



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2012-2013

**“The Critical Study of Religious Diversity in Africa – Empirical and
Theoretical Perspectives”**

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) – 26th February/3rd of March 2013

Report

1 Organisers

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2 Themes and Objectives

The long term objective of our workshops is to establish a network for the critical study of religions in Africa among young African and Non-African scholars. As part of that endeavor we applied for two consecutive workshops. To offer the junior scholars a forum we intend to publish the results of their research. Thus, the follow-up workshop continued the work we started in our first workshop in Bamako 2012 on “theories and methods for the study of religious diversity in Africa”. In this second workshop our focus was on the results of the empirical studies of the participants: We discussed their handling of the empirical data, and worked with the conveners and five additional post-doc / senior researchers towards a joint publication on religious diversity in Africa.

This publication seeks to critically appraise the state of studies of religious diversity in Africa and to broaden this field of study. We want to assemble papers that try to critically scrutinize existing concepts of religious diversity / religious encounters on the basis of empirical data and that propose innovative conceptual approaches to the field. In order to approach the multifaceted nature of encounters between different religious traditions in Africa we propose to pluralize our conceptual frames for studying religious diversity: As religious encounters take various forms and are studied in different dimensions of social life (individual, organizational etc.), a combination of different models of religious interaction seems to be better capable to accommodate the complexity of religious encounters than a single one. A plurality of conceptual frames – as for example provided by the concepts of market, syncretism, conflict/resistance, cooperation, appropriation, or translation – helps us to approach actors’ perspectives and strategies in diverse contexts, without leveling differences to an abstract explanatory model and without sticking to the descriptive level only.

Thus, the idea of the publication is to assemble empirical data, to test the overlaps and possible incompatibilities of different theoretical perspectives on an empirical basis, and to explore the options for a combination of these theoretical perspectives. A central objective of the workshop was to critically discuss and work on the draft chapters with this approach in mind.

3 Methodology and Results

The aim of a joint publication in mind, the main objective of this years’ workshop was the critical appraisal of possible contributions to this volume and a discussion of its theoretical framework. To work on that objective we choose eleven papers submitted (in English or French) by PhD students after a call for papers: Nine of the PhD students invited to the Ouagadougou workshop had already participated in the first workshop in Bamako in 2012, two from Burkina Faso joined us only this year. However, all these students did empirical and / or historical research in the field of religious diversity in Africa in 2012. In addition to this group of junior researchers five post-doc / senior researchers (R. Ben Amara, P. Gifford, K. Langewiesche, E. Faki Mwinyihaji and B. Soares) were invited to discuss the students’ essays and to provide input on new empirical and theoretical developments in the field of religious diversity.

As workshop conveners we assigned to each paper a discussant who prepared comments and suggestions for improvement of the essays. The junior researchers on their part prepared a short presentation of their own paper and commentaries on the others.

On the basis of the positive feed-back we experienced during the workshop in Bamako in 2012 we decided to follow the same workshop format in Ouagadougou: Presentations by invited speakers (a) alternated with working group sessions (b), and plenary sessions to discuss the results of the working groups (c), and finally excursions (d).

a) Presentations by invited speakers

After the welcome address of Point Sud director Moussa Sissoko the workshop started with a presentation of **François Paul Ramde**, a representative of the NGO Union fraternelle des croyants de Dori (UFC). Mr. Ramde gave an introduction into the history, structure and objectives of this NGO working in the field of interreligious dialogue and elaborated on the context of religious plurality in Burkina Faso. Thus, his presentation provided us with basic information about the national setting and made a first step to relate the subject of our international workshop to its venue.

