

**Strident Africa:
Societal and Environmental Change
in the Context of
50 Centuries
of History**

Research programme African Studies Centre Leiden 2019-2024

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Glossary/Acronyms

AEGIS	Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies
CFIA	Leiden Delft Erasmus Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa
CRG	Collaborative Research Group
ECAS	European Conference on African Studies
LDE	Leiden Delft Erasmus University Consortium
LEARN	Leiden Edinburgh Africanist Research Network
LeidenASA	Leiden African Studies Assembly
LERG	Leiden Edinburgh Research Groups

Introduction

This document outlines *Strident Africa*, the overarching research programme of the African Studies Centre Leiden for the years 2019-2024. It outlines the research structures as they exist within and beyond the ASCL, and provides a background to and motivation for the research programme.

The Netherlands has a long and enduring relationship with the African continent. A substantial proportion of the Dutch population is of African descent. Since the 1600s Dutch multinational companies have conducted business in and with Africa, currently Dutch soldiers and sailors are active in Africa, tens of thousands of Dutch missionaries and aid workers have lived and worked in Africa, and tens of thousands of Dutch citizens annually visit the continent on vacation.

The African Studies Centre Leiden is the only academic institution in the Netherlands dedicated solely to the study of Africa. It is one of the leading centres of African Studies in the world. It is strong and resilient, with a proud history and a firm commitment to academic excellence in all spheres. It has a long and well-established warm working relationship with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The library of the ASCL is second to none in Western Europe, and ASCL staff score above average in terms of research and publications.

In 2016 the ASCL ceased to be an inter-university institution, and became an integral part of Leiden University. It is now firmly embedded in the structures of the University as an interfaculty institute (with the Deans of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law sitting on its board), whilst maintaining its independence in terms of research and library acquisition policy. The employees of the centre are actively involved in teaching within the University at all levels, prominent examples of which are the Research Master and Master African Studies. In addition to which the ASCL has its own interfaculty PhD Graduate Programme in African Studies. The institute, through its cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in teaching, and crucial initiatives such as INCLUDE (the Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies), actively strives to make ‘knowledge ‘work’ for policy-makers and practitioners’.¹ The ASCL, through its crucial position in the Leiden African Studies Assembly ([LeidenASA](#)), the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa ([CFIA](#)), Netherlands Association for African Studies ([NVAS](#)) and the Africa-Europe Group

¹ <http://includeplatform.net/>

for Interdisciplinary Studies ([AEGIS](#)), plays a central role in African Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands and the world as a whole. These are strengths upon which the ASCL will continue to capitalise in its future research, documentation and library strategies.

The multitude of ways in which Africa's legal systems, political systems, economies, societies, religions, cultures, technologies, environments, and much more influence change and are affected by change, form the full ambit of what can be productively studied by the ASCL, and in an ideal world of limitless resources this would most certainly be the case. However, the ASCL has to make specific strategic choices. In line with the recommendations of the recent external evaluation of the centre, and its own capabilities and insights, the ASCL will concentrate on its strengths whilst seeking to capitalise on new opportunities.²

African Studies Centre Leiden Research Structures

Within the ASCL research is organised along three lines: individual research projects, professorial Chairs, and within Collaborative Research Groups (CRGs). Beyond the ASCL the institute collaborates in bilateral and multilateral research endeavours with selected partners within and beyond the realm of AEGIS (Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies). Within the ambit of Leiden-Delft-Erasmus (LDE), the ASCL heads the Leiden African Studies Assembly (LeidenASA).

Every researcher at the ASCL has their own research field, speciality, and interest, and more often than not these individual interests are pursued within the context of larger endeavours such as the Collaborative Research Groups (CRGs); however, if need be, researchers are free to pursue their own research trajectories. The ASCL has seven professorial Chairs (of which six have been allocated) in different fields within African Studies, in which the professors head specific research interests in relation to the Chair.

All staff within the ASCL, be they support staff, researchers or library specialists, are free to participate in one or more of the seven Collaborative Research Groups. In addition the CRGs are open to all PhD and post-graduate students attached to the centre for the duration of their studies. The CRGs cover a wide variety of topics, some of which can be linked to the

² https://www.ascleiden.nl/sites/default/files/2017.06.23_rqa_final_version_approved.pdf

individual Chairs of the Centre, and some of which are consciously structured in such a way as to enable and further innovative research in the field of African Studies.

The African Studies Centre Leiden is a co-founder and constituent partner of the LDE Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa (CFIA), which is part of the strategic alliance between Leiden University, Delft University of Technology and Erasmus University Rotterdam. In addition, the ASCL is a founder member and treasurer of AEGIS (Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies). It is within this context that the ASCL has long-term bilateral research relations with the Centre for African Studies at the University of Edinburgh in the Leiden Edinburgh Africa Research Network (LEARN), within which four research groups (LERGS) operate. In these LERGS staff of both institutions work together on matters of mutual interest. In addition, individual ASCL staff often have longstanding links and collaboration with colleagues and institutes in Europe, Africa, and beyond.

Long-term trends in Strident Africa

The word ‘strident’ contains within it two meanings, the first dictionary definition of ‘loud and brash’, derived from the Latin, and the second colloquial meaning derived from the verb ‘stride’, meaning ‘walk with long steps’. Both meanings, used in the context of the title of this programme ‘Strident Africa’, can be considered to be correct and applicable to Africa in the present. Evermore the continent and its people are asserting their own independent and at times brash position in the world, literally striding onto the centre stage of the globe.

