



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2010-2011

“Spaces in Movement: New Perspectives on Migration in African Settings”

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Report

1 Organisers

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2 Themes and Objectives

This workshop “Spaces in Movement: New Perspectives in African Settings,” which took place in Bamako, 20-22 January 2011, is an outcome of the ongoing activities of the Network “Southern Spaces in Movement, SSIM.” The workshop was sponsored by the German Research Foundation, DFG, with the institutional support of the Bamako based Center for Research on Local Knowledge, Point Sud. It brought together a group of thirty-five scholars who work on migration issues across the African continent. The purpose of the three-day event was to facilitate discussion on academic research in African settings between scholars from both the Southern and the Northern hemispheres.

Within the activities of SSIM, this workshop was a continuation of discussion on the state of migration within Africa, which was initiated by a conference in São Paulo, Brazil in 2008 that focused on the patterns of migration in African settings with special emphasis on research methodologies and approaches. During the Bamako workshop, presentations and discussions centered, in particular, around the state of migration studies at large and new directions in research in particular. Through the presentation of various research papers the workshop assessed research trends, questions and challenges to the study of migration issues in African settings. Through a critical dialogue between researchers from both the Southern and the Northern hemispheres, this workshop aimed at tracing the various changes, challenges and shifts in intellectual paradigms, and transformations in local contexts that have affected the growing field of migration research in Africa.

More specifically, the workshop aimed at discussing new southern approaches to migration studies with reference to Africa. It assumed that the dominant approaches to migration in Africa, in particular, and in the Global South, in general, had arguably failed to provide accounts of migration. This failure was particularly evident in the extent to which social change and relations in Africa could be accounted for. The organizers of the workshop – Georg Klute, Mustafa Abdalla, Knut Graw and Elísio Macamo (with the active and fundamental support of Denise Barros from Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil) – took the view that migration should not only be understood as the movement of people across space, but also as the movement of spaces themselves, i.e. processes of transformation or the dynamics affecting social relations, ideas, knowledge, and vocabularies in local and trans-local settings worldwide. In this sense, they spoke of “spaces in movement” to draw attention to the relocation of social relationships, life-worlds and worldviews that take place when people move across

space. The objective was to develop new ways of understanding and thinking about migration that placed it firmly in the social contexts which made it possible, constrained it or were transformed by it. The focus was on voluntary migration, though, of course, the distinction between forced and voluntary might empirically be in the eye of the beholder.

3 Methodology and Results

The workshop brought together scholars from Africa, Europe, North and South America, and the Middle East with a high participation from Malian researchers (see attached list of participants) with a multi-disciplinary background encompassing sociology, anthropology, social geography, history, mass media and religious studies. Some of the participants had a background in civil society organizations. In providing an account of the workshop this report focuses on the challenges, which it faced, especially as far as (a) communication across different languages (b) communication across disciplines and (c) communication to address the main theoretical and analytical issues of the conference were concerned.

(a) Communication across different languages

Academic communication in Africa poses a challenge given the fact that scholars usually only communicate in their own language (French, English, Portuguese or Arabic), and rarely reach across the language barrier to acquaint themselves with the intellectual production taking place elsewhere. In fact, often scholars only become aware of what is being produced by colleagues and peers on the African continent through accounts provided by European scholars who, generally speaking, take a much broader view. The language issue posed a major challenge to the success of our workshop, for it was thought and designed by colleagues steeped in different language traditions and with a history of research collaboration across the African language divide. At the time of planning of the conference there were three languages at the centre, namely English, French and Portuguese. At the conference a fourth language was added, namely Arabic.

Since it would have been too costly to provide professional translation services to the workshop, a makeshift solution was found. It consisted basically in defining English and French as the main languages of the workshop, i.e. asking those giving papers to do so in either of these two languages. In addition to this colleagues with a good command of both languages were asked to provide rich summaries of the presentations in the other language. The workshop was fortunate enough to have a considerable number of colleagues who were in a position to do this. For the minority languages, i.e. Portuguese and Arabic fuller consecutive translations were provided followed by rich summaries in either English or French. Generally speaking, this arrangement worked quite well as witnessed by the rich discussions which took place following the presentations. While the context of language plurality does constitute a major challenge to efficient academic discussion, we feel that it is important to encourage such contexts. It is legitimate to expect scholars to have a good command of at least one foreign language, but even more important than this is scholarly communication and debate which, in the current African context, is still dominated by a deficit in language proficiency. Insisting with language proficiency may be, at

this stage, at the expense of scholarly communication which seems to us to be of capital important now.

(b) Communication across disciplines

The second challenge that we faced in this workshop relates to the diversity of disciplines from which participants came. Interdisciplinarity is an important attitude in the current academic discussion, particularly in the context of African studies. Most social science disciplines, i.e. sociology, anthropology and social geography, use theoretical and analytical vocabularies that make communication among them easy. In this respect, the workshop did not pose a particular challenge. In addition to these core social science disciplines there were also historians, media specialists, historians of religion and civil society representatives. While there is a general level of discussion that makes it possible to achieve levels of intelligibility that do not sacrifice the conceptual precision required within particular disciplines, it seemed important to us to structure our discussions in ways that ensured broad participation in spite of the demands on precision made by disciplines. We addressed this particular challenge by structuring the day in progressive ways. In other words, we always started the day with a keynote address that not only set out the issues for the day (see attached programme), but also sought to introduce the relevant concepts in ways that could enable intelligibility across disciplines and thought traditions. Judging from the quality of the ensuing discussions, we believe that we were able to address the challenge in an effective manner and, thus, create the conditions for the achievement of some of the central objectives of the workshop.

