LeidenASA: African Studies at Leiden University present, future(s)

....a discussion.....
(Mirjam de Bruijn, Ton Dietz, Maaike Westra)

Introduction
LeidenASA is one year old. What did we do in that one year? And where do we want to go? How are we going to build on the past and at the same time use perspectives for the future? Leiden University has gone through many changes over the past year, including the ‘settlement’ of the African Studies Centre within its borders in January 2016. This inclusion of Africa Studies has not just been the settlement of the Centre, but also the questioning of what African Studies means in terms of content and physical presence at Leiden University. The long list of Africanist scholars that have a tenure position, and those who are on their way to tenure, and the long list of Africa oriented PhD’s show how much African studies is present in Leiden and elsewhere in the Netherlands and Belgium. However, everybody works in his or her own institute and often one is not really ‘backed up’ by African Studies, but instead in a discipline. We also discovered that the African Studies Centre, as one of the main hubs of African Studies in Europe was, despite many attempts to link, still poorly connected to Leiden University. The big challenge for us Africanists from the University and the Centre, and the assignment of the board of the University is in fact to bridge this gap and by doing so to develop an African Studies Strategy and platform within Leiden University. The danger of such a ‘regrouping’ is that this will become an island. Therefore we open this discussion text with an idea and vision of/on African studies, not so much as located in geography but much more as an approach of/to the world and in continuous dialogue with other area studies, disciplines and looking beyond the borders of Leiden University.

African Studies
First of all African studies is an interdisciplinary field of studies. An Africanist combines the disciplines in various ways. This is a very productive attitude in a world where universities tend to organize around disciplines. We can consider the choice for African Studies as a methodological statement, a plea for interdisciplinarity, a plea for a discussion on and beyond the borders between the disciplines.
As Ferguson (2006), in the introduction to his book Global Shadows, said: Africa is a way to read the world. In all studies we have to start somewhere to interpret processes, dynamics, developments. And indeed starting in a process or dynamic situated in Africa is one among so many other choices, but it is as reasonable as any other. Such a standpoint leads us into comparative studies. This is an angle that we still have to develop very much at Leiden University (but probably also elsewhere in the world).
Africa is the world, and is everywhere in the world. Hence the study of Africa can link us to all kinds of general discussions. But also the field of African studies is everywhere. African studies is global.
But what makes African studies then so specific? And why does it need a special place in the field of sciences? Some more technologically oriented people would indeed contest this position. On the other hand if we take a very recent example of the way ICTs have been implanted in Africa we can also see a difference in technological development in appropriation of technologies and so on. African cultures and histories are unique and need to be told and known in order to also understand processes and dynamics at the continent and in the world. This attempt to define African Studies is endless, and probably one in which we will never succeed. Thus we could as well keep it to a definition of a study field with strategic interests. All disciplines have a history, and so does African Studies. Today’s interest in African Studies is diverse: science enters the world of business and policy. Here we encounter the ethical questions when we enter for instance into the discussion of commercial interests, military strategic interests, etc. These are questions that have become again so urgent in ‘the war on terrorism’, the search for market opportunities, discussions on land grabbing and so on. At the same time these tendencies show also a particular position of Africa in the world and that is the reason to study it and to debate also on the edge. Probably the most practical reason for the why of African studies is that it is organizing researchers, lecturers, students in a network. LeidenASA will be such a network that is able to defend its studies, to develop a truly comparative framework and to bridge borders between disciplines, and towards trans-disciplinary linkages, and to enter into debate with policy, business and development. And that can be done on the basis of a truly world-class library on African Studies in Leiden of both physical books, journals, documentaries and other forms of knowledge heritage, and ever more of digital(ised) material. The Library of the African Studies Centre has gained a prominent place in Africanist studies worldwide, and with the intended synergy with Africanist materials in the University Library, and in the Libraries of the Museums in Leiden there is a treasure to be proud of and to use as a core focus of African Studies.

LeidenASA 2016
The main aims of LeidenASA, reformulated after evaluation of 2016, are:
1. Proliferation of African Studies of Leiden University as an inter-/transdisciplinary field;
2. Organization of African scholars who are otherwise spread over Leiden University in a network;
3. Synergy and hence ‘profit’ from improved/collaborative teaching and research programmes.
4. Development of a dialogue with the outside world (policy, business, politics, etc.)

