



Catching Up with the (New) West **The German “Excellence Initiative,” Area Studies, and the Re-Production of Inequality**

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Abstract: In the context of the Bologna Process of neoliberal European university reform, the German authorities have recently promoted an “Excellence Initiative” which has defined as one key objective the promotion of area studies. To the extent that such initiatives constitute a more modestly funded imitation of existing U.S. programs and share their affinity with evolutionist modernization theories and their instrumental function in orienting elite strategy, they operate as a vector of “re-Westernization” of the German university. However, these initiatives may also in some cases open up new spaces for the development of critical approaches to migration studies and ethnic and racial studies, from a more subaltern perspective, with openings to critical gender studies and attention to minority politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The label of “Westernization,” whether positively or negatively connoted, has been widely used to describe—or decry—the convergence of social, economic, political or cultural patterns toward a supposedly homogeneous Western model. However, what counted as “Western” has differed considerably across time *and* space, depending on the shifting relations of power between the parts of the world that have informed the notion of “the West” as a

normative reference and model to be followed.¹ Regarding systems of higher education, reference to the “Western university”—by definition, a label used

¹ Lewis and Wigen (1997: 51) distinguish a wide array of versions of the West, ranging from the “standard minimal West” made up of just Britain, France, the Low Countries, and Switzerland, through the “historical West” encompassing the whole of medieval Christendom around 1250, the West of the Cold War Atlantic alliance (including Japan), and up to the conflated “cultural West”, additionally comprising all areas under European influence and/or control, such as Latin America and white South Africa.

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mostly in non-Western contexts, to which it served as a model—has successively denoted the Renaissance university in Italy, Spain and Portugal in the 17th century, the Enlightenment university in England, Germany, and France from the end of the 18th century onwards, as well as the foreign-policy oriented, military-sponsored Cold War university in the United States (Mignolo 2003; Wallerstein 1997).

The German system of higher education in particular has shaped the modern definition of the Western university during a decisive period in its history. The reforms of the early 19th century initiated by Wilhelm von Humboldt, which centered on the unification of research and teaching in state-sponsored institutions, prompted the restructuring of higher education throughout Europe along the lines of state support for both education and science within university structures, rather than within particular institutions dependent on private patronage, as had been the case until the 18th century. The self-understanding of institutions of higher education and their relationship to the emerging Western European nation-states, the main methodological positions, as well as the corresponding demarcation of academic disciplines in both Great Britain and France—the other major 19th-century actors in the shaping of the university establishment—took shape under the influence of or in direct confrontation with Humboldt's idea of an educational state apparatus (*Kulturstaatskonzept*), the idea of sciences of the state (*Staatswissenschaften*), German Historicism, and the *Methodenstreit* between idiographic and nomothetic approaches to scientific knowledge production (DiMeglio 2004; Mielants 2004). With the United States' ascent to hegemonic status in the world-system after World War II, the Humboldtian university model, which had prevailed throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, gradually lost ground to the U.S. model,

which consequently became the epitome of the Western university by the end of the 20th century.

This historical loss of the power to set academic standards is a recurrent theme in both German academia and policymaking—the competition with the U.S. system a constant reminder of it. That the reputation of today's U.S. universities should correspond to that of the German universities of the 19th and early 20th centuries is alternatively denounced, deplored, or taken as proof of the German state's poor implementation of the latest reform of higher education—but as such it is undisputed (Roche 2010; Darnstädt 2010). The same is true of the brain drain which has made Germany the number one country of origin of foreign doctoral students in the U.S. and in other European Union member states and has prompted specific countermeasures and “homecoming programs” by the German Scholars Organization since 2006 (Jung 2010). The result, as in the case of other European university systems in search of past academic luster, is a renewed Westernization, this time fashioned on the U.S.-American model.

The thesis advanced in this article is that what is currently being negotiated as a policy of higher education in the German context in fact represents an institutional catching-up process that unwillingly reproduces the main fallacies of mid-20th century policies of modernization as Westernization, along with their main consequences for the reproduction of existing inequality structures. At the same time, since it is being played out as inner-core competition between the U.S. and Western Europe more generally, and the U.S. and Germany in particular, the academic norm being negotiated remains within the capitalist logic that has characterized the Western university since the beginning of the modern period, and additionally reinforces it. In showing the German university system's renewed Westernization, the arti-

cle proceeds in two steps: first, it examines how the new elite discourse of German higher education, being fostered by such measures as the recent “Excellence Initiative,” is producing new structures of exclusion. Second, the article zooms in on the revival of area studies as one of the prominent targets of the excellence initiative and of funding in order to show how the policy behind the recent state financial support for the study of non-Western regions reinforces the main assumptions of modernization theory and reproduces the asymmetries of knowledge production characteristic of Euro- and state-centered approaches to the issues in question. The article ends with a comparison between the processes of institutionalization of subaltern views in the U.S. and Germany.