The next day **Paul Gifford** gave his keynote speech on “Unity and Diversity within African Pentecostalism” and made us think about diversity even within homogenizing categories one tends to take for granted (as for example Pentecostalism). Referring to his research he compared two Pentecostal churches and thus inspired a discussion on the possibilities and limits of comparison as well as on the similarity-to-difference-ratio being at the basis on every discussion of diversity. On the third day **Ramzi ben Amara** presented first results of an ongoing research project on Muslim activists in Nigeria, introducing a biographical approach to grasp the diverse forms of religious experience and activities during an individual life. In the last presentation **Esha Faki Mwinyihaji** talked about the politics of recognition in the pluralistic state of Kenya and picked up the issue of competition and cooperation among Kenyan Muslims leaders and their relation to the government.

b) Working group sessions

Due to our experience of last year’s workshop in Bamako, we had scheduled ample time for these sessions (90 min). In the course of every workshop day we had up to two meetings of working groups to discuss the papers. To increase efficiency we had formed an Anglophone and a Francophone group of PhD students with four post-doc discussants each. Concise presentations of the papers were followed by questions and comments of the discussants. After a follow-up statement of the presenter, the floor was open to all group members.

c) Plenaries

To overcome the linguistic divide the plenary sessions at the end of each day aimed at informing the rest of the group on discussions conducted and problems addressed by the other workgroup. The plenary sessions showed that the appraisals of the essays often lead to similar recommendations: to be more precise and structured in the presentation of research results and not to impose a theoretical framework at the expense of empirical data, but rather to develop theoretical interpretations grounded in field material. With the publication project in mind it turned out that a pluralisation of approaches and perspectives will probably be achieved through the publication as a whole but not necessarily in every single paper.

During the plenaries we also prepared and discussed the excursions: i.e. the participants developed interview questions, gathered information and compared for example last years’ experiences at a *zīkr* with those of 2013.

d) Excursions

Thanks to the support and efforts of our guests K. Langewiesche and B. Soares this year's excursion program included visits to the Ahmadiyya Center and to a *zikir* of a branch of the Tidjaniyya Sufi-brotherhood in Ouagadougou. The representatives of the Ahmadiyya in Burkina Faso welcomed the group, showed us the center (including a Mosque, a health center and a soap production facility) and gave us plenty of time to ask questions, such as those referring to diversity within Islam and to the situation of religious plurality, cooperation and conflict in Burkina Faso. The visit to the Tidjaniyya *zawiya* was an excellent exercise in comparison as most of the participants had visited a *zikir* in the context of last year's workshop in Bamako. Another excursion brought us to *Christoph Schlingensief's Operndorf Afrika*, the first African opera village. This almost mythical place offered deep insights into Schlingensief's perception of colonialism, African myths and religious approaches, as it is also manifested in his production of Wagner's Parsifal in Bayreuth.

Results: Network and publication

Taken as a whole, our concept of two workshops in a one-year-interval worked out extremely well. After the first workshop with a special focus on methods and theories in 2012 the junior scholars conducted their empirical research. Thus, it made perfect sense to discuss the problems of handling empirical data in written texts in the follow-up workshop in 2013. This year's essays built explicitly on texts and discussions of the first workshop and tried to link the work with empirical data to our intensive discussion on theory and methodology. Moreover, during the 12 months between the workshops, junior and senior scholars continued interacting with each other and exchanged information on conferences, workshops and publications related to the topics of religious diversity. In addition to that, the junior scholars started to establish a regular exchange on the progress of their research. Our aim to initiate a network for the critical study of religions in Africa among young African and Non-African scholars is met at any rate.

The work on the second objective – the publication – continues. After having discussed among the senior participants the problems and possibilities of publishing the essays of the PhD students we opted for working on a joint publication. June 30th is the deadline for the reworked chapter manuscripts.

However, it is already clear that the bilingualism of the papers poses a serious problem as publishers do prefer monolingual publications. Thanks to our highly engaged and motivated bilingual guests it was possible to overcome the language barrier during the workshops. Yet to publish a volume with a well-established international publisher makes translations of some essays necessary (probably the French essays have to be translated into English) and thus funding for a professional translator is urgently needed.

We fully support the bilingual approach of Point Sud but concerning publications we suggest Point Sud to include additional funding possibilities for translations and publications in their program.