Africa may be considered by many to be a relatively minor player on the international stage of economy and politics, yet its role appears set to increase dramatically in the coming decades, if only on account of its remarkable population growth.³ This undiminishing upsurge in population will lead to economies of scale and numbers that cannot be overlooked.⁴ Much as China powered its way with ever-increasing self-confidence onto the centre stage of world affairs in a manner that was hardly foreseen some thirty years ago, similarly Africa appears set to move in from the wings and into the limelight of world affairs.

³ <https://www.odi.org/events/4592-africas-economic-growth-new-global-context> ; <https://www.cfr.org/blog/unpacking-africas-2019-gdp-growth-prospects> & <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview> (Accessed 16 May 2019).

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/> (Accessed 1 May 2018).

In the ‘Year of Africa’ in 1960, when 13 African countries gained independence and the end of colonial rule became inevitable, the African continent had a mere 285 million inhabitants, compared to 658 million in China, 450 million in India, and 406.7 million in what would become the EU-28. Nearly sixty years later the 1.3 billionth African was born on 15 November 2018.⁵ China (with 1.4 billion) and India (with 1.36 billion) still have larger populations, but in 2023 this will no longer be the case. Most demographers expect that Africa will have 1.7 billion inhabitants by 2030 and 2.5 billion by 2050.⁶

This rapid population growth has led to urbanisation on a scale previously not experienced in Africa. In Africa about 40 percent of the population is under 15, and nearly 70 percent is under 30.⁷ This is a young dynamic population that is literally on the move. For example, every day a minimum of 2,000 people emigrate to Nigeria’s largest city, Lagos, where current population estimates put the population at 21 million inhabitants. By the turn of the century, Lagos is projected to have a population in excess of 88 million. Similarly Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is projected to be the second largest city in the world with a population of 83 million. Dar Es Salaam, the former capital on the coast of Tanzania, is projected to have a population of 74 million by 2100.⁸

The urbanisation of Africa has immediate and long-term effects on the economies and environment of African countries. Climate change is an incontrovertible reality that has dramatic long-term consequences for humankind.⁹ Africa, and the world as a whole, have already begun to experience the consequences of climate change with dramatic seasonal shifts and changes in rainfall levels, leading to increased flooding, droughts, failed harvests, and environmental degradation.¹⁰ As the population of Africa continues to grow, so too does the impact of humankind on the natural resources of the continent.¹¹ This unabated exploitation of resources is exacerbated by external intervention which continues to ensure, not only that Africa continues to be a net-exporter of capital, but that the continent’s natural resources continue to be utilised and exported by external actors with allegiances that do not, in the first

⁵ <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population> Material based on UN material.

⁶ See in this regard the work of Prof. Dietz and Dr. Akinyoade at the ASCL.

⁷ <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries> (Accessed 2 October 2018)

⁸ <https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2018-07-22/visualizing-worlds-largest-megacities-2100>

<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/animated-map-worlds-populous-cities-2100/> (Accessed 1 May 2019).

⁹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/> (Accessed 8 May 2019).

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-47203344> (Accessed 14 February 2019).

¹¹ See in this regard the work of Prof. Abbink at the ASCL.

instance, lie with the continent and its peoples, let alone the environment.¹² The extensive existence of rent-seeking states on the continent, in which support for legislation regulating the environmental impact of both internal and external actors is limited or non-existent, ensures that the consequences of climatic change are exacerbated in the interests of profit.¹³ The sustained devastation of the natural environment will have an irreversible impact upon bio-diversity and plant and animal life as swathes of land are laid to waste.¹⁴ This devastation will continue to impact, and be exacerbated by, human society.

Africa is in flux; partly as a consequence of demographic change, environmental degradation and insecurity, millions of people are on the move in Africa.¹⁵ Currently the continent is home to millions of internally displaced migrants, those who have been forced to leave their homes but who have not crossed an international border.¹⁶ The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that an average of 15000 people are displaced daily in Africa, primarily on account of conflict.¹⁷ In addition, currently Sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population, and there are an estimated 18 million people who depend on the UNHCR for support in Africa.¹⁸

The tremendous population flows and spectacular urbanisation rates on the continent are in part a direct consequence of the collapse of rural livelihoods, be they in farming, fishing or pastoralism.¹⁹ Africa's future, it seems, will be an urban one. Its urban population is the fastest growing globally, and one that may have little to no regard for the rural beyond that of seeing the rural as a zone of food production and exploitation, and or old-fashioned ritual.²⁰

¹² See in this regard the work of Prof. Uche and Dr. Kaag at the ASCL.

¹³ Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Tycoons, Smugglers, and the Systematic Theft of Africa's Wealth* (London: William Collins, 2016); Stephen Ellis, *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organised Crime* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016) & Clooney & Pendergast, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-african-republic/2018-03-14/key-making-peace-africa> (Accessed 21 March 2018).

¹⁴ Jon Abbink, *The Environmental Crunch in Africa: Growth Narratives vs. Local Realities* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2018).

¹⁵ Edwards, A. (2016). *Global forced displacement hits record high*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html> & Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2017). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2017*. Geneva, Switzerland: IDMC. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/>

¹⁶ As a consequence, even though these displaced persons have well-founded fears of persecution based on ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and other criteria covered by international protocols, they lack protection accorded to refugees by international law and United Nations agencies.