II. A TALE OF TWO WESTS: THE U.S. VS. THE GERMAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

If German academics and policy-makers, much like their counterparts throughout Western Europe, deplore the Americanization of their university systems today, a similar, if reversed process of de-Germanization of higher education (DiMeglio 2004) was taking place in the U.S. in the beginning of the 20th century.

Faced with a rapid capitalist development since the Civil War, but also with weak state structures unequipped to deal with the emerging “social question,” the United States, unlike the Western European states before it, witnessed a boom in private rather than public universities, financed through the wealth of industrial magnates.² As higher education was becoming more of an enterprise, its promoters, many of whom were social scientists trained mainly in 19th-century Germany, gradually abandoned the distinctly German tradition of thought that emphasized historicity, holism, and disci-

plinary synthesis in favor of the scientism, positivism, and empiricism dictated by the rise of the natural sciences in the context of industrial capitalism (Manicas 1991; DiMeglio 2004). The German-inspired university pattern, organized around individual chairs, was soon replaced by a structure of departments with multiple professors, better suited to the large student bodies in the U.S. and more conducive to the creation of scientific networks whose research attracted significant corporate funds (Stremlin 2004). The emergence of the pattern of the U.S. university and its model of universalistic internationalism after World War I was thus premised on a de-Germanization of university structures in general and of the American social sciences in particular. Following the influx of Western European scientists into the U.S. during World War II and especially the drastic increase in government funding of scientific research for military purposes during the Cold War, U.S. research universities became firmly established as leaders of the world scientific culture.

In turn, the German education system as a whole suffered a series of (mostly self-inflicted) blows. The very model of state support for education and science that had prompted Europe’s first compulsory schooling in early 18th-century Prussia led to a hierarchical three-tiered school structure in late 19th-century Germany. While state employees were being recruited from the upper tier and were the recipients of education more generally (which in turn ensured their access to higher education),

² “The fortunes of the Carnegies, Rockefellers, Cornells, Hopkins, Clarks, Vanderbilts, Stanfords, etc., would be used to build the new universities. But just as important, both these, the public institutions which mimicked them, and the older ‘traditional’ colleges, Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, which now found themselves competing for students and status, would be led by educational entrepreneurs whose values and goals were closely aligned with the leaders of the emerging corporate liberal order” (Manicas 1991: 48).

professional and vocational training became a separate school domain, mainly the lot of the lower classes (Gottschall/Hagemann 2002). A strong institutional basis for educational mechanisms of social selection was thus created. As early as the 1960s, the German educational system's high selectivity, its inability to tap the learning potential of the lower social strata, alongside its overall meagre financial basis earned it the label of "German education catastrophe" (Picht 1964) and an unfavorable reputation among other industrial nations. The ensuing expansion in both secondary and higher education managed to even out some of the horizontal inequalities, especially with respect to gender, but not to vertical ones such as social origin, i.e., class.³ Although the restriction of higher education to the training of national elites, true of most Western European countries, had led to distinct national strategies of differentiating among types of higher education (Paradeise et al.: 201), the inequality-enhancing results of the German system have proven especially persistent. The dismal results of the 2002 PISA evaluation, which placed German 15-year olds (who had been tested on reading comprehension, math, and natural sciences) far below the OECD average on all counts, and revealed structural stumbling blocks preventing the educational advancement of lower-class and migrant children, proved some of the 1960s charges still true in the

³ In a decade-long debate, German sociologists have seriously questioned the appropriateness of social classes and social strata as categories of analysis of postindustrial Western societies. To this day, class euphemisms such as "social origin" are used instead of the conventional class language, closely associated with Marxism in the German context and therefore theoretically illegitimate for the wide majority of sociologists. This particular situation has led Rainer Geißler (2002: 141) to speak of the "German *Sonderweg* of social structure analysis". For a most recent exception confirming the rule, see the May 2011 issue of the Berliner Journal *für Soziologie*, especially the introduction by Müller et al. (2011).

