



Programme Point Sud 2018

Knowledge Production in and about Africa: Intersections of Moralities and Higher Education

9th-12th December 2018, Dakar, Senegal

Report



Knowledge Production in and about Africa: Intersections of Moralities and Higher Education

Conveners

Dr. Franz Kogelmann, Institute of African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Dr. Abdourahmane Seck, Centre d'étude des religions (CER), Université Gaston Berger, St. Louis, Senegal

Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Seesemann, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Prof. Dr. Eva Spies, University of Bayreuth, Germany

in cooperation with Serigne Djigal, Université Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Senegal

Themes and Objectives

The aim of the conference was to create an interdisciplinary forum for joint reflection on the ways in which knowledge production in and about Africa intersects with moralities in institutionalized educational fields. The focus was directed – but not limited – to private colleges and universities connected to religious agendas, highlighting the epistemological premises and the cultural conditions and historical trajectories involved in the interplay between moralities and educational approaches.

The participants in the conference shared their insights vis-à-vis the nexus of knowledge, moralities, and formalized education and highlighted how these fields co-constitute each other in multiple relational processes. The overarching questions of the conference were:

1. How does the encounter between different forms of knowledge production and knowledge regimes in higher educational settings give rise to the construction and negotiation of diverse moral practices?
2. How do ways of communicating, practicing and negotiating moralities play out in establishing (authoritative) knowledge?

The innovative contribution of this conference came through its focus on the relationality of moralities and knowledge production in educational settings. By understanding knowledge practices in formal educational settings (including “religious” and “secular” contexts as well as their hybrids) as ways of “doing ethics”, we were seeking to go beyond conventional, normative ways of understanding and teaching morals/ethics. Therefore, we foregrounded the relational and reflexive character of moralities and highlighted the processes of their co-constitution in higher education as well as in specific educational approaches.

Methodology and Results

Convening the conference in Dakar suggested itself because one of the co-applicants, Abdourahmane Seck, as well as our institutional cooperation-partner – the Université Cheikh Amadou Bamba – were based in Senegal, and because the program was supposed to include visits to higher educational institutions in Dakar and Touba. Thus, the format included three days of conference proceedings at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, a visit to the Université Catholique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest in Dakar and a one-day excursion, on the last day, to visit the Université Cheikh Amadou Bamba in Touba (see the program in the

appendix). These two universities were chosen as examples for the recent transformations of the educational sector in Senegal and beyond. The conversations with teachers and students helped us understand how the religious and ethical agendas of these institutions inform knowledge production through the specific epistemological premises and moralities taught, and how it is at the same time co-constituted, shaped and changed through everyday university life and broader (secular) notions of education.

The conference language was English; colleagues and post-graduate students at the hosting institution were invited to participate. The opening session of the conference and the visit to Touba received substantial coverage in the local media.

Our main goal was to encourage in-depths discussions of the topic and the related theoretical questions. For this purpose we chose a format that included two detailed responses to each paper, thus deviating from conventional formats of interchanging paper presentations and discussions, usually conducted under time constraints. We identified five sub-themes that formed the basis for the thematic sessions of the conference. Chaired by one of the applicants and the cooperation partners, each session featured one main speaker and two discussants, whose task consisted of engaging with and expanding on the presentation of the respective speaker. To guarantee the plurality of approaches, the speakers and discussants represented different perspectives: On the one hand, they came from different academic disciplines (including history, art history, anthropology, philosophy, theology, religious studies, Islamic studies, development studies, sociology, international relations, gender studies, education science, and language and literature studies). On the other hand, they represented different academic traditions (francophone and anglophone Africa, South Africa, Europe, as well as South and North America). This structure allowed us to spark off lively exchange on the sub-themes and produced new and original insights into the main questions of the conference.

The roundtable discussion on “Development, gender and moralities – intersections and tensions in the sphere of education”, which convened prominent female scholars, was one of the highlights of the conference. The panelists addressed the extent to which specific moralities of religious or cultural provenance intersect or stand in contrast with “Western”/secular norms of knowledge production and “universal educational goals” as promoted by the United Nations (cf. the Sustainable Development Goals). These tense relations were discussed with reference to the close insight the panelist gained to the social norms and attitudes regarding girls’ and women’s education in their own biographies and professional lives as university teachers. Thus, the discussion closed the conference by relating back to questions already discussed in the previous thematic sessions and opened up future perspectives on the ways in which (gendered) moralities in educational contexts feed back into knowledge production in the wider educational as well as the political field, including its concomitant notions of development and transformation.

Overall, the conference constituted a successful endeavor to advance new theoretical approaches to the study of the relational processes that connect and shape the fields of education and moralities. It was an important step towards a new understanding of the simultaneous, heterogeneous and mutually influential processes of knowledge production and of “doing ethics”, and ultimately of multiplicity in the field of education.

Sustainability of the Event

After some discussion, we came to the conclusion that the originally envisaged joint publication is difficult to realize, since the papers were rather diverse and the discussions

between the participants could not be reflected in a collection of papers. The conference sparked off ideas for future cooperation between the University of Bayreuth and the participating Senegalese universities. In addition, the visit of a representative of the University of Sousse initiated a students' exchange between Tunisia and Senegal. The participants from the Université Cheikh Amadou Bamba were especially enthusiastic about the event as well as the excursion to Touba and posted extensive coverage on the internet and in social media. In this way, the conference was well publicized in Senegal.

Participants

1. Prof. Erdmute Alber, Anthropology, University of Bayreuth, Germany
2. Prof. Ousseina Alidou, Linguistics, Rutgers University, USA
3. Prof. Akosua Adomako Ampofo, African and Gender Studies, University of Ghana
4. Prof. Moncef Ben Abdeljelil, Literature, University of Sousse, Tunisia
5. Prof. Iris Clemens, Pedagogy, University of Bayreuth, Germany
6. Dr. Patrice Correa, Communication, University Gaston Berger St. Louis, Senegal
7. Dr. Serigne Djigal, Religious Studies, University Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Touba, Senegal
8. Prof. Abdoulaye Gueye, Anthropology, University of Ottawa, Canada
9. Dr. Franz Kogelmann, Islamic Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany
10. Prof. Michael Lambek, Anthropology, University of Toronto, Canada
11. Dr. Cheikh Mame Mor Mbacké, Université Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Touba, Senegal
12. Prof. Penda Mbow, History, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
13. Prof. Danny McCain, Theology, University of Jos, Nigeria
14. Dr. Bruno Reinhardt, Anthropology, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil
15. Mamadou Sangharé, PhD-candidate, History, University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
16. Dr. Père Benjamin Sombel Sarr, Theology, Catholic University of West Africa, Abidjan, Ivory Coast
17. Dr. Abdourahmane Seck, Anthropology, University Gaston Berger St. Louis, Senegal
18. Prof. Ruediger Seesemann, Islamic Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany
19. Dr. Jacqueline Solway, Development Studies, Trent University, USA
20. Prof. Fatou Sow, Sociology, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
21. Prof. Eva Spies, Religious Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany
22. Dr. Amy Stambach, Anthropology, University of Wisconsin
23. Dr. Woodman Lyon Taylor, Art History, American University, Dubai
24. Prof. Abdulkader Tayob, Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa
25. Prof. Ibrahima Thioub, History, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
26. Dr. Emnet Woldegiorgis, Political Science, University of Bayreuth, Germany