¹⁷ <http://www.internal-displacement.org/> & <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2017-africa-report-internal-displacement> (Accessed 13 November 2018).

¹⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/africa.html> (Accessed 13 November 2018).

¹⁹ See in this regard in particular the work of Prof. De Bruijn and Dr. Both at the ASCL.

²⁰ There are those that would argue that this is too harsh a prediction. Indeed, the argument presented may not represent the youth in Africa. Most of whom are increasingly connected to global ideas and awareness and could

Central to Africa's urbanisation are the rural-urban linkages, new economies, forms of governance, culture and society, that allow for and enable people to live in mega-cities in excess of ten million inhabitants. It is predicted that in the coming decade Africa will be home to six of these enormous urban centres, and every second person in Africa will be an urbanite.²¹

Clearly Egypt is not the same as South Africa, Liberia is not the same as Eritrea. Yet, what binds these many and varied countries, beyond the accident of geographical location in one continent, is the experience of colonial rule; a period of time in which the economies of Africa were fundamentally transformed and new forms of governance imposed.²² Structures of governance and forms of economy that generally favour the continued exploitation and subjugation of the continent's people and its resources in the interest of a small elite.²³ An elite that uses the structures of the state to further enrich itself in conjunction with an ever varying group of external actors, be they individuals, states or multi-national corporations.²⁴

In the context of environmental change and demographic growth, African societies and countries will continue to develop in their own particular manner and in historical timeframes that cannot be dictated to.²⁵ All too often 'Africa' has been seen by external observers as something that needs to be developed, its perceived undeveloped or underdeveloped nature to be changed by the external expert. This perspective of Africa is one that is riven through with power relations that are rapidly changing in the present. The examples of World Bank and IMF dictated Structural Adjustment Programmes implemented without democratic mandate, with generally disastrous results for the countries concerned, suffice to underscore the argument being made.²⁶

be expected to reject existing corrupt political leaders as they realize that corruption is limiting their future. In addition, as the Annual Stephen Ellis Lecture, *What is prosperity for Africa?* (Leiden, 6 December 2018) by Professor Dame Henrietta L. Moore, indicates, there is every incentive to ensure that Africa's future not be an urban one. <https://www.ascleiden.nl/news/stephen-ellis-annual-lecture-henrietta-moore-what-prosperity-africa> (Accessed 14 February 2019).

²¹ Julia Bello-Schunemann and Ciara Aucoin, 'Six of the world's 41 megacities will be in Africa by 2030', *HowwemadeitinAfrica* (Accessed 23 April 2019).

²² See in this regard the work of Prof. Gewald and Dr. van Walraven at the ASCL.

²³ An issue that was already apparent two decades ago, J-F. Bayard, S. Ellis & B. Hibou, *The Criminilization of the State in Africa*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1999). What one recent observer referred to as a 'spectacularly corrupt' elite, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36260193> (Accessed 13 November 2018).

²⁴ Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Tycoons, Smugglers, and the Systematic Theft of Africa's Wealth* (London: William Collins, 2016). See in this regard the work of Prof. Uche and Dr. Kaag at the ASCL.

²⁵ See in this regard the work of Prof. Uche and Dr. Leliveld at the ASCL.

²⁶ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011); James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); & Jan-Bart Gewald and Sebastiaan Soeters, 'African Miners and Shape

In line with Africa's changing position in the world, the assault being carried out by countless activists in order to bring about the 'decolonisation' of the academy and African Studies as a whole is to be welcomed. The whole debate revolves around the core issue as to who has the 'authority' and 'right' to speak about Africa, if not for Africa. African Studies needs to be fully aware of its origins, as a field of studies where practitioners sought to define and administer 'the other', yet this should never stand in the way of critically informed source based research. Research material collected in a scientific manner is material that can be utilised irrespective of the gender, colour or creed of the person who collected it. To deny this, is to deny the scientific venture as a whole, and to allow for a descent into the free-floating world of opinion. Any future research to be carried out at the ASCL needs to be critically aware of these debates, and be able to deal with them in an academically sound manner.

The colonial residue that allowed European researchers to criss-cross the continent with a great deal of immunity and privilege, whilst being protected by their passports came to an end in the early 2000s.²⁷ The murder of Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni in 2016 at the hands of Egypt's security services sent out a very strong and clear signal that academic centres would be extremely foolish to ignore.²⁸ That signal is quite simply that academic researchers even from the most august of academic institutions with the most noble of intentions have become fair game, and can expect to be dealt with in the same manner as the subjects of countless African states. The ASCL needs to maintain its position as an academic institution that conducts independent scientific research, yet does not allow itself to become party to struggles within Africa, however noble those endeavours may appear to be at the time. The ASCL will continue to elaborate and cultivate its collaborative research endeavours with African academics.

In summation, rapid and sustained demographic change across the African continent in the past sixty years, has driven hitherto unseen rates of urbanisation, ever expanding economies

Shifting Flight Capital: The Case of Baluba Luanshya, Zambia, A. Fraser and M. Larmer (eds.), *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism: Boom and Bust on the Globalized Copperbelt*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁷ The recent example of the British PhD researcher, Matthew Hedges, jailed for life in the UAE for spying is reflective of the changing power relations that now exist in the world. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46322425> (Accessed 27 November 2018).

