



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2010-2011

“Media Appropriations and Mediascapes in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Media Entrepreneurs and Changing Technical and Social Configurations of Public Communication”

3rd - 9th January 2011

Report

1 Organisers

Prof. Dr. Dorothea Schulz (Anthropology), University of Cologne

PD Dr. Tilo Grätz (Anthropology), FU Berlin

2 Themes and Objectives

The workshop addressed new tendencies of media engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa by focusing on how various kinds of actors and media entrepreneurs in particular appropriate these media technologies.

Starting from the observation that recent scholarship has tended to focus on the press and the video-industry as important mass media in Sub-Saharan Africa, we especially invited papers addressing how various actors have drawn on radio and TV to capitalize on the new spaces of entrepreneurship and cultural creativity. These have emerged from the liberalization of media landscapes since the early 1990s, when many African countries saw the establishment of many new and (state-) independent radio and TV stations, along with a broadening and diversification of the institutional field of media production. Our aim was to focus on new media entrepreneurs (in a larger sense), benefiting from these new opportunities, including journalists, producers, but also religious or political brokers and entrepreneurship in the form of independent media production outlets that work on the basis of public or private contracts.

3 Methodology and Results

On the basis of this agenda, we were selecting significant papers based on ethnographically informed case studies that were submitted after an internationally published call for papers. Subsequently, the workshop brought together scholars working in European, African and US American academic contexts so as to contribute to debates on theoretical and methodological perspectives on these changing mediascapes in Africa. The program did not include paper presentations only, but also field trips, excursions, film and slide screenings as well as round table discussions with media producers in Bamako.

The contributions included e.g. examples of radio and TV stations or production firms, discussing related various forms of creativity, practices and everyday routines of media production, but also the relationships of media producers, journalists or actors with their audiences on one side, and with public authorities on the other. Other contributions were addressing institutional actors such as traditional authorities, religious congregations, political movements, artists or NGO appropriating media in manifold shapes. Most papers also addressed methodological and conceptual challenges emerging for empirical research on radio- and television-mediated communication.

Prior to the workshop, all participants submitted extended abstracts of their papers which were of great help to prepare the discussions. We were opting for English as the main

language for the individual presentations, but always helped francophone scholars with adhoc-translations. In addition to those participants who were presenting papers or were invited as discussants, we also invited several local scholars from Mali, either PhD students, seniors scholars or media practitioners, as well as PhD students from Germany sojourning in Mali, which all significantly contributed to our debates.

The organization of the workshop, both by the team in Germany and in Mali, was almost perfect, the technical support ample. We did not encounter any major logistic problems, put aside some very normal misunderstandings on organizational matters (catering schedule). We would like to thank very much Dr. Sissoko and his staff of Point Sud that were always helpful, friendly and flexible and open to any suggestions.

Unfortunately, one potential participant could not make it to the workshop because of problems with limited options to adopt his flight arrangements. Others had difficulties due to long delays especially when leaving Bamako by plane. Conversely, accommodations at hotel Olympe International Hotel as well as catering were ideal.

The first days (3.-4.1.2011) were primarily organized by Ute Rösenthaler and Dorothea Schulz. After rounds of introduction and the presentation of the overall aims and central points of the workshop, relevant issues and research questions with regard to the field excursions were discussed. The first day was rounded up by a sightseeing excursion to downtown Bamako.

Throughout the following day (5.1.2011) participants went in small groups to investigate various local media entrepreneurs and sites of media production in Bamako. These field trips, both meant to generate valuable insights into the vibrant field of media production in the Malian capital, and as an exercise to employ methods and modes of investigation, were prepared by Dorothea Schulz who put many efforts in contacting the respective actors / institutions prior to these visits. Furthermore, in the course of the workshop, the discussion of results of these sample case studies served as ideal grounds to make our relevant anthropological approaches and methodological concerns more clear and available to all the participants with diverging academic or professional backgrounds.

One group visited the radio station Radio Guintan in Magnambougou, *la voix des femmes*, a radio station as a part of a network that was set up to broadcast primarily for women and is managed by women. Here, institutional conditions as well as everyday challenges of media production were addressed. Another group visited several market stalls of vendors and (informal and legal) copiers of CD and DVD at the central market of Bamako and its vicinity, and discussed their production and marketing strategies. A third group met the owner of the established photo and video *Studio Zoom Chez Fané* in Bamako to investigate his personal pathway of success, across the various periods and technological changes, and addressed the social and cultural embeddedness of his enterprise, including the nature of relationships to kinsmen, employees and apprentices.

On Thursday (6.1.2011) the results of these field trips were presented and discussed to all in all detail, together with all other workshop participants (including those from Malian institutions of media production and higher education), pointing to the institutional and social context of these divergent media enterprises, as well as the relevance of the respective media products and context relevant to the consumers and audiences. Then, we were starting the conference-like part of the workshop with the presentation of the individual papers of the participants, always followed by comments prepared by a discussant. On the final day (9.1.2011), we were primarily discussing methodological problems.

In the following, we will only mention the most significant fields of interest and contributions we were dealing with during these days in Bamako. We were primarily addressing the multiple and fascinating aspects of changing mediascapes in Africa, including their new openness, multivocality, also with regard to new actors and their daily competition within national and national media environments. In this framework, we were addressing various modes of media appropriation that give rise to new options, but also constrains. Furthermore, we addressed the increasing role of transnational media flows in their entanglement with local issues and endeavors. With regard to our mentioned central topic, media entrepreneurs, we attempted to focus on actors, not only media contents and applied a wider definition of that concept that also includes cultural projects, ambitions, and career projections. Furthermore, our debates were dealing with the new formats of media production. Generally, their emergence could be interpreted as a result of the growing competition between media actors, but also their creativity. The most successful formats feature a particular nexus between producers and audiences, but also often witness new processes of a mediatization of everyday life. An important aspect of all debates was our insistence on the social and cultural embeddedness of media production, which supposes a methodology that follows the actors, also beyond their workplace, to detect their background with regard to their family, their biography, but also conceptualizes media outlets as social networks embedded in social structures-patronage, seniority etc. Methodological approaches should enable us to link the more and more interrelated processes of production and reception.

