



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2012-2013

“How does Transnational Mobility Transform Cultural Production? Informality and Remediation in African Popular Cultures”

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) – 4th/10th of January 2013

Report

1 Organisers

PD Dr. Ute Rösenthaler (Anthropology), Goethe-Universität

Dr. Ibrahima Wane (African Oral Literature), Université de Dakar

Dr. Patrick Oloko (English and African Literature), University of Lagos

Alessandro Jedlowski, PhD-candidate (African Studies), University of Naples

2 Themes and Objectives

In the past two decades the introduction of digital technologies and the acceleration of transnational fluxes of people and objects have had an important role in generating new syncretic forms of popular culture. These forms are transnational and “creole” (cf. Hannerz, 1987, “The World in creolization.” *Africa* No. 57.4) both in their genealogy and in their circulation. As Karin Barber argues in her seminal article on popular culture in Africa, “modern popular arts have the capacity to transcend geographical, ethnic, and even national boundaries. Located in the cities, the centres both of technological change and of the rapidly-growing twentieth century transport networks, they are endowed with an unprecedented mobility” (“Popular Arts in Africa.” *African Studies Review* No. 30(3). 1987: 15). This workshop thus aimed to investigate how this mobility works in the age of digital technologies, what are the principles (if any) that drive it, and what are the results that this mobility generates.

The workshop intended to approach these issues by analyzing concrete examples of cultural production, circulation and consumption. The main (but not exclusive) focus was on popular music and on the different media products that are related to it (audio cassettes, VCDs, DVDs, radio and television programs, videoclips, fanzine magazines, street posters, popular forms of advertising, concerts). Popular music is in fact a very malleable cultural product, which the introduction of new recording technologies has made particularly inexpensive to produce and easy to circulate. An increasing number of youth create their own products, make their own video clips, and market their own songs, taking advantage of the new possibilities introduced by digital technologies and internet. These products freely mix together local and transnational cultural influences, winking at both, for instance, the griot tradition and the hip hop culture. All these aspects make popular music the ideal cultural item to look at when focusing on informality and remediation.

3 Methodology and Results

In the opinion of the organizers and participants, the workshop achieved its main goals: it facilitated the development of a wide and highly international research network on the workshop’s topic, it encouraged and created contacts with local Burkinabe professionals working in the field of popular culture production, and it put together a wide range of research materials which will result in a publication and which will ground future researches on the topic.

(a) General organization

Because of the political crisis affecting Mali, the workshop had to be moved from Bamako to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Before describing the workshop's activities in detail, it is important to underline that, despite this challenging situation, Point Sud managed to ensure a smooth organization. The displacement of the workshop became an opportunity for the participants to discover a country they had not yet been to, and for Point Sud to demonstrate that its pan-African philosophy is not a remote objective but an attainable reality.

(b) Participants

Twenty-four international scholars took part in the workshop: Karin Barber, Mamadou Diawara, Matthias Krings, Abdoulaye Niang, Oyeniya Okunoye, Ute Röschenhaler, Patrick Oloko, Alessandro Jedlowski, Ibrahima Wane, Anne Schumann, Leon Tsambu, Shani Omari, Jenny Fatou Mbaye, Amy Niang, Afu Isaiah Kunock, Nhamo Mhiripiri, Chinwe Okwuonu, David Kerr, Ann Overbergh, Tom Simmert, Cole Paulson, Katrien Pype, Duncan Omanga, Charles Sidibé (a doctoral student from the university of Ouagadougou), and occasionally Prof. Ludovic Kibora of the University of Ouagadougou as well as four burkinabé local experts in popular culture: Olivier Zongo, Koala Oumarou, Yaya Halla, Ibrahima Ouedraogo, and two Point Sud representatives (Moussa Sissoko and his assistant Idrissa [...]). The participants were drawn from eighteen universities (evenly divided into nine in Europe and nine in Africa), and sixteen different countries (Nigeria, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, United Kingdom, United States of America). The workshop was thus a highly international gathering, which encouraged and promoted international dialogue and collaboration among scholars coming from Africa and Europe. The workshop has either fostered or initiated collaborations that cut across the Anglophone/Francophone linguistic and cultural divide inherited from European colonialism. To bridge the language gap, the workshop organizers encouraged the use of both English and French languages, and look forward to publishing the workshop's outcomes in bilingual journals.

(c) Research presentations

The first three days of the workshop were dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the participants' researches. The presentations' titles were the following:

- 1) Ann Schumann: "*Zouglou* Digital, *Zouglou* Live: Ivoirian Popular Music, Digital Media and New Performance Cultures"
- 2) Shani Omari: "Tanzania's Popular Music under Transformation: From Breakdancing to *Kushakeshake* and *Kiduku* in Hip hop music"
- 3) David Kerr: "Underground" rap performance, informality and cultural production in Dar es Salaam"
- 4) Jenny Fatou Mbaye: "Hip Hop Flows and Solidarities in West African Musical Borderlands"
- 5) Amy Niang: "Windows to the World: Virtual Styling and Cultural Re-writing"
- 6) Chinwe Okwuonu: "Transnational collaboration in music video production: An examination of the music video of PSquare and D'Banji"

- 7) Duncan Omanga: ‘Peeling Back the Mask’: Remediation and Remix of Kenya’s News into Popular Music”
- 8) Katrien Pype: “Nostalgia and Urban Critique in Kinshasa’s TV music shows”
- 9) Nhamo Mhiripi: “Zimbabwe’s Urban Grooves Artists, Media generated popularity and the Financial Success”
- 10) Leon Tsambu : “Produits musicaux audiovisuels congolais comme melting-pot culturel ‘fabriqué’ en Europe”
- 11) Tom Simmert: “South African house music ad transnational popular culture”
- 12) Ann Overbergh: “Urbanites. Young, tech-savvy and ‘colorblind’ in a transforming city”
- 13) Afu Isaiah Kunock: “Televangelism and medical care: Case study of Moghomo in North West region of Cameroon”
- 14) Cole Paulson: “Nollywood and the Informality Paradox: Model or Martyr for Africa’s New Digital Media?”

Each presentation was followed by 25 minutes of discussion, aimed at giving the presenter a feedback about his/her work and linking it to the workshop’s topic. In this sense, the presence of five senior scholars was particularly important. They in fact provided insights that helped the junior scholars strengthening their research hypothesis and offered important theoretical and methodological input for the development of each participant’s research.

The senior scholars also gave inspiring keynotes which illuminated the broad theme of the workshop and streamlined it through detailed theoretical and practical approaches. The keynote’s titles were:

- 1) Mamadou Diawara: “Celebrating the Migrant: The Genealogy of Music making in Africa”;
- 2) Karin Barber: “The Rags of the Elders: History and the constitution of cultural forms”;
- 3) Abdoulaye Niang: “Hip Hop and Islam in Senegal: Between Classical Preaching and ‘Cultural readjustments’”;
- 4) Matthias Krings: “Making pictures talk: video narration as remediation”;
- 5) Oyeniyi Okunoye: “From Russian public square to Bodilisha poetry X-change: Transnationalism and remediation in the constitution of contemporary African traditions of poetry performance”.

d) Fieldwork excursions

The second part of the workshop, from the fourth to the sixth day, was dedicated to field excursions in the city of Ouagadougou. The objective of this activity was to challenge the theoretical concepts discussed during the previous days through encounter with the reality of the field. The participants were divided into four groups, each supervised by one of the organizers and one senior scholar, and led by one of the local experts. After two days of fieldwork excursions, each group presented a short summary of its research findings and subsequently discussed them in relation to the overriding theme of the workshop and individual research projects. The activities of the four groups can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Group I: On the first day, members went to visit the main office of the Youth Magazine “L’Oil des Jeunes”, where they interviewed the magazine’s director, discussed with the magazine’s employees, and observed the magazine’s redaction at work. The second day, they

met two local rap music bands (Smockey, at Studio Abazon, and Konkrete 53) and a group of spoken-word-artists (so-called slammers), and interviewed them, asking questions about their production and marketing strategies, the content of their songs and poems, and their relation with the local social and political environment.