²⁸ The pitiless maiming and murder in late January 2016 of Giulio Regeni, a 28 year old Italian Cambridge University PhD student researching trade unionism in Egypt, signalled a shift in the manner in which African power elites have hitherto dealt with European observers and researchers. As the Guardian newspaper noted: 'his murder is the first time such an act has happened to a foreign academic researcher working in Cairo, the kind of person who could have expected to be harassed or even deported for his work, but who would have been considered physically 'protected' by his passport'. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/24/why-was-he-killed-brutal-death-of-italian-student-in-egypt-confounds-experts> (Accessed 29 January 2017).

of consumption, and exacerbated environmental change. This has taken place in an ever-changing geo-political context in which the hegemony of the West has increasingly been brought into question.

Thematic Fields

Considering Africa in the past and the present, the research of the centre takes into consideration long-term trends that impact upon, facilitate and constrain human action on the continent. Central to these are demographic growth and environmental change. A dialectical relationship exists between the increasingly rapid climate and environmental change of the world, and Africa's demographic growth and continuing economic development. Given the research strengths and traditions of the ASCL, the institute's research programme acknowledges these mutually reinforcing transformations and seeks to understand and contextualise these within the fields of i) Politics and Security, ii) Society, Religion and Culture, iii) Economics and iv) History.

Rapid and ongoing demographic change in Africa, coupled with climate change and environmental degradation, have had a direct consequence on the **politics and security** of African societies in the present, and, given current and previous developments, could be set to continue to have further destabilising effects.²⁹ Contemporary developments in the Sahel and West Africa, where disparate groups of pastoralists are coming into increasing conflict with states and sedentary agriculturalists underscore the importance of this point.³⁰ Similar arguments could be made for continuing developments in the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region, and southern Africa as a whole.³¹ In addition, demographic change continues to put pressure on the ability of democratically elected governments to deliver public services in education and health sectors; both of which are crucial for the long-term independent viability of the continent.

²⁹ A contrasting perspective on this is presented by ASCL researcher and former director, Prof. Dietz, <https://www.ascleiden.nl/news/ton-dietz-interviewed-ad-about-sleeping-giant-africa>. (Accessed 15 May 2019).

³⁰ See in this regard the ongoing research of Prof. De Bruijn and Dr. Idrissa at the ASCL. As well as the Special Country Meeting, entitled, 'What Future for the Sahel? Institutions, religion, mobility and (geo)politics in Sahelian Africa', held at the ASCL on 23 October 2018 in Leiden: <https://www.ascleiden.nl/news/special-country-meeting-what-future-sahel-institutions-religion-mobility-and-geopolitics> (Accessed 13 November 2018).

³¹ For the Great Lakes region see the work of Dr. Berckmoes, southern Africa see the work of Prof. Gewald and Dr. Wels, and the Horn of Africa see the work of Prof. Abbink, all of the ASCL.

The last thirty years have shown major transformations within political systems and institutions in Africa. The ending of the Cold War led to the evolution of elections, political parties, a wide variety of parliamentary and judiciary systems, coupled to decentralized decision-making structures, presidentialism and constitutional issues. All of this in contrast, and often in direct opposition to forces of informal power, as well as business networks behind the scenes.

In the present, the ‘politics of resource control’ dominate the continent, in the context of extremely weak and often consciously undermined forms of national and local environmental governance.³² The extent to which religion plays a huge role in politics on the African continent cannot be underestimated. Religion, and religious belief, are consistently used and instrumentalised by political actors to determine claims to legitimacy. Similarly claims to autochthony and indigeneity are used to determine who may or may not reside or benefit from the fruits of the land.³³

The thematic field of **Society, Religion and Culture** in African Studies is covered by a number of researchers at the ASCL. Rapid urbanisation and demographic pressure as well as scarcity in resources in Africa have contributed to crises in health and well-being in many societies, producing not only greater demands for health care, poverty-relief, and resource redistribution, but also leading to increasing calls for human rights, equality, social justice and reorientations in view of ethics and moralities.

In many ways, the continuing significance of religious identities, practices and organizations in contemporary African societies responds to these needs, but also shapes these in unprecedented ways, to which the ASCL research calls attention. At one level religion can be seen to have been instrumentalized for political power and its contestations, yet religion has also become equally important in shaping people’s identities and relationships where these have been confronted with life-crises that relate specifically to the realities of people’s private and personal circumstances. For example; the importance of religion in terms of the care, prevention and treatment in the context of the pan-African AIDS crisis has by now been well-documented, yet at the same time this research throws into perspective the manner in which

³² See in this regard the research conducted at the ASCL by Dr. Kaag, Dr. Akinyoade, Prof. Abbink, Prof. Dietz, Prof. Dekker and Prof. Uche.

³³ See in this regard the research conducted at the ASCL by Prof. van Dijk, Dr. Idrissa, Dr. Kaag, Dr. van Walraven, and Prof. Abbink.

religion may also play an ambiguous role vis-a-vis sexuality, the provisioning of services, health and security.³⁴

The continuing importance of religion both at the level of the public as well as the private, has to be researched in a manner that is simultaneously culturally engrained (and therefore deeply imbedded in personal and communal decision-making) as much as that it is transnationally and transculturally linked, whereby religious power and authority is increasingly sourced from without the local community. Religious groups, identities and practices have become notoriously trans-local, if not transnational, and in the last three decades have demonstrated their capacity to link people and communities across the continent and beyond.³⁵ These transnational religious linkages are crucially important to the waves of migration that the continent has seen as it often provides for a socio-religious context in and through which important needs of the displaced individual migrants are being served.