2000s. Together with the rising numbers of college dropouts and the comparatively high age of university graduates,⁴ such developments made Germany's hitherto prevailing self-definitions as "the land of poets and thinkers" and "educational nation" increasingly inappropriate and the "backwardness" of its schooling system a growing matter of concern (Smolka 2002; Gottschall/Hagemann 2002).

The Bologna university reform, destined to create a "European higher education area" of increased comparability—but also competitiveness—at the world level by reducing the duration of university studies, lowering the number of college dropouts, and improving the employability of graduates, seemed the perfect cure for some of the German system's chronic ailments. However, as the three-year fast-track to the bachelor's degree took prevalence over the transfer of knowledge and as the yearly output of employable students increasingly decided the fate of universities in the higher education market, ever more charges of having superimposed the "entrepreneurial university" (Helbrecht 2007) over the republic of knowledge and having thus chosen "Siemens over Humboldt" (Darnstädt 2010) were directed at German policy-makers.

III. THE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE: A SUCCESS STORY?

For the chronically underfinanced German educational system, the Bologna university reform also meant growing differentiation between universities that could meet the needs of the new entrepreneurial apparatus and those who could not. Depending on reputation, university or

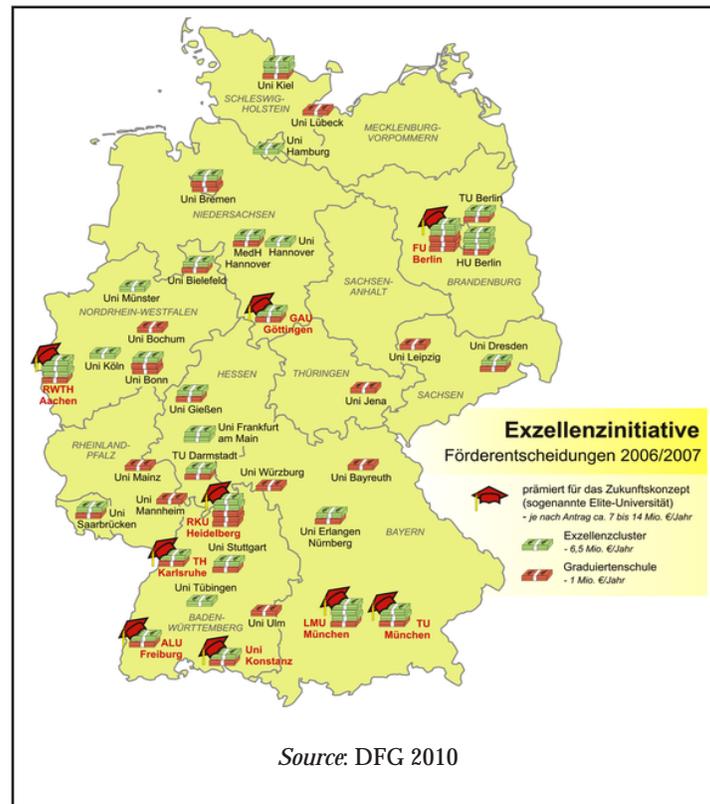
⁴ At an average age of 26, German graduates are the oldest among all graduates in OECD countries. See Eurostudent 2008, Darnstädt 2010.

department size, available federal funds, or attractive location, the capacity to implement bachelors, but not masters or doctoral programs often implied a drift toward the status of a “mere” teaching university. While occasionally hailed for putting an end to the “fiction of equality” that traditionally governed Germany’s higher education, the policy of sifting out teaching from research institutions, modeled on the U.S. case in the hope of reproducing the success of its Ivy League colleges, did not yield similar results. By establishing, on the one hand, so-called “elite universities” that benefit from considerable state funding for “excellent research,” and on the other progressively confining the overwhelming majority to (already) overcrowded “mass universities” where the teaching load allows almost no time for research, such policy measures artificially draw a sharp line between universities which, having been structured according to Humboldt’s ideal of “unity of research and teaching,” most of the time do not fall neatly into any one category (Kreckel 2008:6).

The so-called “excellence initiative,” an evaluation process taking place between 2006 and 2007, in the course of which nine universities—the Free University of Berlin, the University of Munich, and the University of Heidelberg, among others—were designated as “elite universities,” represents Germany’s hitherto clearest and most highly institutionalized example of a state policy aimed at confining research to specialized institutions. Earlier steps in this direction, such as the founding of the research-only Max Planck institutes, Leibniz institutes and Fraunhofer societies in the 1980s and 1990s, had only created a wider array of employment options for researchers than the state university system allowed for. In contrast, the new academic division of labor initiated with the Bologna reform and taken one step further by the “excellence initiative” has subserviently followed the U.S.-model of creating a rift

between research and teaching within the university structure itself.

Having as an explicit goal “to promote outstanding research projects and institutions” at Germany’s universities as well as “to make German science and research more visible in the scientific community,” the excellence initiative, run by the German research community (DFG) together with the federal and state governments, consists of three separate funding lines: Graduate Schools, aimed at promoting young scientists and researchers; Clusters of Excellence, aimed at furthering cutting-edge research by having universities, non-university research institutions, and business and industry work together on particularly promising topics; and Institutional Strategies, conceived as a means to advance top-level research at the individual university level. At the end of the first two evaluation rounds in October 2006 and October 2007, 85 institutions were selected along those lines, out of which 39 were Graduate Schools, 37 Clusters of Excellence, and nine “Elite universities,” i.e., those having presented the best Institutional Strategies (see fig. 1). All these institutions will be funded with a total of 1.9 billion Euros spread over a period of five years. The second selection round, now in progress, will allocate an additional 2.7 billion euros for the period 2012-2017. However, the bulk of the funding (up to 14 million euros per institution per year) is destined for the elite universities, most of whose institutional strategies of future development boast a shift from the “classical university structure” to a “modern management structure” (FU Berlin), establishing “innovative executive management structures at university board and faculty levels” (RWTH Aachen) or even envisage “the entrepreneurial university” *tout court* (TU Munich) (DFG 2008). For Germany’s critical academics, the discursive shift from the academic understatement traditionally characterizing Western European universi-



ties to an elitist language coined in the terms of marketing and advertising is symptomatic of an indirect commercialization of European universities (still predominantly state-funded and state-controlled), as opposed to the direct commodification of academic work in the U.S. in the context of massive corporate funding of private universities (Kreckel 2006). According to the promoters of the excellence initiative, however, the balance sheet of such catching-up policies is an exclusively positive one, as the website of the German research community suggests:

This video portal presents a success story that has achieved much in so little time—and will do so in the coming years. When German politics and science joined together in 2005 to launch the Excellence Initiative, they set themselves a

formidable goal. Their aim was to organize a competition to sustainably strengthen research at Germany's universities and to raise the visibility of German science and research vis-à-vis our international competitors. These were ambitious goals indeed, especially since it meant a departure from a long-cherished—and fatally wrong—conception that all universities are equal and hence should be treated equally. Instead, the Excellence Initiative pursued a path of inequality and of funding elites. (DFG 2010)

Thus, the new elite discourse of German higher education not only fosters the emergence of new structures of within-country exclusion, but also is based on an explicit avowal of what is seen as the road to success in a globalizing world—catching

up with the competition. Much like an institutional modernization policy that follows a sequence-of-stages model, it leaves to hazard the social consequences of growing inequality for the sake of the greater future good—German academic excellence. In fact, the discourse bears clear modernizationist overtones beyond the academic endeavor as such, as it attempts to translate its alleged success into a wholesale policy of social transformation. In the words of DFG president Matthias Kleiner, an engineer by training:

[...] the Excellence Initiative is not only changing the German science and research system—it is actually driving the country as a whole forward. It is creating thousands of high-quality jobs, it is promoting our specialists, experts and executives of tomorrow, and it is contributing to innovation in business and industry. And it shows how science supports society.” (DFG 2008: 11)

As in classical modernizationist thought, both the educational policy and the wider policy of social transformation it claims to engender rest on the idealization of a pre-established model to be followed—the Ivy League standard in terms of education, and the U.S. as a whole in terms of societal development—as well as on disregard for both the context of its emergence and of its success, as critics of the excellence initiative have cogently pointed out:

Its ideal and reference point are that which the German audience think they know about American universities and only what they want to know. It is the beaming look toward the USA, which not only makes that reality glitter, but is disinclined to acknowledge its specificity within the western world [...] The dominant notion is

that globalization leads to a worldwide society that speaks English and thinks American. And that its motive force must be unimpeded competition, the results of which must be quantitatively measurable in the short run. This is the global society for which Germany must be trained. (Meyer 2010: 568, my translation)

