisation and facilitation of preparation seminars for future volunteers and train-the-trainer seminars on global learning and global interdependencies with the Global Education Network for Young Europeans (GLEN).

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Student representative of the doctoral students in the Initiativkolleg “Empowerment through Human Rights”, University Vienna, Austria.

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Personal assistant of people with special needs on a voluntary basis at *GIN – Verein für Gemeinwesenintegration und Normalisierung* in Vienna, Austria.

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Internship at the Paulo Freire Zentrum, Vienna, Austria.

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Programme co-ordination and contribution in the organizational team of the conference “Looking for a Different Europe” – A Forum of Non-governmental Organizations of Central and Eastern Europe, which took place in Bratislava, Slovakia, in November 2005 and was co-organized by Attac Austria, Greenpeace CEE and Trialog.

2004/09

Internship at the Slovak Development NGO Platform in Bratislava, Slovakia.

### **Stays abroad:**

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Field research on the Community Based Organization *Miss Koch Initiative* in the slum of Korogocho in Nairobi, Kenya, using qualitative methods of field work.

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### **Publications:**

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