The mass movements of people hither and thither across the continent has tremendous effects for the societies and cultures of Africa. Languages, ways of doing and being are consistently being transformed and adapted as societies deal with the loss of thousands or the influx of thousands.³⁶ The immensity of these transformations at all levels of society cannot be underestimated.³⁷ Most of the people that have been forced from their homes, have been forced to do so on the basis of ascribed identities. The killings of *makwerekwere* immigrants in South Africa, Fulani Bandits in the Sahel, or Hutu and Tutsi in the Great Lakes region, all revolve around essentialised identities in which individuals are subsumed in the whole and accorded identities that generally say more about the perpetrators of violence than of those who are attacked. How societies and cultures deal with these changes falls wholly in the research ambit of the ASCL and its researchers.

If only because of population growth, the **economies** of Africa will continue to expand and grow in the coming years. Increasingly an African middle-class is emerging that has consumer needs that are primarily fed by import from outside of the continent.³⁸ In the

³⁴ See in this regard the research conducted at the ASCL by Prof. van Dijk, Dr. Kaag, Prof. De Bruijn and Ms. Oudenhuijsen.

³⁵ See in this regard the work of Dr. Kaag at the ASCL.

³⁶ See in this regard the socio-linguistic work of Dr. Amha at the ASCL.

³⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html> ; <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/>; <http://www.internal-displacement.org/> ; <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2017-africa-report-internal-displacement> & <http://www.unhcr.org/africa.html> (Accessed 13 November 2018).

³⁸ Stephen Ellis, *Season of Rains: Africa in the World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012).

foreseeable future it is envisaged that more and more of these imports will be covered by manufacture from within the continent itself. Ironically, as the local market will continue to grow and local manufacturing is set to take off and profit from the ever burgeoning middle classes, Africa remains a net exporter of capital and a primary source for raw materials that are transformed into high consumer goods beyond the continent. At the same time the increasing effects of climatic change will impact on agricultural production in a variety of ways. Societies dependent upon agriculture will have to adapt and change their economies, and many will join the many thousands flocking to the urban centres of Africa in search of gainful employment.

Many African economies have been growing since the early 2000s and are projected to grow in the next decade.³⁹ However, much of the economic growth realized can be considered to be empty, as it generally did not create large-scale employment or lead to an increase in the productivity of African economies.⁴⁰ In addition it did not lead to sustainable economies that take account of climate change and ecological boundaries. It is increasingly clear that the economic growth benefited only certain sectors of the economy, certain geographical areas and only certain population groups. High population growth, the levels of poverty and inequality, as well as the structure of economic growth all contribute to a lack of broad based improvement in well-being in the continent. Although poverty rates have gone down, the absolute number of people living in poverty is on the rise. At the same time the aspiring (upper) middle class is growing and leading to an increased demand for energy, different types of food and consumer items that are increasingly imported.⁴¹

These processes indicate that African economies may take alternative growth trajectories and not necessarily follow the same roads to prosperity as other parts of the world, notably through industrialisation. The structural transformation of African economies is slow and so far, has deepened the existing inequalities, both in terms of income and wealth. In fact, some argue that Africa has been de-industrialising since the 2000s, with the focus shifting towards agriculture and service sectors.⁴² Productivity in these sectors, however, is not increasing

³⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/unpacking-africas-2019-gdp-growth-prospects> & <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview> (Accessed 1 May 2019).

⁴⁰ See in this regard the inaugural lecture of Prof. Marleen Dekker, *Inclusive development in Africa*, Leiden, 9 October 2017, as well as the inaugural lecture by Prof. Marja Spierenburg, *Hit by a double whammy: the combined impact of shrinking labour markets and land concentration in the Global South*, Nijmegen, 27 October 2017.

⁴¹ See in this regard the ongoing work of Prof. Uche, Prof. Dekker, Dr. Wels, Prof. Abbink and Prof. Spierenburg.

⁴² See in this regard the work of Dr. Akinyoade and Prof. Uche at the ASCL.

sufficiently to meet the demands of the growing population. Furthermore, the ever increasing digitization of work will also affect the future of employment in African economies.⁴³

This raises important questions on how African economies could combine more broad-based economic growth, which might offer sufficient employment opportunities and provide for public services and social provisions for its population, with an economic trajectory that respects and does not trespass ecological boundaries whilst advancing equity. With roots in political economy and heterodox economics the research at the ASCL wants to contribute to this question by addressing the following issues in its research agenda on economies in Africa. What is the role of agriculture and the off-farm food sector in the generation of employment and production of food for future generations? What is the role of innovation and ICT in the transformation of African economies towards inclusive and sustainable economies that meet the demand of the growing and more aspiring young population? What is the role of African and multinational entrepreneurs in these economic models and what are the economic governance structures needed to ensure more broad-based prosperity and sustainability?

