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1 Between Empirical Messiness and Theoretical Ambition: Introducing Interdisciplinary Conversations on Actors and Practices of Space-Making Under the Global Condition

1 Moscow

It was the last sunny September days in Moscow. Instead of strolling along the banks of the river or watching passengers go by in the cafés at Gorky Park, I adjourned to the chilly halls of the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Africa Institute to collect material for my book investigating a transregional history of Soviet African studies during the Cold War. This time I was chasing dissertations from Soviet Africanists – a group consisting not only of Soviet scholars but also of students from the Arab world, as well as from all parts of the African continent. As I am interested particularly in the encounters of Soviet and African scholars and how these had impacted on the formation of ideas of Africa, of development, of socialism in the Soviet Union, I was enthusiastic to find numerous unpublished manuscripts by African experts, which they had written in Russian, in the Soviet Union, yielding the benefits of their “home-grown” expertise about their countries of origin, partly comparing these experiences with Soviet trajectories. These dissertations had been hidden for – I assumed – at least two decades in the stacks of this library. Tanja,¹ the librarian, was of utmost kindness, being excited about the interest of a German researcher to come and work at her place, which had certainly seen busier days. She obligingly responded to all my requests, pulling out the partly mouldering and disintegrated manuscripts from hidden shelves in the large room. I assisted her, reading out the names of the authors to help her find the titles. The manuscripts of Soviet scholars such as Gavrilov, Potekhin, Filatova, and the like were easily found. But when the list of – to her obscure – foreign names grew longer, such as Afana (see [Figure 1](#)), Bakondolo, Paul-Bonné, and Traoré, she halted and disdainfully muttered: “Eto ne nash” (this is not one of ours).

¹ Name changed.

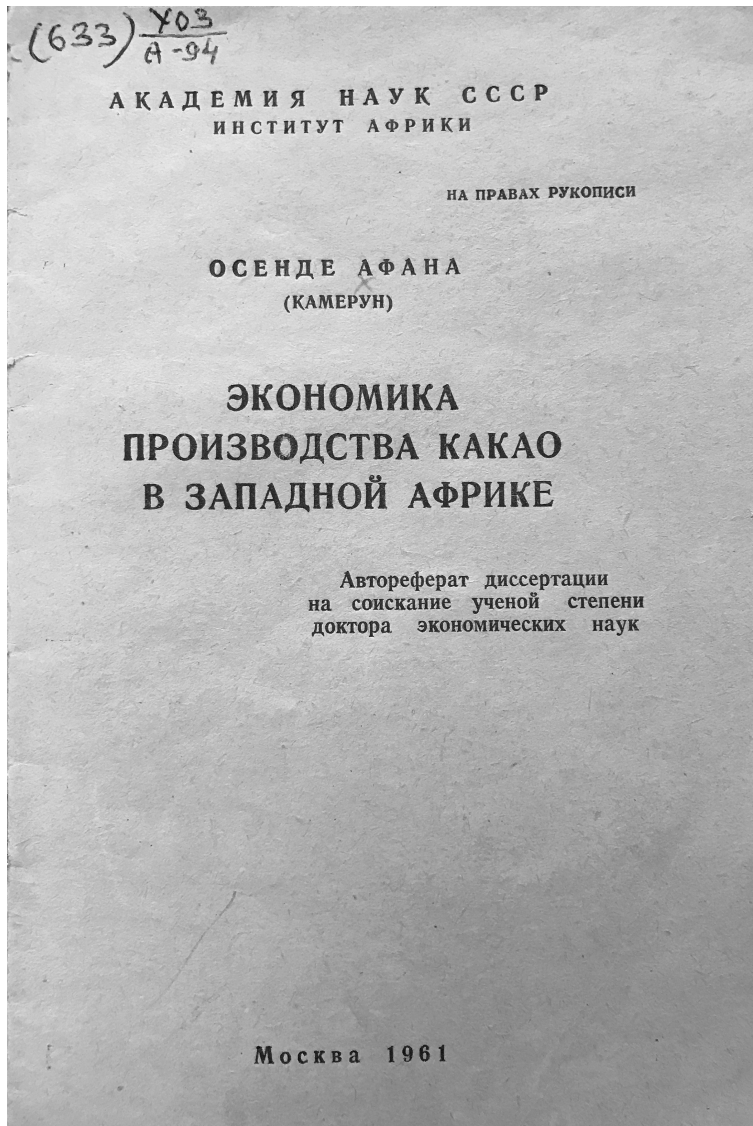


Figure 1: Cover of Osendé Afana's dissertation summary "The economy of Cocoa production in Western Africa", submitted to the Africa Institute Moscow in 1961 (© Steffi Marung, September 2017).