(c) Theoretical and analytical communication

A key objective of the workshop was to explore new ways of studying migration with a focus on southern research priorities. We achieved this in two ways. The first was the articulation of movement across spaces with the social transformation that migration entails to the local settings from which migrants come. We are happy to note that several papers addressed this concern quite forcefully, bringing into relief the extent to which migration is embedded in a larger movement of space itself, i.e. the transformation of villages, local economies, neighborhoods and the public spheres to which migrants claim affective allegiance. There was a strong sense in which migration emerged in the debates at the workshop not simply as a response to economic hardships, political instability and cultural expectations, but rather as an expression of life-worlds that are alive and expanding their territorial and normative boundaries as they are engulfed by processes of social change.

The second was the discussion of the relationship between African villages and the horizons brought into view by migration. In the workshop we resisted the temptation to see migration fundamentally as a problem, which corresponds to a policy perspective that has done a lot to distort research priorities in this regard. The workshop included creative moments with documentary films and civil society initiatives that brought home the importance of embedding migration in the context of everyday life and seeing it as an affirmation thereof. It became clear that migrants are more than simply a problem. In fact, they

are subjects of their own lives and as such extremely relevant to calibrating our analytical tools to the creative potential revealed by Africans in their everyday life.

4 Sustainability of the Event

We believe that the workshop achieved its main goals of addressing the analytical and theoretical challenges posed by the notion of migration. Our discussions focused a lot on the search for new perspectives and, in this sense, helped us articulate migration with wider processes of social analysis in Africa. The main practical outcomes of the workshop are (a) a commitment to closer collaboration and (b) the publication of the proceedings in a peer-reviewed journal. As far as the first outcome is concerned, a follow-up meeting, which was originally scheduled to take place at the end of May 2011 in Bayreuth, will now take place in September with the participation of the main applicants and a Brazilian colleague, Denise Barros. The main purpose of the meeting will be to discuss ways of pursuing the issues in a more systematic way through a common research project. As for the second outcome, contacts have been established with *Caderno de Estudos Africanos* (a peer-reviewed journal published by the Centre for African Studies in Lisbon) for the publication of selected papers in a special issue to be edited by Mustafa Abdalla and Elísio Macamo. This publication is scheduled for 2012. Work is also underway to publish a volume with the proceedings of the conference.

5 Participants

1. Mustafa Abdalla M.A. Anthropology, FU Berlin, Germany
2. Mahfouz Adnane M.A. History, Al-Azhar University, Egypt
3. Dr. Marina Berthet Anthropology, University Federal de Juiz de Flora, Brazil
4. Fousseni Camara M.A. Anthropology, Point Sud, Mali
5. Dr. Bakary Camara Law, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
6. Dr. Clara Carvalho Sociology, University of Lisbon, Portugal
7. Pierre Cissé M.A. Demography, ISFRA Bamako, Mali
8. Dr. Denise Dias Barros Anthropology, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil
9. Dr. Birama Diakon Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
10. Dialla Diallo DEA ISH, Université de Bamako, Mali
11. Dr. Denis Dougnon Linguistics, Université de Bamako, Mali
12. Dr. Isaie Dougnon Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Mali
13. Bakary Doumbia M.A. Communication, Point Sud, Mali
14. Dr. Augustin Emame Law, Université de Nantes, France
15. Dr. Pierre Fadhibo History, Université de Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
16. Dr. Knut Graw Anthropology, Leuven University, Belgium
17. Roland Huguenin M.A. Mass Media, PANOS, Paris, France
18. Almarzok Ibrahim M.A. Law, Université de Bamako, Mali
19. Gunvor Jonsson M.A. Anthropology, University of Oxford, England
20. Senni Jyrkiäinen M.A. Anthropology, University of Helsinki, Finland
21. Mady Kante M.A. Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt
22. Bourema Kansaye M.A. Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
23. Dr. Brehima Kassibo Sociology, CNRST Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
24. Dr. Naffet Keita Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
25. Prof. Georg Klute Anthropology, University of Bayreuth, Germany
26. Begona Lopez M.A. Political Science, Liga Espanola de la Educacion y la Cultura Popular, Spain
27. Prof. Elisio Macamo Sociology, University of Basle, Switzerland
28. Dr. Hamidou Magassa Economics, SERN Bamako, Mali
29. Dr. Alkassoum Maiga Sociology, Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
30. Dr. Ismael Montana History, Northern Illinois University, USA
31. Dr. Pierre Mounkoro Psychiatry, CRMT Bandiagara, Mali
32. Dr. Hanan Sabea Anthropology, American University Cairo, Egypt
33. Abdoul Savadogo M.A. Anthropology, Burkina Faso
34. Mukhtar Shehata BA Writer, Cairo, Egypt
35. Dr. Moussa Sissoko Geography, Point Sud, Mali
36. Dr. Carlos Subuhana Anthropology, Faculdade de Campinas, Brazil
37. Almamy Sylla M.A. Anthropology, Point Sud, Mali
38. Brehima Touré M.A. Anthropology, Point Sud, Mali
39. Magnus Treiber M.A. Anthropology, University of Bayreuth, Germany
40. Christian Ungruhe, M.A. Anthropology, University of Bayreuth, Germany