It is almost a platitude to seek to emphasise the role of **history** in African Studies, and yet the transformations taking place in Africa in the present can only be adequately analysed and understood when they are placed within an historical context. In this it is of paramount importance that research is not limited to recent history of the past decade. Such a position underlines our concerns about the presentist way in which Africa is generally dealt with in the present, whilst many trends in contemporary Africa arguably have their roots in a deeper past.⁴⁴

Africa's history is marked by continuities and ruptures, but it is not always clear where these lie and how these operate. Research, if it is to attempt to gain a better understanding of developments in Africa, should be guided less by topical questions that figure in Western society today and more by questions of long-term cultural concern. Here one could think of the study of African cosmologies (especially in their non-Christian dimensions), which have persistent relevance in the study of Africa's past and the present. The dramatic changes in the demography of Africa is one of the key changes in Africa that commenced in the twentieth

⁴³ See in this regard the lecture by Professor Dame Henrietta L. Moore, *What is prosperity for Africa?* (Leiden, 6 December 2018).

⁴⁴ See in this regard the long-term effects of the slave trade in Africa, or the current re-evaluation of the period 1780-1840 in southern Africa as the period in which ethnic identity and land distribution came to be determined. J.B. Gewald, 'People on the move', in M. Gosselink, M. Holtrop and R. Ross (eds), *Good Hope. South Africa and The Netherlands from 1600* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2017).

century. It affects all manner of issues such as urbanisation and migration that have become pertinent today but which have – certainly in the case of migration – roots that go back into the ‘pre-colonial’ past.⁴⁵ By the same token it is important that the ASCL actively support archaeological research, in close collaboration with the study of precolonial history. The recent scholarship by such people as Jan Jansen on pre-colonial Mali and Karim Sadr in South Africa on stone wall enclosures demonstrates the importance of archaeological research for reinterpreting major established points of history in the pre-colonial era.⁴⁶ They help point to the relevance of the deeper past.

As the years of independence in the 1960s are becoming ever more distant, a reinterpretation of the age of colonialism, and of ‘post-colonial’ structures and patterns that established themselves afterwards, is opportune. Colonialism was, viewed from today, an interlude and one could question what its significance and meaning are in the longer-term historical development of Africa. Are we overestimating its longer-term effects on political cultures and societal structures? Or are there long-term consequences, notably from colonial violence, that continue to exercise their influence on developments in Africa long after the 1960s? And if so, how relevant are they and how?

Chairs in African Studies

The African Studies Centre Leiden hosts six Chairs in African Studies, which in their work cover the four thematic research fields discussed above. Not surprisingly, in their coverage of the four thematic research fields, the Chairs overlap in part.

Culture and Identity in Africa

Professor Mirjam de Bruijn holds the Chair ‘Culture and Identity in Africa’. The Chair builds upon a long tradition within the ASCL of dealing with culture and identity issues from a ‘bottom-up perspective’. The Chair covers the thematic research fields of politics and

⁴⁵ Host of material dealing with ‘Wealth in People’, for example Joseph C. Miller, ‘The Value of Material Goods and People’ in Miller, *Way of Death*, 40-70. & Jane I. Guyer, ‘Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa’, *Man*, New Series, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 243-265..

⁴⁶ <http://afrikastudies.nl/wp-content/uploads/article-in-defence-of-mali-gold-2015-michigan-state-university-jan-jansen.pdf> & <https://www.ascleiden.nl/news/ascl-seminar-series-johannesburg-newly-discovered-tswana-city-around-ad-1800> (Accessed 26 November 2018)

security, society, religion and culture, as well as history. Research within the Chair is interdisciplinary, with a preference for contemporary history and cultural studies; in addition the Chair focuses on the interrelationship between agency, marginality, mobility, communication and technology.

In the recent past the ASCL explored innovative programmes that sought to connect cultural and identity issues with technological change and the impact of the mobility of people, ideas and forms of expressions. Examples of these programmes are the recent Voice4Thought⁴⁷ work, as well as Professor Mirjam de Bruijn's VICI project, Connecting in Times of Duress.⁴⁸ In particular research of the Chair covers recent political and cultural developments in Africa. By making use of new technological possibilities including social media, popular youth culture and professional artists have become tools in political and social mobilisation. They connect artistic forms of expressions with every-day forms. Youth movements, protests, new waves of oppression, combined with the occurrence of increasing mobility and migration, and the advancement of mobile communication technologies (ICTs), reinforce the need to revisit questions around culture and identity, and new ways of dealing with 'citizenship' as expressed by cultural symbols and identity markers. These are core questions to understand 'African agency' in social and cultural expressions of citizenship and identity in Africa.

Governance and Politics in Africa

Professor Jon Abbink holds the Chair 'Governance and Politics in Africa' which primarily covers the thematic research fields, Politics and Security, and Society, Religion and Culture. The Chair's subject matter covers the evolutionary dynamics of 'political' society, governance structures and cultural subtexts in Africa. Governance and the exercise of power are perennial issues of contention in Africa, and democratization experiments have shown this to be precarious. The often tense relationship between politics and religion also requires attention. While Africa is not 'exceptional' in this regard, it displays its own specific dynamics, more than ever relevant in a globalizing world. The research proposed under this Chair addresses phenomena of governance, political culture repertoires, and community formation regarding the political process. One of the aims is to recognize an Africa beyond the dominant discourse of development, international aid, failed states, etc. and refocus more

⁴⁷ <http://www.voice4thought.org/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/>

on socially and historically constituted social movements, including youth political agency, civic associations and other collective formations of people that draw on African resources and formulate their own aims.

Inclusive Development in Africa

Professor Marleen Dekker holds the Chair ‘Inclusive Development in Africa’ at the ASCL, which primarily covers the thematic research fields of Politics, Security and Economy. The Chair’s theme connects to debates on poverty and inequality, development paradigms and African perspectives to development. The research advances a critical approach to this debate, including on the narrative on inclusive development as advanced in the Global Goals. Empirically, outcomes, equity and processes of inclusion and exclusion in markets and socio-economic networks and organizations will be studied using a behavioural and political economy perspective. This includes for example the collaboration within households as well as an understanding of the context specificity of local economic linkages and multipliers. Specific attention will be given to financial inclusion and social mobilisation to counter marginalization (for example in the context of land rights), as well as (youth) employment in relation to inclusive businesses and so-called frugal innovations for the ‘bottom of the pyramid’.⁴⁹

Religion in Contemporary Africa and its Diaspora

The Chair ‘Religion in Contemporary Africa and its Diaspora’ is held by Professor Rijk van Dijk and primarily covers the thematic research field of Society, Religion and Culture. This professorial Chair on Religion in Africa aspires to develop a sophisticated understanding of major developments in religion that have taken place in recent years. It is important, firstly, to underscore the fact that contrary to modernist expectations that predict a retreat of religion from modern societies under the impact of globalisation and secularization, in Africa a very different development can be noticed. Religion remains an important force in the transmission of values and moralities, continues to mobilize people, and also provides for a context of

⁴⁹ C.K. Prahalad and Stuart L. Hart, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* (Wharton School Publishing: 2004) http://www.stuartlhart.com/sites/stuartlhart.com/files/Prahalad_Hart_2001_SB.pdf (Accessed 16 May 2019).

continuing innovation as a driver of change. Religion also remains a source of conflicts. Modern religious movements have emerged in large numbers, have been able to place themselves at the core of social and political centres of power, have become dominant in public domains through the establishment of a wide range of civil society organisations (known as Faith-Based Organisations), and have become influential through the development of new teaching-, media- and medical institutions. And African religious practices and recent developments are deeply influencing the lives of people in the African diaspora all over the world, and this again influences religious (and other) developments in Africa itself.

The Stephen Ellis Chair in the Governance of Finance and Integrity in Africa

The Stephen Ellis Chair in the Governance of Finance and Integrity in Africa is currently held by Professor Chibuike Uche and covers the thematic research fields Politics and Security, Society, Religion and Culture, Economy and History. One of the most striking anomalies of the African continent in the present, is the fact that this poorest continent is actually a net exporter of capital. The questionable level of integrity in the governance of the continent, which has permeated most aspects of economic endeavour, including business and finance, is mainly responsible for this paradox.

The Chair builds forth upon the work of Stephen Ellis (1953-2015) whose work touched on many aspects of contemporary history in Africa, with special attention for issues of integrity, human rights, and transparency.

African History

The Chair in African History is held by Professor Jan-Bart Gewald and being concerned with history it covers in essence the thematic research fields Politics and Security, Society, Religion and Culture, Economy and History. Africa can only be truly understood when placed in the context of history. In the contemporary world the African continent and its peoples are marginalised in terms of political and economic clout. Yet this was not always the case, and given the vagaries of history there is every reason to believe that this contemporary condition is set to change.

The continent displays the largest population growth, illiteracy, demographic imbalance and income disparity in the contemporary world. Many areas are ravaged by war, famine and disease, and the political elites of its 54 officially recognised states generally operate in ways that do not further the interests of their subjects. Yet at the same time the continent contains extensive natural wealth and untapped potential in land, water and mineral resources, all of which serve to ensure that Africa, although still relatively small in terms of global trade, holds the potential for any further global economic growth.

Collaborative Research Groups

In the present the ASCL has seven Collaborative Research Groups in which researchers, support staff, library staff and postgraduate students come together to exchange and conduct research on matters of mutual interest. The CRGs are granted an annual budget that can be spent in ways that further the research theme of the CRG, be that a workshop, a joint publication, or field research. CRGs are not fixed institutions, and they function and exist for as long as there remains an interest and serious commitment on the part of its members to the research theme being pursued.

Africa in the world - Rethinking Africa's global connections

The debate about Africa's changing relations with the world has rapidly evolved over the past decade. The initial emphasis on China's role in Africa has given way to a more diversified approach, acknowledging that other emerging global players have also become important. These not only challenge global power constellations, but also help to reconfigure power constellations and redistribute resources at the local and regional levels in Africa - with repercussions for the global level as well. There is a need, however, for a more in-depth reflection on what these new developments mean from the vantage point of Africa, to develop a perspective in which the agency of Africans in co-shaping the contemporary world is prominent, and to do so in historically informed ways. This Collaborative Research Group brings together scholars who aim to discuss their work from the point of view of Africa's global connections and to contribute to some of the larger questions related to Africa's changing position in the world.

Collaboration and contestation in words: Dialogues and disputes in African social realities

In African societies today, growing inequality and continued exclusion due to ethnicity, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation give rise to both contestation and cooperation for social change. This Collaborative Research Group aims to investigate how the written or spoken word is leading to collaboration and contestation in areas of social life that are marked by strife. While movements mobilize people to come together so as to organize themselves in the advocacy for specific objectives, they can also foster collective contestation against structures of power, inequality and infringements on (human) rights. Movements that express politically or religiously charged antagonisms in the pursuit of particular (fundamentalist, extremist, exclusionary) identities often rely on particular forms of speech that produce collaboration amongst them. Understanding the interrelationship between specific discourses, polemics, dialogues and disputes through which both collaboration (between some groups) and contestation (between some other groups) emerges, and how these are expressed in the media, the public domain and in specific texts, is highly relevant in African societies today. These worded repertoires of cooperation and dispute are at the heart of this CRG's attention and will be studied from different disciplinary perspectives.

Governance, entrepreneurship and inclusive development

Africa is rising and increasingly seen as a potential market by economic actors from Africa and the rest of the world. The main objective of this Collaborative Research Group will be to explore the interrelationship between governance, entrepreneurship and inclusive development. Emphasis will be on developing programmes and research projects that will aid our understanding of the roles, challenges and strategies of the different economic stakeholders and businesses that operate in the 'economic space' on the continent, and the implications of these for (economic) governance for inclusive development. These will be researched at the entrepreneurial level (the business model) and in terms of securing a conducive business environment that allows entrepreneurs to flourish.

Pioneering futures of health and well-being: actors, technologies and social engineering

Within the domain of health, some new developments can clearly be seen; for example e-healthcare solutions, which change the health care delivery, usage and accessibility landscape. However, in many African countries health care and public health initiatives are not sufficient enough. This Collaborative Research Group will pioneer in the domain of m-health, insurances, and other appearing fields that combine new technologies and actors in the domain of health care and well-being. We will follow an ‘actor health care in context’ approach, and especially look into social, cultural, economic and political aspects in the context of and in health care itself. Making the CRG to be an added value to the already existing research endeavours in this field. It brings together staff members from the African Studies Centre, Leiden University and several African institutes.

Politics, governance and law in Africa: Exploring connections

Politics, governance and law form a triangle of themes defining power and the reproduction of power structures. The themes constitute a crucial domain in African societies and economies, reinvigorated by contemporary new forms of youth politics across the continent. Features of political institutions and networks, local socio-political structures, trust communities and law frameworks combine to form patterns of ‘political culture’ that can provide the basis for the expression of ‘the political’ and for people to act on their values, framing political preferences and goals. Power and politics play out on various levels, from state to local community, and combine in various registers, both institutionally and culturally. This Collaborative Research Group wants to explore the interactive processes that shape African political and governance patterns and socio-cultural formations that issue from the political communication, competition of interests, formal and customary legal structures, and from norms and ideas of ‘group’ and ‘self’. There is a continued need to understand the historicity, long-term trends and contexts of governance and contestation, as well as of the situated practices of power. Comparative theoretical appraisal is part of this venture, integrating African case studies into research and debates on global political structures and dynamics.

Rethinking African history

The Collaborative Research Group ‘Rethinking African History’ has been in existence for several years now. As the sole disciplinary CRG it wishes to act primarily as a platform for discussion of historical issues related to the African continent, its place in the world and in African Studies. In doing so, its debates tackle historical, historiographical and methodological questions in the widest sense of the term: new research questions, archival source collections, historicising approaches in other disciplines, and new approaches in historiography.

Trans-species perspectives on African Studies

In the last couple of decades an ‘animal turn’ has taken place in the social sciences. There is good reason for this: Scientific evidence now abundantly and convincingly shows that humans and animals only differ in degree and not in kind. As a result it has become evident that ‘the social’ (in the social sciences), cannot be assumed to be uniquely human. It has led to a call to study and research social issues by including non-human animal perspectives. It is high time that African Studies joins the chorus of minds that try to contribute to these multi-layered and multifaceted debates.⁵⁰

Conclusion

In summation, Africa may very well appear to be ‘marginalised’ in the present global context, yet it is a mistake to believe that the continent and its peoples were ever beyond history. Africa is and always has been an integral part of the world. Given contemporary developments, its position on the fringes of the world is set to change dramatically in the coming decades.

Through sheer force of numbers Africa will increasingly come to influence the world in which we live, for better or for worse. Rapid and sustained demographic change across the African continent will continue to drive unprecedented rates of urbanisation, ever expanding economies of consumption, and exacerbated environmental change. This will continue to take

⁵⁰ Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Spierenburg & Harry Wels, *Nature Conservation in Southern Africa. Morality and Marginality: Towards Sentient Conservation?* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

place in an ever-changing geo-political context in which the hegemony of the West has begun to come to an end. Central to this new world will be Africa's mega-cities, home to millions upon millions of urbanites living in and sustaining novel economies, governance, societies and cultures.

Africa's tremendous population growth drives the growth of the continent's cities and the further exploitation of natural resources in support of urban growth. Which in turn leads to the further impoverishment of the environment, particularly in rural areas, which in turn leads to further population growth and drive to the city. In this process the city is a site of opportunity, diversity and new forms of association and governance.

To facilitate independent scientific research and documentation of this 'Strident Africa', which will allow us to understand and contextualise the dramatic changes of the continent and its peoples, and to disseminate these findings to the academy, ministries, and as broad an audience as possible will continue to be the core task of the ASCL. In this the African Studies Centre Leiden is ideally placed to function as a centre of expertise and research on historical, current and future developments in 'Strident Africa'.