Several papers were analyzing a particular set of actors, circumscribed as religious and „traditional“ media entrepreneurs. This involved, among others, religious leaders, groups or associations setting up their own media outlets or developing particular programs, and more and more entering the public sphere (Sounaye, Ng'atigwa, Affagnon). Abdoulaye Sounaye studied a well-known Muslim preacher in Niger, member of a rather dissident religious fraction, who successfully created channels of distribution of his recorded sermons on DVD. Sounaye followed him in his multiple appearances and media strategies and analyzed his perception by various audiences.

Qemal Affagnon, in his contribution, was analyzing current changes in the landscape of media in the Republic of Benin, unveiling especially the role of religious media entrepreneurs who are often highly entangled with politics at the highest levels of the state.

Furthermore, several contributions were discussing the role of traditional authorities such as chiefs, kings or sultans appropriating media technologies and contents (Brisset, Fogue). Florence Brisset was describing the ways in which media entrepreneurs associated to the

kingdom of Buganda that again has become an important political player after 1993 in Uganda, are setting up their own radio station and promoting successful programs, including talk shows and revitalizing rhetoric competitions.

Furthermore, we were discussing the impact of new media formats and modes of mediation between media producers and audiences. Katrien Pype e.g. was investigating the daily work of new local TV stations and their journalists, producing local news contents, focusing on moral as well as developmental issues, in close interrelation with local dwellers in Kinshasa, DR Congo. Maurice N. Amutabi, in his contribution, analyzed popular media formats such as sitcoms and their main comedians, promoting, among others, a significant social critique in contemporary Kenya.

The workshop also made clear that many of the processes of media change cannot be analyzed without looking on the transnational connections and actors. In this regard, Seyram Avle was focusing on the role of returning IT specialists in Ghana as successful founders and media enterprises, whereas Simone Pfeifer was following a Senegalese singer and feminist activist, unfolding her diverse political and mediated activities between Europe and Senegal. Alternative voices, in the form of local radio stations in impoverished areas of Nairobi, Kenya, presented by Helene Mercier, or an underground radio station of oppositional parties in Zimbabwe, operating from South Africa, that was examined by Admire Mare.

Most contributions perfectly combined case studies with a more general structural discussion of processes of media change, often supported by audio-visual data. Furthermore, the schedule of the workshop included several excursions, visits and social events. On January 7th 2011, participants had the opportunity to visit the successful private radio station Radio Kledu, and engaged in intensive discussions with managers and the staff on technical aspects of the daily work. A further highlight was a meeting, on the evening of January 6th 2011, with M. Doumbia, program director and representative of the Friedrich- Ebert-Foundation in Mali that in the last two decades broadly accompanied the ongoing changes in the Malian media sector and generously supported many related activities of capacity building, research and training. One of the highlights of our workshop in Bamako was, on Saturday 8th 2011, a round table discussion with journalists of various Malian media structures and scholars about the often problematical conditions of successful media engagement in Mali today, held at the *Maison de la Presse* in Bamako. This event was largely covered by the state broadcaster ORTM, as it has been already the case with the opening ceremony of the workshop. Finally, social events included a farewell party dinner on the premises of Point Sud and a guided tour of the National Museum in Bamako.

4 Sustainability of the Event

One of the most important aspects and outcomes of the workshop was the creation of an informal network of scholars working on media entrepreneurs in Africa, primarily PhD students, substantiated by exchanges on social networks and a common website, hosted by the University of Cologne. Some of the members will congregate on other workshops, and a publication of the most valuable contributions is planned.

5 Participants

1. Qemal Affagnon M.A. Communication, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
2. Prof. Maurice Amutabi History, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya
3. Seyram Avle M.A. Communication, University of Michigan, USA
4. Florence Brisset M.A. Political Science, Université de Paris I, France
5. Fousseni Camara M.A. Anthropology, Point Sud, Mali
6. Dr. Birama Diakon Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
7. Bakary Doumbia M.A. Communication, Point Sud, Mali
8. Francis Fogue M.A. Communication, Université de Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
9. PD Dr. Tilo Grätz Anthropology, FU Berlin, Germany
10. Boubacar Guindo DEA Education, CNRST, Bamako, Mali
11. Boureima Kansaye M.A. Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
12. Karim Komah M.A. Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Mali
13. Mohamed Maiga DEA Education, CNRST, Bamako, Mali
14. Admire Mare M.A. Communication, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
15. Helene Mercier M.A. Journalism, Radio Canada Montreal, Canada
16. Francis Ng'atigwa M.A. African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany
17. Simone Pfeifer M.A. Anthropology, University of Cologne, Germany
18. Dr. Katrien Pype Anthropology, University of Birmingham, England
19. PD Dr. Ute Roeschenthaler Anthropology, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany
20. Dr. Oumar Sankaré Biology, ISFRA, Bamako, Mali
21. Prof. Dorothea Schulz Anthropology, University of Cologne, Germany
22. Prof. Abdoulaye Sounaye Anthropology, Northwestern University, USA
23. Amadou Waigalo M.A. Communication, Journal Les Echos, Bamako, Mali