(2) Group II: on the first day, members met with several local rap music bands (Faso Kombat, Doumba Kultur, and Duni Yaam) and discussed with them issues related to music production and distribution, and to censorship and political activism among musicians. The second day, they went to CENASA, a state-owned recording studio and performance venue, and to the national television and radio station RTB. Here they had interviews with the head of the station and the editor-in-chief of the TV editorial board about the station's internal organization and infrastructures, the programming schedule and rationale, and the political and institutional framework regulating television and radio broadcasting in the country.

(3) Group III: on the first day, members went to the Burkinabe radio station Ouaga FM and had interviews with Mr Gnehioun Zacharia, director of Ouaga FM, and Mr. Mohammed Touré, programmer at Ouaga FM, about the radio's contents and economic structure, and about the institutional framework within which the radio operates. The second day, they went to visit an independent recording studio based in Ouagadougou, Seydoni, and had interviews with Mr Seydou Richard Traoré, director of Seydoni, and Mr Cyril [...], Sound Engineer at Seydoni, about the history of the studio, its commercial and economic strategy and its production methods.

(4) Group IV: on the first day, members went to the concert venue and recording studio Reemdogo, which is funded by the city of Ouagadougou in cooperation with their French partner town Grenoble. Then the group went to visit the central market of Ouagadougou, Roodwoko, where it had the opportunity to observe music and video distribution and had interviews with local vendors of digital products. The second day, it went to the private television station BF1TV, visited the recording studios and was shown the television's technical equipment. Then, it conducted interviews with a number of professionals about the television's internal organization, its economic structure and program, and about issues concerning copyright and censorship. At the end of the interview session, a number of the group members were invited to participate to the recording of a TV program (Faso Reggae) during which they were asked to present Point Sud activities, and the scope and objectives of the workshop.

4 Sustainability of the Event

The seventh day served to condense and summarize the conference results and decided on future activities. The organizers are working on the publication of two journal issues as a result of the workshop. The participants' papers will be grouped around two subthemes to be published into two separate issues, each of them edited by two of the workshop's organizers. One of the two journals contacted for publication will be a bilingual journal, accepting papers in English and French. The participants and the organizers agreed on a number of journals, which will be contacted in the coming months to explore publication possibilities. The list

includes: Africa, the Journal of African Media Studies, The Journal of African Cultural Studies, the Canadian Journal of African Studies (bilingual), the Cahiers d'études africains (bilingual), Critical Arts.

Participants and organizers also agreed on the need to consolidate and further enlarge the research network that resulted from this workshop. In this sense, a dropbox folder and a mailing list were created in order to share research materials and useful information among the participants, and a number of tentative ideas about future opportunities for collaboration were explored. These include organizing joint panels in international conferences of African and media studies and exploring funding possibilities to organize further workshops of this kind in Africa and in Europe.

5 Participants

1. Prof. Karin Barber Anthropology, University of Birmingham, UK
2. Prof. Mamadou Diawara Anthropology, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany
3. David Kerr, M.A. Anthropology, University of Birmingham, UK
4. Prof. Matthias Krings Anthropology, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany
5. Afu Isaiah Kunock, M.A. Anthropology, University of Yaoundé I, Cameroun
6. Dr. Jenny Fatou Mbaye African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town, South Africa
7. Dr. Nhamo Mhiripiri Media and Society Studies, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
8. Prof. Abdoulaye Niang Sociology, University Gaston Berger, St Louis, Senegal
9. Dr. Amy Niang International Relations, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
10. Prof. Oyeniya Okunoye English Language, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
11. Chinwe Okwuonu, M.A. English Language, University of Lagos, Nigeria
12. Duncan Omanga, M.A. Media Studies, BIGSA Bayreuth, Germany
13. Dr. Shani Omari Kiswahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
14. Ann Overbergh, M.A. Cultural Management, University of Antwerp, Belgium
15. Cole Paulson, M.A. International Development, University of Oxford, UK
16. Dr. Katrien Pype Anthropology, MIT, Cambridge, USA
17. Dr. Ann Schumann Media Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
18. Charles Sidibé, M.A. Anthropology, University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
19. Tom Simmert, M.A. Anthropology, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany
20. Dr. Leon Tsambu Sociology, Université de Kinshasa, RDC