That the budgets of top U.S. universities far surpass even those of the best-endowed German elite universities, whose funds are only granted for five-year periods, is wholly disregarded in this context. So is the fact that the yearly tuition fees for America’s Ivy League universities, which are higher than the average yearly income in the U.S.⁵, bear no comparison to the recently introduced fee of 500 euros per semester in Germany—which met, however, with considerable student protest, given Germany’s long history of “free” (i.e., state-funded) education at all levels. The inequalities of opportunity for which the introduction of tuition fees (however low) paves the way and which the German students protested, have left their trace on the U.S. higher education system since the late 1970s: they have led to the emergence of an entire industry of student loans, have prompted the exponential growth of student debt, and—paradoxically—higher college dropout rates. Moreover, by making part-time work an essential precondition for affording college attendance, they have driven up the age of U.S. college students, which now averages 26—thus matching Germany’s (Donoghue 2010). While the elite universities producing excellent professionals become increasingly unaffordable (except to a select few)

⁵ Speaking of American elite universities as “extremely expensive consumption goods,” Donoghue (2010) lists a figure of \$35,000 for average tuition fees, compared to an average yearly income of \$29,000 in the U.S.

and formerly prestigious public universities cringe under shrinking state subsidies, there is a proliferation of cheaper technical and community colleges providing practical and vocational training. The result is not top researchers, but service workers with a two-year college education (Donoghue 2010: 635). The higher education system that Germany is striving to emulate is thus, taken in its entirety, well past its prime and has been for several decades producing the very results the German university system has identified as its own weakest points.

IV. AREA STUDIES RELOADED

Nevertheless, it is with the “Golden Age” of the U.S. university system in mind that one of the prominent targets of the excellence initiative and funding in Germany became the revival of area studies. Awareness of the need to promote research on the regions of the world was prompted by strategic considerations similar to those in the U.S. in the 1940s and 1950s, where the institutionalization of area studies was argued primarily on geopolitical grounds and catered directly to the United States’ foreign policy in the Cold War context. Against this background, large amounts of federal funds as well as research grants from major foundations went to the study of non-Western, especially communist areas as well as toward keeping the newly decolonized states in Asia and Africa from falling under Soviet influence (Wallerstein 1997). Theoretically informed by modernization theory, the area studies of the mid-20th century were primarily directed at implementing development policies on the U.S. model.

Their German counterpart were the “regional sciences” (*Regionalwissenschaften*) of the former GDR, themselves under the ideological aegis of the socialist regime, but as such (paradoxically) less characterized by a common political agenda with a strong

developmentalist penchant than by an interdisciplinary social scientific orientation. Indeed, from among the numerous regional disciplines pursued in Eastern Germany, only the ones focused on China (*Chinawissenschaften*) can retrospectively be clearly viewed as contract research and directly depending on the respective political relations between the GDR and China (Krauth/Wolz 1998). While Middle Eastern and South Asia studies were under partial constraints by the respective status quo of foreign affairs, they also produced a significant amount of internationally valuable research before 1980, as did the Africa sciences of the most important research and teaching centers of Leipzig and Berlin (Rothermund; van der Heyden, in: Krauth/Wolz 1998). With the German reunification, most of this research tradition was lost either by the closing down of the respective centers or of parts of their research departments (such as African philosophy or African sociology) or the incorporation into the Western German research and teaching canon and university structure, which had not previously included regional science departments. The research undertaken in the form of area studies after 1990 would, however, follow the U.S. model as explained above.

In Germany, area studies were neither so copiously funded nor so coherently implemented as their U.S. counterpart. The rationale for their institutionalization came first in the context of the so-called “transformation research,” centered on postcommunist Europe as a whole—but overwhelmingly carried out with respect to East Germany; and second, and more importantly, in the context of the federal government’s strategy to internationalize German science and research in order to better keep up with global competition—the same strategy that had also informed the excellence initiative and which was seen as associated with globalization. If the first orientation resulted in transition and

democratization research of a neo-modernizationist kind (see Spohn 2006), the second, more recent one joins the excellence initiative in drawing up research frameworks that further reproduce modernization theory's main assumptions. Thus, in the call for research proposals launched by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in 2008, the rationale for the "promotion and further development of area studies" is seen in developing strategic resources for the management of globalization phenomena such as the growing migratory flows:

The need for in-depth knowledge about other regions of the world is growing steadily. In light of globalization processes and migration processes, knowledge of local and regional as well as trans-national and trans-cultural realities and relationships become increasingly important." (BMBF 2008, my translation)

Specifically, the initiative is intended to (1) initiate a structural strengthening of area studies; (2) develop content as well as methodological and theoretical approaches to regional studies; (3) develop new forms of cooperation between area studies and the "systematic" disciplines such as economics, social sciences, law, history, natural sciences, and engineering in order to counterweigh the role hitherto played by history and philology in producing knowledge on world regions; (4) increase the visibility of those interdisciplinary "loci of expertise" in Germany which draw upon innovative concepts (BMBF 2008). Against the background of what has by now become a state policy of university excellence, however, academic objectives that foreground regional expertise and downgrade historical-philological knowledge to the benefit of "systematic disciplines" (i.e., hard science), reveal wider geopolitical

goals: in the race for the top positions in the global hierarchy of knowledge production, reproducing a core perspective on the value of knowledge (neutral expertise in the core vs. empirical evidence in the periphery), the methods used in order to generate it (science vs. the humanities), as well as the intellectual division of labor among subjects and objects of knowledge production on a global scale (the West vs. the Rest) all become means to the end of "catching up" with the top dog:

To maintain and improve competitiveness in the globalization process, it is essential that Germany's remote expertise with regard to different regions of the world be further developed. Only when a broad range of expertise is available will it be possible to successfully communicate with other world regions. [...] While regional studies in Germany display a wide range of knowledge of various world regions, cultures, and countries, some individual disciplines have a strong historical and philological penchant and their cooperation with the systematic disciplines is rather selective." (BMBF 2008, my translation)

In analogous fashion to the excellence initiative's funding line for elite universities, the research grants allotted on this basis ensure financing only for a period of four years and differ widely in size depending on the scope of the submitted proposals. Moreover, despite the existence of area studies centers in formerly East German universities, only seven proposals were selected after the first round and only four ultimately received funding. The extent of state support in this case is thus hardly comparable with the long-standing, large-scale aid granted to U.S. area studies by such initiatives as the Ford Foundation's

Foreign Area Fellowship Program, which contributed \$270 million to 34 universities for area and language studies between 1952 and 1966; or the U.S. National Defense Education Act, issued in 1958 as a reaction to the Soviet Union's launching of the first Sputnik the year before, and which subsequently allocated funds to 125 area studies units at U.S. universities, alongside Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships for graduate students (Wallerstein 1997; Szanton 2004).

At the same time, the limited scope and extent of governmental control in the German case presents the area studies programs being funded with the opportunity to implement their own intellectual agendas and to choose neither to reinforce the main assumptions of modernization theory in their study of "other" world regions, nor to reproduce the asymmetries of knowledge production characteristic of Euro- and state-centered approaches to the issues under scrutiny. Indeed, the study of global interdependencies of social inequalities beyond the nation-state, undertaken in mutual exchange *with* Latin American researchers rather than as German expertise *about* Latin America, is the explicit objective of the research network set up at the Institute for Latin American Studies of the Free University of Berlin within BMBF's area studies program. In this particular instance, the chronic underfinancing of German higher education translates into (at least partial) academic freedom. Nevertheless, questioning the capitalist logic of knowledge production remains a matter of individual responsibility and is contingent upon, as well as subordinated to, the excellence of funding, not of scholarship. While critics focus on disclosing the rhetoric of academic excellence as a political construction within an academically asymmetrical power field (see Münch 2007), and the large research networks it funds as structurally inert and inefficient, they leave unquestioned the larger logic prompting self-

designated "knowledge societies" to engage in a race for top positions in the global hierarchy of knowledge production.

V. THE NON-WEST(ERN) AND ITS AVATARS: FUTURE PROSPECTS

The process of re-Westernization of the German university system as examined in this paper has tended towards the monopolization of resources at "elite" academic sites. One of the main consequences of this process, alongside the reproduction and reinforcement of the educational system's existing inequalities, is that of preventing the systematic incorporation—much less the institutionalization—of subaltern(ized) views.

