



## Programm Point Sud 2014

### *Culture as a Resource: Understanding the Role of Art and Cultural Performance in Envisioning the Future*

**Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) – 17th to 22nd December 2014**

## Report



# DFG

## **Organisers**

Prof. Dorothea Schulz, Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Cologne

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## **Themes and Objectives**

Under the paradigm of ‘cultural diversity’, firmly established as a global agenda by the UNESCO since 2001, new discourses and practices have emerged that aim at the promotion of culture as a ‘resource’ for ‘development’ and social transformation. These initiatives target, on the one hand, the economic potential of artistic practices and cultural entrepreneurship. They also center on opportunities to invest in the rapidly expanding cultural industries on a global scale, thereby adopting neo-liberal ideas and models of development that aim at economic growth. On the other hand, the initiatives articulate a view of cultural and artistic practices that highlight their potential in addressing social problems and mediating the increasing differences and inequalities that go along with economic and political transformation processes at national and global levels. The term ‘cultural diversity’ is thereby associated with notions of democratization, participation, peaceful cohabitation, citizenship or cultural rights. But the term also evokes more contested or conflictive visions of social, cultural and political change that are related to claims to local particularity, national identity, cultural ‘authenticity’ and autochthony. Finally, there are critical voices that caution against a promotion of ‘culture as a resource’ as a sign of the ‘selling out’ of Africa’s last remaining vital resources, namely its culture(s) and creative traditions.

Against this backdrop, the workshop explored debates on ‘culture and development’ in Africa to understand the ways actors, located in different institutional settings, draw on art and cultural performance to envision a future for African societies. It aimed to understand what new policies go along with the promotion of ‘culture as a resource’ and what (and whose) notions of development and of culture are being promoted in this process.

A primary concern of the workshop was to take into consideration the experiences of different groups of activists in the domain of arts and culture, and to foster dialogue among them, as well as between them, policy makers and scholars.

The workshop pursued three aims. Firstly, participants were to explore the stakes and interests that inform current debates, among scholars, artists, activists, politicians and other policy makers, about the link between ‘culture and development’ in Africa. Secondly, to understand what new policies go along with the promotion of ‘culture as a resource’ and what (and whose) notions of development and of culture are being promoted in this process. Thirdly, to give special attention to the experiences and expectations of artists and activists in the domain of arts and culture in Africa.

Workshop debate was structured around the following key questions:

- 1) Who are the actors, interest groups and institutions engaged in debates on culture as a resource?
- 2) How do politics of national governments, international donor and development agencies, and recent politics of administrative decentralization affect the debates?
- 3) What new translocal dynamics and networks emerge in this process and how do they feed back into dynamics at the local and national levels?

## **Methodology and Results**

The workshop's interest in 'culture as a resource' took as its point of departure a view of culture as an object of debate and as a set of practices, discourses and institutional arrangements mobilized by actors who are positioned unequally in power hierarchies. We thus conceived of culture heuristically as a domain of struggle over meaning. Likewise, we used 'development' as a heuristic device that allowed us to explore the actors, discourses, practices and institutional contexts that shape, and are affected by, current debates on culture as a resource.

By proposing this heuristic conceptual framework, the workshop addressed debates and policy making about culture as a resource not merely from a purely academic point of view. It allowed participants to generate an empirically relevant and fruitful critical exchange and engage in discussions that bridged the divide between theoretical and practical knowledge. In this way, the workshop realized the Point Sud programme agenda of creating a forum for reflection on the historicity and potential of local knowledge and knowledge production.

The convenors of the workshop developed a special workshop format conducive to fostering exchange and dialogue between activists, artists, policy makers and scholars, and to prompt discussion on how actors and activists in various domains of cultural production capitalize on art and cultural performance to envision a future for African societies.

The workshop combined scholarly exchange, thematically focused working groups, and a public debate organised in collaboration with the local Goethe Institute in Ouagadougou. With this innovative workshop format, we responded to a principal rationale of the Point Sud program, that is, to create a forum for south-south dialogue on the historicity and potential of local knowledge production.

During 6 days, workshop participants the different domains (e.g. dance, theatre, cinema and popular music) in which various institutions and actors, among them state institutions, private organizations, NGOs and activists, engage in cultural production in the name of development. These domains proved to be in themselves indicative of several interrelated trends, such as the booming of regional and local festivals; the promotion of 'cultural' tourism and related efforts to 'valorise' local traditions as national or world cultural heritage; a growing presence of artists from Africa on international stages who capitalize on expanding transnational networks and who use transnational and translocal resources and forms of symbolic capital to articulate their own perspectives on social, political or economic developments.