2016 was a try-out year for LeidenASA.

The actions undertaken in 2016: The documents to which this text refers can all be found on the website of LeidenASA.
1. Establishment of a ‘governance’ structure of LeidenASA; communication plan with different groups who are responsible; next to the board and daily board; (organigram, see website);
2. Allocation of Funds from University to LeidenASA (1.2 mn);
3. Two meetings of the core group, representing all departments and gremia from the university and musea in Leiden (read the minutes);
4. Set up of communication plan (in progress);
5. Teaching: Development of minor African studies (read the draft proposal);
6. Research: Exploration of research agendas and possibilities to develop in teams; we assigned three sabbaticals (read the proposals here);
7. Valorization of research, the Africa Thesis Award; main element here was the V4T festival
8. Developing linkages with African institutes through MOUs and networks we so far assigned four Visiting fellows for 2017. Profiles will be published on the website as soon as possible.
9. Establishment of the PhD network and successful yearly meeting on October 27;
10. Activities for expanding the library collection; A first collection trip under the umbrella of LeidenASA was made to Nigeria;
11. Start with the development of a publication e-platform and website.

Leiden ASA 2017: What are the challenges?
Each of the points raised here is in fact an invitation for reflection. Please if you have additional reflections that did not appear in the discussion of 8 December, you can email them to Maaike Westra.

During the meeting of 8 December we invite you to especially
- reflect on the programme as a whole and please suggest additional components
- reflect on the document of the minor African Studies
- reflect on network LeidenASA – knowledge institutes/networks in Africa.

We intend to write a two-year action-plan for LeidenASA on the basis of our discussion and to formulate a proposal for the Africa Policy of Leiden University, embedded in an Africa Policy for the LDE university network (Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Rotterdam; see later).

Organization

Make the organizational structure of LeidenASA really work! In order to do so we propose to further develop the LeidenASA digital environment and a website. The digital structure that was offered by the University has not been very successful. In 2017 we will work with an external partner (G-company) and with the University on the improvement of the web-office LeidenASA.
A quick overview of organizational structure:

1. Board: Dean of Humanities, Dean of Social Sciences and the Director of the VVI (Law Faculty) (the same Board as for the ASCL)
2. Co-chairs
3. Daily governance; Co-chairs and coordinator
   a. Committee education
   b. Committee research
   c. Committee library
   d. Committee valorization
   e. Young scholars
   f. To be nominated: committee Africa-Europe networks?
   g. Sub-group: Exploration of the expansion of LeidenASA into Delft and Rotterdam (LDE)

A: Teaching in African Studies

The inventory of African Studies teaching programmes at Leiden University has shown a very diverse but yet fragmented programme. It is not easy for Bachelor students to find their way if they want to combine courses and develop independently without being obliged to do the full programme of the BA Talen en Culturen van Afrika (languages and Cultures of Africa), to develop a specialization in Africa within another discipline. The programme within International studies is separated from Leiden University for organizational reasons (that probably have to be contested).

To overcome this problem the core group teaching has taken up the challenge to develop a minor programme for the BA that has to be ap/improved in 2017. In the link you find the draft proposal.

Furthermore we should put creation of synergy as a core goal; both in BA and MA programming for teaching in African Studies. The ResMA and MA African Studies would ideally be more streamlined with disciplinary oriented programmes. Visibility is important. One possible improvement is a website where all the programmes are presented in one block.

For 2017 we propose as well to develop the first steps into the development of e-learning: Moocs and Spocs; We should inventorise who has already expertise, or who is willing to develop e-learning. The university has separate funds for the development of these e-teaching programmes. (http://leidenuniv.onlinelearninglab.org/offer-a-spoc.html; http://leidenuniv.onlinelearninglab.org/); Example of Spoc: on language and society (Maarten Mous & Eefje Gilbert); Example of Mooc: Frugal Innovations in Africa (a.o. André Leliveld) and the Mooc developed in the Department of Political Science (by Jan Erk).
**B: Researching in African Studies**

An important tool to develop more synergy in research within the field of LeidenASA is a LeidenASA-sabbatical that allows people with overfull teaching agenda’s to liberate themselves to work on a research project (of any kind) that includes collaboration within the University and beyond. Beginning of 2017 the first three sabbaticals paid from the funds of LeidenASA will start.