Now *I* was bewildered. At this institute (see Figures 2 to 4) – which was engaged with research about Africa since the late 1950s and served as a meeting place for African and Soviet activists and academics, the latter proudly emphasizing



Figure 2: Fresco in the Africa Institute Moscow (© Steffi Marung, April 2015).

to be the better Africanists, as they said to have no colonial or neo-colonial agendas – I had not expected to find somebody who would not be as curious as I was about this forgotten world of internationalism in the Soviet Union.

Tanja instead preferred to show me around the institute, leading me to its main conference hall. She introduced me to the rich history of the building, dating back to the investments of an Armenian merchant family in the eighteenth century who came to Moscow to be closer to the economic and political centre of the Tsarist Empire.

After the revolution, the first Soviet court confiscated the palace to hold its meetings there. After the Second World War, the Polish embassy moved in, which had to leave again in the early 1980s as the institute's new director – Anatoly Gromyko, son of the then Soviet foreign minister Andrey – convinced his father to help him improve the institute's position in the heart of Moscow. While I was fascinated about this history, I was even more taken back by the arrangement of the room, with pictures of the institute's three directors along one wall, facing the other wall with portraits of African activists and politicians such as Patrice Lumumba,



Figure 3: Main hall of the Africa Institute Moscow (© Steffi Marung, September 2017).

Amílcar Cabral, and Jean Ping – a part of the interior that Tanja obviously ignored or would not make sense of.

The actors in this vignette come together in different layers of time and space: the Russian librarian and the German researcher; the Soviet scholars, ministers, and judges; the African academics and activists; the Armenian merchants; and the Polish diplomats. They had all left their traces in this peculiar place, which in effect became a locality at which different spatial orders and spatial formats materialized and intersected: the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet Union, the decolonizing world, the Cold War, and the multipolar fragility of the twenty-first century. These actors, which diachronically or synchronically crossed their paths at this place, had very different stakes, imaginations, desires, and positions within and regarding these spatial orders and spatial formats. At the same time, they made use and were part of a variety of techniques and infrastructures: not only the library, the Academy of Sciences, the judiciary system, carefully curated architecture, but also international organizations, diplomacy, and cultural policy. They thereby appropriated this place – the palace on Spiridonovka Street, next to the famous Tverskaya street – renarrating its history, selectively remembering its past, and reshaping its position and infrastructures, thus not only locating it in Moscow's



Figure 4: Portrait of Patrice Lumumba at the wall in the main hall of the Africa Institute in Moscow (© Steffi Marung, September 2017).

(and hence: Russia's) commercial and cultural centre, but also relating it to competing spatial formats. The unuttered – yet productive – misunderstanding between the German researcher and the Russian librarian appears then as one little chapter in a longer history of space-making under the global condition in the heart of Moscow.

2 Space-Making Under the Global Condition

That space and space-making are not outside of or opposite to “globalization” but rather crucial lenses through which to study it as well as a major dynamic without which any nuanced understanding of the patterns and challenges of global connections would not be possible is something that we can take as a starting point. Such an approach would not only be shared among the scholars at the Collaborative Research Centre 1199 at Leipzig University, in which this volume was

conceived and pursued, but also be increasingly agreed upon by scholars in different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences.

While anthropologists and sociologists since the 1980s have discussed “practices of space”,² theorized the “site of the social”,³ and particularly emphasized that an “anthropological theory of space and place needs to be process-oriented, person-based, and allow for agency and new possibilities”,⁴ such spatial turns⁵ have profoundly profited from the conceptual repertoire and empirical richness of geographical research, which had taken up inspiration from cultural studies.⁶

These efforts were introduced into investigations of conditions of globality only after the Cold War’s ending, being in the early 2000s prominently promoted by historians who were themselves inspired by conceptual and methodological innovations in cultural history and cultural studies, as well as anthropology and human geography and who developed a profound critical stance towards older perspectives of world or universal history.⁷ Still, debates among this later generation of global historians are far from solved, most importantly about how to relate the different scales of global history, how to reflect on spatialities of the global⁸ in a historical perspective, and how to temper the obsession with (“good”) connectivity and taking seriously the globalizing impacts of disconnections, tensions, and ruptures.⁹ In some cases, to address the many challenges of global history and “to put

2 M. de Certeau, “Practices of Space”, in: M. Blonsky (ed.), *On Signs*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp. 122–145.