4 Sustainability of the Event

As was mentioned above our network for the critical study of religious diversity in Africa is currently engaged in the production of a joint publication. Deadline for the individual chapters is June 30th, 2013. We expect to submit the manuscript to the publisher within this year.

Magnus Echter, Franz Kogelmann, Eva Spies (eds.) *Critical investigations of religious diversity in Africa*

Table of content (preliminary):

Introduction

Echter, Magnus/Kogelmann, Franz/Spies, Eva: Religious Diversity

Multiple Offers and (Religious) Identities

1. Baiyewu, Timothy: Diversity and the religious market. The responsiveness of the Church of the Lord Aladura in Nigeria
2. Gez, Yonatan: Institutional confidence, alleged religious misconducts and religious behavior in Nairobi
3. Debele, Serawit: Competition for legitimacy in the making of Oromo national identity: Oromo Evangelical Churches and Waaqqeffana
4. Olsson, Hans: Transforming or restoring a nation? Religious narratives of belonging in the wake of Zanzibari ethno-nationalism

Monotheistic Religions and “Others”

5. Michael Lambek: Immanent Worlds and Transcendent Religions: Reflections on the Relations between the Abrahamic Traditions and their 'Others' in Africa
6. Nrenzah, Genevieve: Kofi oo Kofi: Modernity, religious diversity and the construction of neo-indigenous religions in Ghana
7. Ravonison Andrianasolo, Baholy Malala: La diversité religieuse à Mitsinjo / Madagascar: Une réalité tangible mais mouvante (will be translated into English)
8. Kopecka, Ziva: Bhakti, shakti and the beyonds of ritual: exploring the field of contemporary South African Hindu practice
9. Diop, Babacar: Essai d'analyse de l'interrelation entre l'islam confrérique et des religions traditionnelles africaines dans l'espace thérapeutique au Sénégal (will be translated into English)

Islam in Dialogue

10. Ramzi Ben Amara: Why Study Islam in Nigeria?
11. Esha Faki M.: Researching Islam in East Kenya
12. Kaboré, Koudbi: Le rôle et la place des musulmans dans l'expression du dialogue islamo-chrétien à Dori (will be translated into English)
13. Yacouba Ouédraogo: L'islam modéré dans la diversité religieuse au Burkina : compromis et enjeux
14. Binaté, Issouf: Diversité religieuse et aide au développement en Afrique : La contribution des ONG confessionnelles islamiques à la reconstruction en Côte d'Ivoire (will be translated into English)

5 Participants

Conveners

1. Magnus Echtler (PhD), Religious Studies Bayreuth University, Germany
2. Franz Kogelmann (PhD), Islamic Studies Bayreuth University, Germany
3. Eva Spies (PhD), Social Anthropology Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Germany

Senior scholars

4. Ramzi Ben Amara (PhD), Islamic Studies University of Cape Town, South Africa
5. Esha Faki Mwinyihaji (PhD), Islamic Studies Maseno University, Kenya
6. Paul Gifford (PhD), Study of Religions SOAS, London
7. Katrin Langewiesche (PhD), Social Anthropology EHESS Marseille and Mainz University, Germany
8. Benjamin Soares (PhD), Social Anthropology Afrika-Studie Centrum Leiden, Netherlands

Junior Scholars

9. Baholy Ravonison Andrianasolo (Social Anthropology), Université d'Antananarivo, Madagascar
10. Timothy Baiyewu (Religious Studies), Bayreuth University, Germany
11. Issouf Binate (PhD, History), Université Félix Houphouët Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
12. Serawit Debele (Religious Studies), Bayreuth University, Germany
13. Babacar Diop (Social Anthropology) Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis de Senegal
14. Yonathan Gez (Social Anthropologie), IHEID, Université de Genève, Switzerland
15. Koudbi Desiré Kaboré (African History) Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
16. Ziva Kopecka (Religious Studies), Bayreuth University, Germany
17. Genevieve Nrenzah (Religious Studies), Bayreuth University, Germany
18. Hans Olsson (Theology and Religious Studies), Lund University, Sweden
19. Yacouba Ouédraogo (History) Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso