



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2010-2011

**“Rester et Partir/Bleiben und Gehen/Staying and Leaving/Toso any ka taka
– Photography and the Representation of African Migration”**

8th - 15th February 2011

Report

1 Organisers

Dr. Sissy Helff (New English Literature), Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Dr. Marie-Hélène Gutberlet (Media Studies), Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

2 Themes and Objectives

The event “Rester et Partir/ Bleiben und Gehen/Staying and Leaving/Toso any ka taka - Photography and the Representation of African Migration” combined the workshop format with an exhibition and an interdisciplinary symposium. The aim of this event was to bring together a number of international scholar and practitioners in order to discuss the differing imaginaries of migration and movement and the connection between physical movement and the visualization of migration. Guiding questions were how migration is imagined in local and global contexts and if imaginaries changes when experienced and discussed in a local context. These issues were not only discussed in theoretical terms but also in relation to the concrete photographic work together with representatives from institutions, scientists, artists and photographers in Bamako. In the evenings during the symposium and workshop, films by Lisl Ponger, Idrissou Mora Kpai, Angelika Levi and Abderrahmane Sissako were shown. In these movies, photography plays a significant role. The films were shown in the street in front of Point Sud, where the participants of the symposium and everyday life around Point Sud came into direct contact with one another.

3 Methodology and Results

The shift from Frankfurt/Main to Bamako was based on the lively migration and photography scene in Bamako. But not solely. The shift was also of eminent academic significance since Western scholarship continues to influence the perceptions formed about a non-European reality. The shift to Bamako was meant to address the Eurocentric practice of looking outwards. As a positional shift, in the opposite direction to the migration vectors addressed during the symposium, the shift highlighted the conscious questioning and exploration of the guest and host status and its self-conception in scholarship and art. The Point Sud venue was, therefore, the ideal meeting place for a productive discussion not only of being a foreigner, being a guest, and mobility, but also of the limits of mobility, scholarship, media diffusion, and public profile. The symposium took place both at the Point Sud conference venue and the exhibition hall in the Musée de Bamako. The exhibition in the *Musée de Bamako* had been developed in cooperation with Amadou Sow, co-curator and member of the staff of the *Maison Africaine de la Photographie* and six additional photographers from Mali as well as four artists from Germany, Austria, and England.

The working language of the workshop was English and French. The event was accompanied by translators from Mali who assisted in overcoming the language barrier between franco-phone and anglophone participants. The following four issues were discussed in panels:

1. The images and ideas formed and formulated in the context of emigration and transit and whether or not mobility can be visualized in this context. We focused on what aspects remain invisible and what photographic and visual practices and markets are thematically connected to this issue. It was discussed to what extent for example Great Britain as well as other European countries (in their policy making) are still relying on a representation of African migrancy (directed towards Europe) mainly drawing from dominant imageries picturing Africa in light of a Conradian Heart of Darkness scenario (Heaven Crawley). Crawley therefore suggested that social scientists should pay more critical attention to the proliferation of Africa in dominant media coverage. She suggests that study of imageries and iconographies should become an integral part of the practiced methodology such as quantitative research.
2. How and to what extent do economic aspects of immigration enter into the picture? In the discussion with the Malian artists who all work as professional photographers it became clear that economic aspects of immigration are always present in pictures, although, and this is mainly true for Western onlookers, not always very obviously so. This becomes particularly clear if we consider wedding photography in which the family and the bride are often depicted while the bride groom remains absent. The absent husband, who as an economic migrant in a Western country, nonetheless equips his future wife and his family with the financial means to celebrate the wedding and the displayed opulence in the pictures embodies the absent bride groom to the 'knowing onlooker'.
3. Is African photography shifting from depiction to observation? And if so does this move signify a shift of emphasis toward the depiction of social conditions and 'analytical forms' through which the act of taking pictures and the role of the photographer are reflected in the image? Should we, in consequence, understand photographic visibility i.e. representation of migration as a concrete reproduction of reality (documenting routes and living conditions) or rather as recourse to mental images which represent a global cultural memory which is constantly reorganising itself. While images of migration are often directly connected to the reproduction of reality, the mediated reality as we find it in contemporary Malian and West African photography and visual art often differs a great deal from the expectations of 'Western onlookers'. While there are certainly links between how African migration is represented in West Africa and how it is portrayed in the more globalised European photography and visual art, there are also necessary visual fractures which emphasise the visual stripe lines along which cultural memory is constantly reorganising itself.