As shown above, the Western university of the late 19th century was Western European, and as such was contemporary to and complicit with the nation-building processes in Germany, France and England alike. In all these cases, the painstaking construction of national languages and literatures and national historical narratives, alongside their formal incorporation into an academic curriculum, was an integral part of political projects of national unification, including the production of bodies of civil servants for the maintenance and expansion of the nation's colonial empire (Mielants 2004: 49). This entailed the academic institutionalization of the standpoint of white, male, heterosexual national elites to the detriment of women, colonial subjects, and the ethnic(ized)/racial(ized) others beyond one's own imperial boundaries. While Britain saw at least a partial inclusion of minority politics within the mainstream alongside the emergence of an academic "race relations industry" (Small/Solomos 2006: 250) since the 1960s—both of which were partly due to massive postcolonial immigration from the New Commonwealth—France and Germany have proven particularly intrac-

table in this respect. The very first gender studies program in Germany was instituted in 1997 at the Humboldt University and was soon followed by several women's and gender studies programs across the country, but these have an extremely small number of (mostly junior or untenured) academic positions.⁶ As for ethnic studies, up to now they have been, at best, incorporated within migration research programs or literature departments; there are no queer studies curricula (the only one functioning in Hamburg since 2003 was dismantled five years later); while critical migration studies and newer gender and intersectionality research are concentrated in a handful of chairs in the sociology or political science of "diversity," or undertaken by free-lance researchers.

Much like in France, where the term "immigration" has long been used as a proxy for race, and for the racial scapegoating of immigrants in both academic and public discourse (Balibar 1999), German academic and policy discussions on racism, race relations or postcolonial migration have consistently employed the term "race" (*Rasse*) either in inverted commas or as an English neologism in otherwise German-language texts, in order to mark the difference between current racial phenomena and Nazi Germany's use of the biological concept of race. Until very recently, the relevance of discussions of racism, ethnic conflict, and postcolonial contexts more generally tended to be thoroughly dismissed in mainstream social scientific discourse on account of

⁶ Tellingly, only 18% of all university professors in Germany are women. The figure was recently boasted throughout the German mass media as a remarkable success, given that it signifies a doubling of the 1999 figure for female professors (around 9%). It was less remarked that this increase is partly due to the appointment of women to a large number of non-tenure track positions (*Juniorprofessur*) instituted since 2002. The fact that the numbers for university professors recruited from among the ethnicized/racialized Others in Germany is less than 1% is not even mentioned in this context.

Germany's relatively short colonial past, which supposedly did not warrant attention to a postcolonial present (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 1999, 2010; Boatcă/Costa 2010). For Germany's critical intellectuals, having (virtually) no academic curricula dealing with social differences from the perspective of the subalterns' emancipatory claims, represents not only a regrettable German *Sonderweg*, or special path, in comparison to other Western European settings such as the British or the Scandinavian context, but also, and especially, a temporal and financial lag with respect to U.S.-American academia (Dietze et al. 2007).

If this interpretation is correct, it could paradoxically constitute grounds for optimism with respect to future developments in Germany, and be the one respect in which a catching-up policy could prove rewarding after all. In the United States, what had started out as the top-down, state-controlled policy of the strengthening of area studies in the 1940s and 1950s and had come under severe attack in the post-1968 period, gradually gave way to the bottom-up institutionalization of women's and ethnic studies departments. Born out of the revolt of marginal groups against the dominant university structures, but also out of the political and intellectual radicalization occasioned by the academics' contact with (often postcolonial) research areas, these new academic enterprises were critical variants of area studies that focused on the "Third World within" (the ethnic and racial minorities of the North) and its links with the global South, such as the Black diaspora and Third World women (Wallerstein 1997). As such, they were essential in opening up institutional space for the appointment of ethnicized and racialized Others, promoting subaltern perspectives in fields that had hitherto been monopolized by white professors and students endorsing Eurocentric epistemologies (Grosfoguel 2007).

Although the process identified here as

the re-Westernization of the German university system is nothing like the success story it pretends to be, it has managed to become more like the U.S. model it has been following without catching up in any systematic way. However, the catching-up *policy* behind the excellence initiative has lent it traits of the challenges to the system effected in the US starting in the 1960s, as becomes evident in discussions of area studies programs and the timid beginnings of the academic institutionalization of minority politics. True, in the U.S. case, the incorporation of the latter into the mainstream has resulted in the relative depoliticization of both women's studies and many strands of ethnic studies in the following decades. But since embarking on the path of a model to be followed has so far always resulted in a *Sonderweg* with a different outcome in the case of Germany (as indeed in any modernizationist policy), moving from excellently Eurocentric area studies to a systematic academic structure of subaltern studies would be a *Sonderweg* worth pursuing.

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