3 T. R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002.

4 S. M. Low, “Towards an Anthropological Theory of Space and Place”, *Semiotica* 175 (2009) 1/4, pp. 21–37, at 22.

5 J. Döring and T. Thielmann (eds.), *Spatial Turn: Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2008.

6 C. Berndt and R. Pütz, *Kulturelle Geographien. Zur Beschäftigung mit Raum und Ort nach dem Cultural Turn*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2007.

7 M. Middell and K. Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization”, *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010) 1, pp. 149–170; M. Middell, “From Universal History to Transregional Perspectives: The Challenge of the Cultural and Spatial Turn to World and Global History in the 1970s and Today”, *Cultural History* 9 (2020) 2, pp. 241–264.

8 S. Sassen, “Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization”, *Public Culture* 12 (2000) 1, pp. 215–232.

9 See, e.g., J. Adelman, “What is Global History Now?”, *Aeon*, 2 March 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment> (accessed 8 March 2023); D. Bell, “This is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network”, *New Republic*, 26 October 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor> (accessed 8 March 2023) and the response by R. Drayton and D. Motadel, “Discussion: The Futures of Global History”, *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018) 1, pp. 1–21.

its feet on the ground”, its productive combination with microhistory has been offered as a solution.¹⁰

This proposal demonstrates that one challenge of conceptualizing and empirically investigating the spatiality of globalization processes concerns discussions around scale, while another is the role of actors and their practices. Both are interlinked, as proposals for a “micro-spatial history”¹¹ demonstrate, which promote a profound actor-centred perspective to understand scale as an effect of social practice, not as a predefined level of analysis. This, of course, resonates with earlier discussions among human geographers.¹² As a crucial spatial reference, scale had attracted the attention of historians interested in transnational connections more than ten years ago,¹³ and here again, the focus on transnational agency, on different kinds of actors, and on their practices of connecting, communicating, translating, and mediating¹⁴ has turned out to be particularly convincing. More recently, this connectivity bias has been nuanced towards a careful reconsideration of rootedness, of actors and practices, and of ruptures and dead ends to include different forms of spatialization into the analysis of transnational actors and transnational agency.¹⁵

3 Globalization Projects

Transnationality can be understood as a specific form of spatialization – as practice and process – as one among a multitude of reactions to the challenges of the global condition. These spatializations can result in the emergence of spatial

10 J.-P. A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: Seeing the World Like a Microhistorian”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019) 14 (suppl.), pp. 1–22.

11 C. G. De Vito, “History Without Scale: The Micro-spatial Perspective”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019) 14 (suppl.), pp. 348–372.

12 N. Brenner, “The Limits of Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration”, *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (2001) 4, pp. 591–614; A. Moore, “Rethinking Scale as a Geographical Category: From Analysis to Practice”, *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (2008) 2, pp. 203–225.

13 B. Struck, K. Ferris, and J. Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History”, *The International History Review* 33 (2011) 4, pp. 573–584.

14 D. Kitzinger, “Towards a Model of Transnational Agency: The Case of Dietrich von Hildebrand”, *The International History Review* 33 (2011) 4, pp. 669–686; A. Dietze, “Cultural Brokers and Mediators”, in: M. Middell (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, pp. 494–502.

15 A. Dietze, and K. Naumann, “Revisiting Transnational Actors from a Spatial Perspective”, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 25 (2018) 3–4, pp. 415–430.

formats,¹⁶ among which the nation-state is certainly a prominent but not the only articulation.¹⁷ To understand the emergence of spatial formats, their interrelation, and their function under the global condition, an actor-centred approach is required that focuses on the efforts of individuals, groups, or collective actors such as international organizations to “globalize the world following their own world views, interests and possibilities”.¹⁸ When these efforts become more targeted and comprehensive, tend to be bestowed with notable resources, and are pursued over a longer period of time, we speak of globalization projects.¹⁹ This conceptual innovation allows us to deal with the apparent tension between a mundane understanding of “globalization” and space-making processes. As an abstract, ahistorical notion, globalization seems to stand in contrast to the everyday experience of space as an obstacle and/or challenge to social interaction. In order to act globally, people must expand far beyond the limits of their body-space and act on multiple scales. They mobilize, construct, connect, or subvert a plurality of spaces using techniques and technologies of connectivity. They imagine geographies, produce corridors for the movement of people and objects, and create intersections for reliable translations between locations, nations, or institutions.

Hence, by studying global space-making, we move beyond abstract notions of flow and exchange to examine the spatial arrangements that direct and organize flows, determine their speed and scale, and produce interruptions or continuations.

16 M. Middell and S. Marung (eds.), *Spatial Formats Under the Global Condition*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019.

17 C. S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era”, *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000) 3, pp. 807–831; J. Breuilly, “Modern Territoriality, the Nation-State, and Nationalism”, in: Middell and Marung (eds.), *Spatial Formats Under the Global Condition*, pp. 149–179. For excellent recent investigations into other regional, federal, and international projects in the first half of the twentieth century in the context of dissolving empires, see, e.g., A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019; I. Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

18 M. Middell, “From Universal History to Transregional Perspectives”, at 256.

19 Ibid. The “we” refers here to discussions among researchers at the Collaborative Research Centre 1199 “Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition” at Leipzig University. We have developed, discussed and will further test the conceptual and analytical category of globalization projects in a series of handbooks forthcoming with Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht with the first three scheduled: M. Middell (ed.), *Handbook of the French Globalization Project*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming; U. Engel, J. Herpolsheimer, and F. Mattheis (eds.), *Handbook of Globalization Projects: Regional Organizations*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming; S. Marung and U. Müller (eds.), *Handbook of Socialist Globalization Projects*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming.

Through this lens, “globalization” becomes visible in the plural as a multiplicity of projects of space- and place-making.

This volume addresses space-making during a particular period, when, starting from the mid-nineteenth century, a number of competing globalization projects materialized and began to clash. The global condition that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century provided a new quality of global entanglements, but it did not lead to ever-increasing global flows to the benefit of all as it was driven by the dialectic of de- and re-territorialization, resulting in emerging flows and control, and shaped by unequal power relations and unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural resources. These competing and still related projects developed, for example, as different forms of imperialism and colonialism, as efforts of post-colonial nation-building in the second half of the twentieth century, as a variety of modernization programmes driven by the two competing ideologies of the Cold War, or as marginalizations based on gender or race translated, for instance, into global border regimes, which regulated the flow of labour. For mobile actors, these projects defined their access to political, social, and cultural rights.

The chapters of this volume focus particularly on how people as individuals, in groups, and in and within organizations created, today and in recent history, spaces of social action under these conditions. Their choices are encouraged and constrained by powerful institutional arrangements. These might be ideological, social, or material and might manifest as infrastructures, architectural arrangements, maps, instructions, or traditions. The actors and practices, which the chapters zoom in on, do not necessarily all have a globalization project of their own. This could be considered the case for the chapter by Katharina Döring and Jens Herpolsheimer, unpacking actorness in African regional organizations in the early twenty-first century; for the chapter by Stephan Rindlisbacher, studying the reconfiguration of Soviet territoriality after the Russian Revolution; for the chapter by Pascal Goeke and Evelyn Moser, investigating the philanthropic practices of the Rockefeller foundation; or for the chapter by Frank Meyer and Judith Migelbrink, shedding light on the complex regulatory landscape of organ donation in present-day Europe. In these cases, experts, bureaucrats, scholars, policy-makers, diplomats, or medical professionals appear prominently to envisage and implement a specific spatial order that would allow them to pursue their interests as it reflected their conceptions of globality and their own position in it.