These trends are relevant to a range of art forms which, while realized and practiced in very different social and cultural milieus, address diverse, often internally heterogeneous audiences. On one side of the spectrum are different forms of popular performing arts and cultural practices, such as 'griot' or 'jeli' art, mask performances or other manifestations that are conceived of as 'traditional', rooted in rural society and embodying 'authentic' local cultures. On the opposite side of the spectrum are the so-called 'contemporary' art forms that cater to the concerns and aesthetic expectations of mainly urban populations, ranging from intellectual elites to marginalized youth. These contemporary art forms are often criticized as being 'Westernized' and culturally alienated. In between are various traditions of community theatre and theatre for development that are linked up with particular postcolonial histories and with transcultural artistic movements that promote a 'modernizing' agenda.

Important insight generated during the debates concerned significant parallels in national cultural politics between different countries of Francophone West Africa. To a certain degree, these parallels can be seen as the result of the paradoxical French colonial legacy of high valorization of 'traditional cultures' and a concomitant strong pressure for cultural

assimilation within *La Francophonie*. Yet participants also identified notable differences from ‘standard developments’ in the case of Burkina Faso and, though to a lesser degree, for Guinea. The few contributions to the workshop that focused on the experiences from Anglophone countries (South Africa, Ghana) prompted animated debate and fruitful exchanges about the continued legacies of different colonial paradigms on contemporary cultural activism and initiatives. It also raised awareness about the need to consider more systematically experiences from other Anglophone countries as well as from Lusophone Africa.

Another insight generated by workshop presentations and debate was the need for sustained periodization and characterization of the different eras and types of policies commonly subsumed under the label of ‘neoliberal’ cultural politics.

The locale of the workshop (in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) proved to be an ideal match for the workshop’s thematic scope and format. Culture has been ranked highly on the agenda of development politics in Burkina Faso ever since Sankara’s ‘popular revolution’ during which a ‘new culture’ was promoted as a key resource of political and social transformation. Over the last 20 years, governmental cultural policy has shifted from conceiving culture as a tool of mass mobilization to promoting cultural diversity as an element of ‘democratization’. During approximately the same period, a lively and heterogeneous field of cultural enterprises has emerged. Diverse trends are perceptible in the domains of theatre, cinema, dance, music and crafts; these trends range from the formalization and professionalization of cultural production to the rise of more experimental initiatives that reach out for new audiences and publics. The current national development strategy (*Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Développement Durable: SCADD*) ranks the cultural sector as the third most important one, after agriculture and mining.

### **Sustainability of the Event**

Are any publications, network building, joint research projects, follow-up workshops/activities planned?

The results of the workshop will materialize in two forms. Firstly, the convenors will bring out a special journal issue, comprising revised workshop papers that allow for a comparative perspective on different trajectories of national politics of culture in Francophone West Africa.

Secondly, in response to the insights generated during the workshop, the convenors of the workshop are planning a follow-up workshop that firstly, should address more systematically differences and parallels in contemporary politics of culture in francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone Africa; and secondly, would aim at a more nuanced and historically specific understanding of different parameters, periods, and related challenges of neoliberal cultural policies that have been promoted throughout sub-Saharan Africa for the past 15 years.

## Participants

1. Funmi Adewole Dance Studies, De Montfort University, UK
2. Dr. Sarah Andrieu Anthropology, Université de Nice, France
3. Prof. Heike Becker Anthropology, University of the Western Cape, South Africa
4. Dr. Ndiouga Benga History, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
5. Munyaradzi Chatikobo Applied Drama and Theatre, Drama for Life – Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
6. Dr. Marie Yvonne Curtis Ethno-Aesthetics, Anthropology, National History Museum, Washington/Conakry, USA/Guinea
7. Christiaan de Beukelaer Cultural Management, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, University of Leeds, UK
8. Dr. Elina Djebbari Anthropology, King's College, London, UK
9. Dr. Anne Doquet Anthropology, IRD/IMAF/EHESS, Paris, France
10. Mame Rokhaya Ndoeye Sociology, Université Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis, Université Pierre Mendès, Grenoble, France
11. Dr. Abdoulaye Niang Sociology, UFR/CRAC/section MAC, Université Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis, Senegal
12. Prof. Francis Nii-Yartey Dance Theatre, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
13. Prof. Moussa Sow Anthropology, Sociolinguist, Semiology, Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako, Mali