Film program at Point Sud:

1. Heremakono by Abderrahmane Sissako, Mauritanie/Mauritania 2002, 95'
2. Absent Present by Angelika Levi, D 2009, 85'
3. Programme of Short Films: Toussaint Dabélé, Mamari Diallo, Mohamed Konaté, Brigitta Kuster & Moise Merlin Mabouna Tiécoura N'Daou Lisl Ponger
4. Les Naufragés de la Méditerranée by Tiécoura N'Daou, Mali 2008, 4'10"
5. Sahara Chronicle, a Collection of Videos on Mobility and the Politics of Containment in the Sahara by Ursula Biemann, CH 2006-2009, 78'
6. Arlit, deuxième Paris by Idrissou Mora-Kpai, F/Benin 2005, 78'

4 Sustainability of the Event

Sustainable research is one of our highest priorities, which is why we invited established European and African academics as well as early career researchers (including students) to take part in the symposium. The transdisciplinary character of the conference will be documented in the anthology *Rester et Partir/Bleiben und Gehen/Staying and Leaving/Toso any ka taka – Photography and the representation of African migration* (AT) transcript Verlag, forthcoming, 2012 as well as on our website <http://www.migrationandmedia.com> through which we hope to create a platform connecting young scholars with leading international researchers while promoting transdisciplinary research on Africa in the world of art in particular and in academics in general.

We have also established several partnerships with other cultural institutions in Bamako, such as the *Conservatoire Balla Fasséké Kouyaté* (video screenings followed by discussion) and the MAP.

5 Participants

1. Prof. Habib Ballo Conservatoire Balla Faséké Kouyaté, Bamako, Mali
2. Fousseni Camara M.A. Anthropology, Point Sud, Mali
3. Dr. Djibril Cissé Literature, École Normale Supérieure, Mali
4. Prof. Heaven Crawley Sociology/Migration, Swansea University, Wales
5. Dr. Birama Diakon Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
6. Fatoumata Diabaté Photographer, Bamako, Mali
7. Sokona Diabaté Photographer, Bamako, Mali
8. Emanuel Bakary Daou Photographer, Bamako, Mali
9. Alima Diop Photographer, Bamako, Mali
10. Melanie Gärtner M.A. Anthropology, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany
11. Raul Gschrey (Student) English Studies, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany
12. Prof. Alan Grossman Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland
13. Bouréma Kanssaye M.A. Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
14. Dr. Brehima Kassibo Sociology, CNRST Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
15. Roshini Kempadoo Artist, London, United Kingdom
16. Mamadi Koité Photographer, Kayes, Bamako, Mali
17. Dr. Moussa Konaté Sociology, Director of Maison Africaine de la Photographie (MAP), Bamako, Mali
18. Prof. Barbara Korte Cultural and Literature Studies, Director of the English Seminar, University of Freiburg, Germany
19. Prof. Christian Kravagna Art History, Postcolonial Studies, Critic and Curator, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Austria
20. Brigitta Kuster Artist, Berlin, Germany
21. Prof. Bärbel Küster Art History, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
22. Dr. Jessica Nitsche Media Studies, University of Düsseldorf, Germany
23. Moise Merlin Mabouna Artist, Berlin, Germany
24. Bounama Magassa Photographer, Bamako, Mali
25. Elke aus dem Moore Director of the Art Department, ifa, Stuttgart, Germany
26. Ulrike Pirker M.A. Cultural and Literature Studies, University of Freiburg, Germany
27. Lisl Ponger Artist, Vienna, Austria
28. PD Dr. Ute Rösenthaler Anthropology, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany
29. Christoph Singer M.A. English Literature, University of Paderborn, Germany
30. Cara Snyman Programme Director for Art, Goethe-Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa
31. Amadou Sow Photographer, Bamako, Mali
32. Daniel Thorpe (Student) Anthropology, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany
33. Souleymane Traoré DEA Anthropology, CNRST, Point Sud, Bamako, Mali
34. Miriam Würz M.A. Film- and Media Studies, Frankfurt/Main, Germany