2017 ending we will evaluate the first sabbaticals on their success in combining disciplines, building bridges within the University and link Leiden University to the external research world.

Another tool for the creation of synergy would be a LeidenASA seminar series, for which collaboration with ‘Valorization’ will be organized.

Thirdly the establishment of a network with African knowledge institutes will also help to create more synergy (see below).

In 2017 we would like to explore if it is possible to strengthen African Studies where that is needed most by making use of joint appointments at various levels. And the intended ASCL professors all will have a specific task to link with the various Faculties existing in Leiden, and together to have links with all of them. This will specifically mean an extra effort for linking with the Faculty of Science and for the Faculty of Governance and Global Studies in The Hague. But also linkages with for instance LUCIS, LUCAS, Archaeology and LUMC need more emphasis (and possibly a financial backing).

**C: Library collaboration and extending collection**

Looking back to what we worked on in the information – and library section in 2016, several things were accomplished that possibly wouldn’t have been achieved without the existence of LeidenASA:

* Extending the Leiden library collections with >1,500 books from acquisition trips to both Morocco and Nigeria. The trip to Morocco (SIEL Book fair) was undertaken in cooperation with the university library; during the trip to Nigeria the ASCL bought books for UBL (language & literature, Arabic etc.)
* Choosing 700 books on development & Africa (by UBL & ASCL together) for the Leiden collection, to fill the “KIT-gap”.
* Leiden law Professor Nick Huls wrote the introduction for the ASCL web dossier “Constitutions in Africa”.
* UBL & ASCL Library staff giving explanation about datamanagement, collections and rankings to 25 young Leiden (+NL+BE) researchers on Africa. (PhD / Junior researcher meeting 27 October 2016)
* Valorisation: a YouTube film with 2 Dutch rappers (Akwasi & Bokoesam) on their Ghanese/Dutch roots, filmed both at the ASC Library and the Leiden Academiegebouw, attracting 20,000 hits within 2 weeks.

Looking forward to 2017, we expect to work on the following:
* Extending and implementing the PID to include the ASCL catalogue in the UBL catalogue Alma.
* Further developing the Africa part of the Leiden repository (o.a. from APIS to LUCRIS), and increasing the number of open access “Leiden Africa” publications.
* Having new introductions on information matters for PhD & researchers.
* Cooperating on new acquisition trips in Africa in 2017.

**D: Valorisation of research**

Valorisation of research has become an important part of the researcher’s and funder’s discourses and practice. What we mean by it is highly diffuse, which is probably a good thing. LeidenASA should make choices which valorization tools to develop in this vast field of valorization practices.

**Plans for 2017:**

1. An evaluation by the committee of the Voice4Thought festival as it took place in September [http://voice4thought.org/festival-2016/](http://voice4thought.org/festival-2016/) and internalize these in a next version of the festival or likewise activities for 2017, initiated through V4T;

2. 2017 should be the start of a LeidenASA seminar series, where the core elements of African Studies (see above) are presented and what can become, or should be a meeting place for the widely spread Africanists in the University; to create and stimulate synergy;

3. Valorisation is as well collaboration with societal partners, business etc. In 2017 we will make an evaluation of existing links with these ‘non-academic’ partners. The ASCL developed the ASC Community (with many non-academic members in the Netherlands and in Africa; Initiated by ASCL and executed by the NBAC is the Africa Works conference organized every two years; another activity here is Leiden’s presence during the annual Africa Day of the Max van der Stoel Foundation, as well as Leiden’s presence at the activities of the NVAS. But there are many other ongoing valorization activities, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that African Studies is a pioneer in this field within Leiden University. However, more is possible, and particularly in terms of linking and learning.