Other chapters draw our attention to actors, who are often perceived as marginal, subaltern, and/or deprived of economic or cultural resources. Srividya Balasubramanian situates migrant workers and kiosk owners in peripheral regions navigating the banking infrastructure of the Indian state today at the centre of her analysis, Hanna Rössner presents the struggles of female activists from the

(former) German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Namibia across the Cold War's ending to find ways to continue their East-South solidarity projects, and Gabriele Písarz-Ramírez highlights authors and readers – as well as fictional personages – in the early nineteenth-century US as co-producers of the American nation at the Florida Frontier. Still, also these apparently marginalized actors must develop an understanding of the spatial contexts they have to navigate by producing their own imagination of it, which in turn is shaped by the institutional, economic, political, cultural contexts in which they are formed, in order to respond to the challenges they perceive. Thus, even if the actors investigated here do not develop or pursue a globalization project, they are either imagining other actors having and pursuing one, leading them to act and react.

4 Spatial Entrepreneurs and Spatial Literacy

The chapters are an invitation to raise questions regarding a typology of actors and practices of space-making under the global condition. Highlighting actors who appear to be particularly influential in shaping processes of spatialization in relation to globalization projects, we have introduced the notion of spatial entrepreneurs.²⁰ These are either individual or collective actors who seem to have the intention to respatialize and who legitimate this through specific spatial semantics. They play a crucial role in imagining, shaping, or challenging spatial formats, in combining them into spatial orders, in reading and managing the complex respatializations under the global condition, and in disposing of and creating specific forms of spatial literacy. It might be productive to further differentiate between spatial entrepreneurs when we, for example, observe empirically actors whose role seems to be mainly to *translate and mediate* between different spatial orders, between different spatial imaginations, and those who seem to focus more on the *implementation* of a respatialization project. In Stephan Rindlisbacher's chapter, for example, the differentiation and tension between the experts of Gosplan and the (wo)men on the ground – often in rural areas – appears to be particularly illuminating. His findings can help us to go beyond a conventional dichotomy between the “knowing” expert with the necessary resources at hand and the “illiterate” peasant who becomes the

²⁰ The “we” here refers again to discussions among researchers at the Collaborative Research Centre 1199. This volume is the first to systematically bring together empirical research in order to test this category, while it is further discussed and reflected upon in the individual scholarly production by the colleagues at the centre, non the least the inspiring work documented in PhD theses.

object of state action. We must hence avoid the misunderstanding that spatial entrepreneurs are mostly white men in black suits, highly educated and high earners, well-connected, self-conscious and self-confident. Rindlisbacher's peasants succeed with their petitions because they can mobilize a specific kind of knowledge the expert does not dispose of (and which is not provided at universities, for example) and because their agenda appears complementary to those of other resourceful players.

At first sight, this observation could seem to resonate with Michel de Certeau's "Wandersmänner". But these are, in his view, "practitioners [who] employ spaces that are not self-aware; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of one body for another".²¹ Despite conceding a profound impact of the everyday practices of these actors – of walking, talking, or window shopping – on the social construction and production of urban space, de Certeau still seems to hierarchize specific kinds of social and cultural capital.

To deal with this risk – that is to say, being able to give voice to and conceptualize agency of less prominent groups of people – we address the specific cultural and social capital of actors that enables them to "read" different spatial formats, spatial orders, and spatializations as spatial literacy.²² The term *spatial literacy* is probably both a blessing and a curse, as it evokes a number of associations and is also related to heterogeneous states of the art, which has appropriated both elements of the term but unfolds it in quite different ways, situating it in specific disciplinary and also national communities.²³ *Spatial literacy* as a concept more specifically is, on the one hand, part of the debate among educational, cultural, and linguistic scholars and, on the other hand, more firmly and prominently embedded in research and teaching of geographers and earth and environmental scientists. As far as we can see, there is no coherent and stable definition of this term in this debate but a variety of inspiring efforts to do so.²⁴

21 De Certeau, "Practices of Space", p. 124.

22 Middell, "From Universal History to Transregional Perspectives", pp. 259 sq. This concept and the way we use it, is, again, the outcome of our joint considerations at the Collaborative Research Centre 1199 and will be further developed and tested in the upcoming years.

23 For a normative agenda, see, e.g., E. D. Hirsch, J. F. Kett and J. Trefil (eds.), *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, New York: Vintage Books, 1987; for a critical take, see H. J. Graff, "The Literacy Myth at Thirty", *Journal of Social History* (2010), pp. 635–661; for multiliteracies, see, e.g., B. Cope and M. Kalantzis (eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*, Melbourne: Psychology Press 2000; New London Group, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures", *Harvard Educational Review*, 66 (1996) 1, pp. 60–92.

