



From the Editor

With this issue, *ACTA Academica* has a new editor. Former editor Professor Lis Lange, previously Vice-Rector: Academic at the University of the Free State (UFS), has moved to the University of Cape Town as Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. It is my honour, privilege and challenge to fill the big shoes she has left behind. I would like to thank her for all her hard work, which added much value to the reputation of this journal. In my efforts to maintain this quality I benefit from the continued solid and reliable support of René Eloff as assistant editor. I will also be supported by Thinus Conradie at the Department of English and Mvuzo Ponono at the Department of Communication Science as newly appointed editorial associates. They take over from Professors Andre Keet and Helene Strauss, who deserve thanks for their valuable contributions to the journal in this role. Having ended 10 years as managing co-editor of *Africa Spectrum* with its issue no. 1/2018 [<https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/afsp/article/view/1111/1118>] and five years as editor-in-chief of the *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* with issue no. 1/2018 [[https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/85/Strategic%20Review/vol%2040\(1\)/Introduction.pdf](https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/85/Strategic%20Review/vol%2040(1)/Introduction.pdf)], I look forward to this new assignment offered to me by the UFS, to which I am affiliated as Extraordinary Professor at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies.

Dedicated to scholarship in the humanities, *acta academica* will henceforth be published annually with a minimum of two issues, plus an optional additional issue per year. It has the declared intention to apply a critical social theory perspective. On its website (<http://apps.ufs.ac.za/kovsiejournals/default.aspx?journal=19>) it invites “scholarly work that examines how the humanities in the 21st Century are responding to the double imperative of theorising the world and changing it” (Karl Marx sends greetings!). This is an ambitious but also a rather broad if not fuzzy agenda. As a result, the journal publishes a wide range of thematically different contributions. Being an open, multidisciplinary forum is necessary as an integral part of scholarly debate, and the setting of thematic frameworks and parameters does not contradict this.

We witness these days in the post-apartheid era white supremacy and right-wing populism on the rise in many places in the world. Discriminatory hegemonic

discourses resurface. In such times, the power of social sciences in promoting social justice needs to be strengthened. Civil liberties are under siege. This includes academic freedom and the freedom of speech. Such shifting grounds require also scholarly engagement.

The visible advancement of postcolonial and decolonial theories in the public spheres and discourses might have contributed to the current backlash as also manifested in colonial-apologetic mystifications of an imperialist past (and present), of inequalities and processes of marginalisation and exclusion. As a journal promoting humanist values and ethics, *acta academica* therefore would like especially to encourage and publish scholarly analyses and think pieces that engage with such challenges in a critical (and gendered) theoretical perspective. We welcome in particular contributions that link to current themes and processes on the African continent and especially to Southern Africa, without abandoning the global context and the shared perspectives of committed scholarship elsewhere. We will promote an emphasis on contributions in the fields of Postcolonial, Development, Cultural, Gender, International and African Studies, aiming to support current efforts towards a decolonisation of knowledge and knowledge production. The journal will combine an international postcolonial discourse inspired by critical theory and other relevant schools of thought applied to and/or generated in a local and regional (African) context. We also welcome efforts to contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge, which still to a large extent is anchored in the global asymmetries.

We cannot pretend these asymmetric power relations and inherited structures do not exist. Nor will we be able to avoid their reproduction completely. But we can promote ownership of authors over their intellectual product and will disseminate the work as widely as possible. Our contributors are free to share their published work with whomever they want – at no cost. Thanks to its UFS funding, *acta academica* is available in print while also being fully open access online. As a peer-reviewed, accredited journal it maintains the necessary quality standards and ensures recognition of the contributions published. Like the other two journals that I was editor of, *acta academica* offers a meaningful alternative to the hegemony of a handful of international publishing houses in control over most periodicals, generating massive profits based on the selling of intellectual products resulting from the unpaid work of authors and reviewers. Their limited outreach precludes any democratic way of sharing the benefit of unlimited access to knowledge.

As *acta academica* we share our publication as widely as possible, with no obstacle to access. This also means that the pro bono work done by those involved in the project, as well as reviewers, is not exploited for the material gain

of anyone but in support of knowledge sharing. In another effort to decolonise we will also make special efforts to empower aspiring African scholars. As part of this endeavour, the UFS's Centre for Gender and Africa Studies has already been for several years the partner institution of Africa Spectrum for the annual Young African Scholars Award. We will try to create similar opportunities, encouraging early career scholars to submit articles. In addition, we would like to expand the character of contributions, by further diversification of forms of knowledge transmission through debate articles, reports, comments, review essays and other thought-provoking interventions. We hope to receive your support, as potential authors or as readers who contribute to or benefit from *acta academica's* efforts to further a stimulating debate.

Henning Melber