FROM THE EDITOR

With issue No 1/2013, this journal changed in several respects. Under a new editor-in-chief, the *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, then published for 35 years, turned into an open access journal with a redesigned look. But the makeover aimed at more than merely cosmetic changes. As outlined in the introduction of that issue, the changing context both in South Africa as well as globally, motivated a conceptual re-positioning, that also modified the subject-related thematic framework[1]. Since then, thanks to many contributors offering a wide range of topical analyses, we hopefully managed to live up to at least some of the expectations created.

After five years, it is now time to hand editorial responsibility to a new generation of scholars groomed in the spirit of democratic South Africa. This, therefore, is the last issue for me as the editor-in-chief. While I welcomed the privilege to lead the journal towards implementing a modified agenda, I now welcome the opportunity to move out of the way and pursue other tasks. I thank all those in the editorial group and the advisory board who accompanied and supported me during the last years. I am especially grateful to Maxi Schoeman, who felt I would be the right choice for this task. Special thanks go also to Wilma Martin, without her assistance none of the last eleven issues would have become a reality.

Interrogating knowledge

This journal has — at times more, at times less — tried to critically reflect on the premises of our scholarly endeavours and to interrogate what is considered as established 'absolute truth'. After all, "knowledge is power" remains a popular slogan in education and beyond. It aims to motivate learners to acquire knowledge and to apply it for their own gains. But while knowledge can be liberating and emancipatory, it can also be oppressive and intimidating, and domesticating. We always need to be aware of who uses which kind of knowledge for which interests and purposes. Like development, knowledge is not neutral. Nor is it value-free. We, therefore, cannot uncritically affirm and praise knowledge production (and its dissemination) as a relevant aspect of and contribution to development without examining the nature and intention of both the knowledge created and applied as well as the concept and meaning of development.

This also requires that we must (self-)critically explore and question the conditions, forms, substance and likely impact of the knowledge produced. The starting point should not be the result of knowledge production, but the process of producing knowledge. Our hierarchical world is characterised by structural asymmetries as an integral part of the reproduction of societies and institutions.

These are structures of power and interest, but also of contestation. Race, class and gender matter. As does the type of knowledge and development we want to encourage. We should always be careful and cautious when "universal knowledge" in the singular is the reference point of a "darker side of Western modernity", rather than the "pluriversality" of knowledges.[2] Defining the point of departure, Walter Mignolo stated elsewhere:

> The practice of liberation and de-colonization is initiated with the recognition, in the first place, that the colonization of knowledge and being consisted of using imperial knowledge to repress colonized subjectivities and the process moves on from there to build structures of knowledge that emerge from the experience of humiliation and marginalization that have been and continue to be enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix of power.[3]

In contrast to such an advocated project of deconstructing power relations with the aim of emancipation, 'dataism' has emerged as a new currency, pretending to be a revolutionary way of producing knowledge.[4] But it reduces knowledge to a level of algorithms.[5] Such trends not only reinforced an oppressive, anti-humanist version of 'modernity', but also forces us to reappraise knowledge and knowledge production as a process, which involves human interaction on the basis of respect and recognition of 'otherness'. By standardising life on earth as a data generating object for decision-making processes, we sacrifice knowledge in other forms, influenced by empathy, social justice and related motives — such as solidarity. If knowledge is no longer a combination of the multiplicity of experiences but reduced to data processing, then knowledge remains part of a problem instead of searching for and contributing towards a solution.

What we need is to engage in knowledge and development for all as a process of mutual understanding in search of a common future beyond the Anthropocene. An inter-generational social contract, which seeks to honour and respect the dignity of all life on earth. This is a challenge not limited to any particular country but a global task.

In this issue

I have taken the liberty to kind of 'guest edit' this last issue under my responsibility.[6] It compiles several revised papers originally presented to the Colloquium on "Decolonising the University?", hosted by the Centre for Africa Studies and the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein (26-27 October 2017). It, therefore, also includes as an overall thematic contextualisation the slightly modified version of my own paper presented at the same forum. It is followed by a mapping of the epistemological

challenges by *Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni* and a gendered perspective on human security studies by *Heidi Hudson*. Their principled engagements with established traditions of knowledge production is followed by concrete cases of new approaches. *Johann Rossouw* puts the South African universities into the context of the still largely undemocratic legacies casting their long shadows into the present. *Christian Williams* then shares his approach to decolonising anthropology through a course at the University of the Free State. It triggered the subsequent reflections by *Khanya Motshabi* on the necessary re-positioning of teaching law through a shift in perspectives. Finally, *Théogène Niwenshuti* shares his personal engagement with REmbodiment in search of new forms of dealing with a history of violence and dehumanisation.

Decolonisation — as not only the following articles and the particular case of South Africa document — remains a challenge. The mission is far from accomplished everywhere, given the globally dominant powers of definition in an asymmetric, hierarchical world, which shapes and impacts on knowledge and its production. But efforts to tackle the hegemonic system nourished by Eurocentric expansion into the rest of the world through colonialism and imperialism, become stronger and alliances are in formation worldwide.

It is rewarding to end the role I was privileged to play in this journal with a special issue devoted to such a focus, outlining the tasks for efforts towards the conceptualisation and promotion of knowledges, giving voice and recognition to the multitude of 'otherness' as an integral part of true humanity.

Henning Melber
Editor-in-chief (2013-2018)

Endnotes

1. Melber, H (2013), "Southern Africa in the World. The Context for a *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol 35, No 1, pp 1-13.
2. Mignolo, W (2011), *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options.* Durham: Duke University Press.
3. Mignolo, W (2016), "Delinking", *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, No 2, p. 492.
4. Harari, Y H (2016), *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow.* London: Harvill Secker.
5. "Yuval Noah Harari on big data, Google and the end of the free will", *Financial Times*, 26 August 2016.
6. I acknowledge with gratitude a two-month stipend as visiting researcher by the Cluster of Excellence "Cultural Foundations of Social Integration" at the University of Konstanz, which provided me during April 2018 the opportunity to focus on finalising the editing work for this issue in a pleasant and stimulating working environment. Thanks is also due to Heather Thuynsma, who kindly enough took the language editing upon herself.