24 H. King, "Understanding Spatial Literacy: Cognitive and Curriculum Perspectives", *Planet 17* (2006) 1, pp. 26–28; S. W. Bednarz and K. Kemp, "Understanding and Nurturing Spatial Literacy", *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 21 (2011), pp. 18–23.

More concretely, spatial literacy in these contexts is understood as the outcome of spatial thinking, which includes being able to think *in*, *about*, and *with* space. Being able to navigate a city, avoiding a traffic jam, or knowing how to cross a border would be examples of thinking *in* space, acquiring and learning information about the world as well as organizing this information for thinking *about* space. Thinking *with* or *through* space refers to “spatializing non-spatial data or using space as an organizing framework to conceptualize problems and make decisions (as) an effective cognitive strategy used frequently in problem solving”.²⁵ Spatial thinking in this strand of debate is related to spatial concepts, the use of spatial representations, and processes of spatial reasoning.

This debate in geography is often presented as a reaction to the emergence of new technologies and methodologies such as GPS or GIS. But this shift is only the last one in a long history from – let’s say – the itinerary and nautical chart to modern navigation tools in smart phones. Literacy more generally and spatial literacy more specifically are embedded in space and time and can hence only be thought of in the plural. Dealing with the normative package of the “literacy myth” – which embedded literacy firmly in Western development schemes – is an important provocation of critical literacy studies, and we need to reconcile our efforts to more closely conceptualize spatial literacy while investigating the variety of practices and skills that actors develop and how they use them according to which aims and ambitions. In this regard, it is probably empirically more productive to understand spatial literacy as a collective undertaking, resulting from the efforts and practices of many people to reflect experiences of space-making and of thinking in, with, and through space by identifying, describing, relating, and distributing spatial concepts, by “teaching”, adopting, using, challenging, and transforming competencies in spatial representation, and by thinking through space as a way to design and pursue globalization projects.

5 The Chapters

We seek to understand how practices and processes through which – relatively durable – spatial arrangements are created, maintained, and subverted. We do so from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. Historians, geographers, anthropologists, and scholars of literature studies, international relations, and global studies

²⁵ Bednarz and Kemp, “Understanding and Nurturing Spatial Literacy”, p. 20; see also J. M. F. Goodchild, “Toward Critical Spatial Thinking in the Social Sciences and Humanities”, *GeoJournal* 75 (2010), pp. 3–13.

explore how we might conceptualize actors and agency in a theory of space-making. We approach the problem through the lens of case studies. Who forges transnational and transregional connections and, in turn, how do these connections affect the making of spatial orders and spatial formats? How are people integrated or socialized into spatial arrangements that have a large global reach or are globally ambitious? What role do power, positionality, and the access to resources play in this regard?

This multi- and interdisciplinary undertaking requires an “ecumenical” approach to concepts of actors, agency, and social practices. The authors share a post-structuralist, actor-centred perspective aiming to grasp the dialectic between space as an outcome of social practices as well as a structuring context for action. Some authors are inspired by sociological and anthropological insights to reflect on the methodological and conceptual challenges their own discipline brings with it when it comes to actors and actorness, such as Katharina Döring and Jens Herpolsheimer do when they meticulously unpack the different types of individual and collective actors in the Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union: staff of international organizations and think tanks, bureaucrats and diplomats, desk officers and ministers, delegations and researchers. They furthermore situate these in the variable contexts and the roles that they take on there: as members of commissions, as chairs of sessions, as consultants in the field, or as guest at informal meetings. This follows an anthropological impulse in peace and security studies while, at the same time, develops a coherent agenda for the theorization of the relations between these different kinds of actors. Pascal Goeke and Evelyn Moser, in turn, aim at conceptualizing philanthropic organizations as *collective* actors with specific practices to create legitimacy for the doings and to create impact on social relations and political contexts. Giving gifts, defining problems, and the solutions to them appear in their findings as most prominent types of philanthropic practices.

While Döring and Herpolsheimer unpack *actorness*, Frank Meyer devotes with similar care attention to the variety of *practices* involved in organ donation in Europe. He presents it as a series of medical practices that manifest themselves in a wider set of practices, situated in a multiscalar regulatory regime. Patients and their families, medical experts, or health officials engage in different types of practices, including the decision to donate, managing and counselling processes, as well as regulatory activities. These refer, in turn, to different spatial frameworks in which families, clinics, medical associations, state agencies, and international organizations are embedded – and thus in effect permanently rescale the regulatory regime of organ donation.