4. Publication strategies are as well part of valorization. Increasingly we are confronted with e-publishing. Recently Brill adopted the experiment that was developed within Voice4Thought: a peer-reviewed e-publication platform: Bridging Humanities: e-platform for alternative methodologies. This will be further developed in 2017, and goes online in February with the first
publication, that will be Africa oriented, see: http://voice4thought.org/platform/.

5. Important is the development of a website (see above) where announcements of workshops etc. are posted and alerts are built in for all members of the LeidenASA community; a better communication about valorization activities that are already on-going is crucial for the future of LeidenASA;

6. All other suggestions are welcome; let’s especially combine and communicate!

E: Young scholars

The PhD-group is running and the annual meeting was a success. This is combined with an excel overview of PhD projects in the Netherlands. It has been suggested to set aside some funds for visits by Leiden PhD students abroad and vice versa.

LeidenASA should develop a similar structure for Post-doc researchers and other junior temporary staff. We will appoint a small committee to develop this in 2017.

F: Linking to African Studies knowledge institutes in Africa and Europe

In 2017 we have made a first step in the creation of a Leiden-Africa ASA network. Instead of ‘blindly’ signing MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) we have decided to reflect on the possibility to develop a more inclusive and networking approach.

In the past relations between institutes in Africa and Europe were suffering from unequal relations that were criticized in post-colonial discussions. It has not been easy to get rid of the ‘colonial heritage’, which is for instance reflected in the often used concept of ‘capacity building’. In a search for more equal relations the concept ‘partnership’ has become the buzz-word. We refer for an overview and actions-reactions to a paper of Ton Dietz.

LeidenASA wants to contribute to the development of equal partnerships in knowledge production within African Studies.

Our instruments are of course limited. Ideally we envisage LeidenASA as being part of networks of Knowledge Institutes in Africa and Europe. In these networks collaboration is central. As it is impossible to link to all relevant institutes, we propose three tools to enable this collaboration:

1. The signature of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between central knowledge institutes in Africa and LeidenASA; LeidenASA already signed several MOUs in South Africa, Mozambique, and Ghana, while there is NIMAR and NVIC for North Africa. We are negotiating with several institutes in West and Central Africa and we envisage to do the same for Eastern Africa;

2. The creation of networks of (regional) knowledge institutes in Africa and Europe, or of the reinforcement of existing knowledge institutes (like
CODESRIA, AERC, etc.) with a crucial role for the central partners of Africa based Knowledge platforms (under 1); With special attention for including all ‘official’ language areas: Portuguese, French/Francophonie; English, Arabic;

3. NIMAR will be included in the network as a central ‘hub’ in the arabophone part and to link Northern and sub-Saharan Africa;

4. Small funds should be made available for start-ups: small collaborative projects within these networks, e.g. book projects/writing projects;

Action from LeidenASA in 2017: create a committee for this task that is responsible for the selection of the central institutes and a discussion with these institutes to develop regional networks; develop small collaborative projects. The goal is to have established networks towards the end of 2017.

**G: Further extension of collaboration in the Netherlands: Delft Rotterdam**

Find the preliminary overview [here](#).

Leiden, Delft and Erasmus Rotterdam have decided that Africa will be one of seven major fields of collaboration between these three co-operating universities, while in some of the other six fields Africa is also prominent (like in the Frugal Innovations theme), and in others it can be developed further. Asia is also one of the seven major fields and existing linkages within LeidenGlobal between Africa and Asia activities could be expanded to Delft and Rotterdam as well.

As we did in Leiden in 2016, an inventory was made about existing key people with research and teaching activities in and on Africa. See link above.

On top of the more than 100 PhD holding scholars in Leiden the various knowledge Centres in Delft (including UNESCO-IHE), Rotterdam (including ISS and IHS), and some in The Hague (e.g. Clingendael) add another 90 PhD-holding scholars. Together these 200 scholars probably form one of the most knowledgeable concentrations about Africa in the world (outside Africa itself), and with a vast network of contacts in Africa and in the world as a whole.

In 2017 explorations will be continued about ways to fruitfully work together. One of the obvious possibilities is a joint Minor African Studies (see before), and expansion of the Leiden Fund for African Studies with funds coming from Delft and Rotterdam to add sabbatical leave, visiting fellow,valorization, and other joint possibilities at the level of LDE as a whole.