

South Africa in a Time of Transition

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Hamburg has been called *Germany's gateway to the world*. This is because Hamburg as Germany's city with the biggest sea-port has entertained relations with countries outside of Europe for centuries—among which the countries of Africa have always played a role. Today international relations are an important feature of Hamburg's public life. This is mirrored by the fact that Hamburg is second only to New York with regard to the number of foreign consulates located there.

International relations are a major feature of the University of Hamburg as well. Since the end of World War I when Germany was re-admitted in the international scientific community, official partnership agreements have been signed with more than 40 universities. Among the universities with which Hamburg maintains official links there are three African universities—two of them South African.

Ties with South African universities go back to the time of the founding of the University of Hamburg. Actually, two of the first three PhD candidates in the "Seminar für Afrikanische und Südsee-Sprachen" were South African scholars.

Therefore, it was a special pleasure for me to renew these links in 1995 by signing partnership agreements with the University of Cape Town and the Universiteit van Stellenbosch after the end of Apartheid and the shift to democracy in South Africa.

The present colloquium is the first upshot of these partnership-agreements and I am particularly delighted to welcome scholars from our South African partner universities and other South Afri-

can institutions who are taking part in this event. I hope that the exchange of ideas, results and plans for future research projects will be a fruitful one.

The University of Hamburg was founded immediately after World War I in a time of economic hardship and psychological depression. However, the international orientation of the newlyfounded university was evident from the very first moment: The Faculty of Philosophy boasted a number of chairs for African and Asian Languages and Cultures that were unique in Germany. The chair of Japanese language and culture is the oldest in Germany, the chair for African languages is even more prestigious in this respect: it is the oldest in the world.

This Tradition of teaching and research in foreign languages and cultures—that I regard to be one of the most remarkable features of this university—is being kept alive even now even though Hamburg’s government has introduced an austerity-program that seriously endangers teaching and research at this university.

The university therefore fullheartedly supports an initiative taken by more than 25 scholars from nine different faculties to strengthen the tradition of non-European research activities by taking steps towards establishing a “Sonderforschungsbereich” (multidisciplinary research project). Discussions with the South African scholars who are taking part in this colloquium will contribute to the success of this difficult and time-consuming task.