As a specific form of space-making under the global condition, processes of de- and re-territorialization stand out in most chapters, while many zoom in on moments of crises, of fragility, and of (often controversial) transition. Gabriele Pisarz-

Ramirez takes us to the early nineteenth century and demonstrates how literature has helped to mediate between two – not yet clearly outlined and related – projects of US-American nation-building: consolidating the still contested peripheries or undertaking expansionist projects to engage in the competition with European empires. The less known Florida Frontier appears as a space in which both imaginations could be unfolded and tested. Her contribution adds another layer of complexity to how we think about spatial entrepreneurs: in addition to authors, readers, book sellers, and publishers, we observe fictional characters navigating a fragile spatial order, as literature becomes a laboratory for the development of spatial literacy.

Hanna Rössner and Stephan Rindlisbacher draw our attention to another set of historical ruptures. While Rindlisbacher's chapter addresses the years after the Russian Revolution and civil war and delves into the moment of birth of the territorial formation, which is contested again today in the war by Russia against Ukraine, Rössner highlights female activist along the East-South axis as spatial entrepreneurs who had to navigate a profoundly shaken spatial order. When the Cold War ended, this meant erasure of the GDR and resurrection of Namibia – the territorial contexts in which the activists also navigated. And although the specific project, that Rössner investigates, did not produce the planned outcomes, it still provided a framework in which the female actors could learn to adapt their literacy to the newly emerging order.

In a similar vein, Srividya Balasubramanian invites us to think about spatial literacy of non-elites. In her chapter, she shows how ambitious plans for the creation of a banking infrastructure as a backbone of the Indian state in order to make it competitive in as well as to link it to global financial and political market can only be realized with the support of banking agents. These banking agents act as mediators between state elites and a mobile population in Indian peripheries, between urban and rural spaces. They anchor the vast respatialization agenda in the locales of the kiosk, where they are able to create trust as the precondition for how the government's digitization initiative can be realized.

Finally, Goeke and Moser draw our attention to the current (re)making of (connected) urban spaces through the transformative philanthropic practices of collective actors such as the Rockefeller foundation. Zooming in on the foundation's "100 Resilient Cities Programme", they demonstrate how it combines the specific definition of resilience as a concept with which to frame responses to anthropogenic challenges and a specific form of giving to create both legitimacy and to impact on and transform urban policies worldwide.

Individually and in sum, the chapters demonstrate the fragmented, contradictory, and at times chaotic and contingent nature of practices and processes of space-making under the global condition. This insight is not equivalent with the

scholarly resistance to theorization, but rather an empirically substantiated and important conceptual starting point: we cannot and must not start from deductive conceptualizations of actorness, agency, and practice. We instead need to accept the openness in our empirical observations and first aim to carefully trace actors and their practices as well as empirically investigate and reconstruct the ways in which people, collective and individual actors, make spaces under the global condition. This includes aiming to grasp the interrelation between institutions, normative regimes, infrastructures, and practices and to situate actors in this nexus.²⁶ Here, practice theory²⁷ as well as actor network theory²⁸ provide important inspirations, while further development by geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and David Harvey²⁹ have proven to be crucial to think about actors, practices, and – specifically – *space*. What seems to be more challenging conceptually and methodologically is to develop a framework that remains flexible enough to address the historical openness and contingency of such processes and to account for the disorder of individual and multiscale dynamics under the global condition. Thinking through the concepts of spatial entrepreneurs and spatial literacy is our proposal of how we could deal with the tension between theoretical ambition and empirical messiness.

²⁶ On infrastructure, see recently Marian Burchardt and Dirk van Laak (eds.), *Making Spaces through Infrastructure: Visions, Technologies, and Tensions*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023.

²⁷ P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; T. R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; A. Hui, T. R. Schatzki, and E. Shove (eds.), *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, London: Routledge, 2017.

²⁸ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991; M. Callon, “Actor-Network Theory – The Market Test”, *The Sociological Review* 47 (1999) 1 (suppl.), pp. 181–195.

²⁹ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, London: Continuum, 2004; D. Massey, *A Place in the World? Places Cultures and Globalization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; D. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2006.

