

# Newsletter 2/2023



Swiss Society for African Studies  
Société suisse d'études africaines  
Schweizerische Gesellschaft  
für Afrikastudien



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La Newsletter de la SSEA est publiée avec le concours de l'Académie suisse des sciences humaines et sociales. Les articles et informations publiés, tout comme les opinions qui y sont exprimées, sont sous l'entière responsabilité de leurs auteurs, et ne sauraient être considérés comme reflétant l'opinion de la SSEA.

Der Publikationsbeitrag der Schweizerischen Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften sei dankend erwähnt. Die Verantwortung für die Inhalte der veröffentlichten Beiträge und Informationen liegt bei deren Autoren. Die darin enthaltenen Standpunkte decken sich nicht immer mit jenen der SGAS.

**Cover:** Excavation of storage jars discovered at the Wadi el-Jarf.  
See the article by Adeline Bats on page 35 in this newsletter (picture: Pierre Tallet, mission archéologique du Wadi el-Jarf 2017).

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# ÉDITORIAL • EDITORIAL

■ ANNE MAYOR, CO-PRESIDENTE

La 49<sup>ème</sup> assemblée générale de la société a été l'occasion d'annoncer un événement important, à savoir le changement de co-présidence, qui s'opère en deux temps pour assurer une transition en douceur : la première étape voit cette année le remplacement de Daniel Künzler, sociologue de l'université de Fribourg, par Henri Michel Yéré, historien et écrivain, de l'université de Bâle, qui entre donc au comité comme nouveau membre et comme co-président (voir sa présentation par Natalie Tarr, page 11 dans ce numéro). Je souhaite donc la bienvenue à Henri Michel, le félicite pour cette nomination et tiens à le remercier très chaleureusement d'avoir accepté cet engagement.

Je souhaite aussi bien évidemment remercier du fond du cœur Daniel qui, en 2012, deux ans seulement après son entrée au comité, a accepté de partager avec moi la présidence de la société... une direction à deux têtes d'une durée de onze ans, quelle société peut en dire autant ? Cette stabilité, notre complémentarité et notre bonne entente ont certainement aidé la SSEA à accompagner l'essor des études africaines en Suisse et le développement des cursus d'enseignements dans les universités de Bâle et de Genève principalement, mais aussi de Lausanne et peut-être prochainement de Berne ! J'aimerais saluer ici son engagement sans faille en faveur de la bonne gouvernance et du développement de la société, sa disponibilité, notamment lorsqu'il fallait participer aux réunions annuelles de l'Académie à l'autre bout de la Suisse et rapporter les décisions au comité, et sa rigueur dans le suivi des aspects financiers et administratifs. Daniel a aussi été le moteur des réflexions menées conjointement avec la société suisse des Américanistes et la société suisse d'études du Moyen-Orient et des études islamiques lors d'un atelier organisé à Fribourg en 2014, ayant donné lieu à une publication (Künzler, D., Mayor A., Kradolfer, S., Herzog, Th., 2016: *Prise de position sur les Area Studies*, dans : *Qualitäts- und Leitungsbeurteilung in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften: Prinzipien, Ansätze und Verfahren*. Swiss Academies Reports 11/2, 57-70). Daniel s'est aussi engagé dans l'organisation de conférences scientifiques :

la première à l'université de Fribourg en 2014, en collaboration avec la société de sociologie, intitulée *Social policy and regimes of social Welfare in Africa*, la deuxième à l'université de Berne en 2015, en collaboration avec la société d'études du Moyen-Orient et des études islamiques, intitulée *Islam in Africa : historical and contemporary processes of Islamization and Re-islamization* et une troisième à l'université de Neuchâtel en 2019 sur les relations entre la Chine et l'Afrique, en collaboration avec la World Society, qui a donné lieu à la publication *African-Asian relations : Past, Present, Future* parue en 2022. Merci à toi Daniel, cela a été un réel plaisir de collaborer, et de confirmer une fois de plus les avantages indéniables de la formule de la co-présidence.

Pour le reste, je vous laisserai juger par vous-même, à la lecture de ce numéro de la Newsletter, du foisonnement d'événements, d'activités et de projets ayant trait à l'Afrique en Suisse. J'aimerais souligner aussi l'organisation d'événements sur sol africain, co-organisés par des chercheurs suisses et africains, comme le colloque tenu à Nairobi en juin 2023 sur le thème *The Commons we want*, la recherche collaborative et les expositions sur la médecine par les plantes entre Ouganda et Suisse, ou l'exposition organisée à Dakar et à Gorée sur 12 ans de recherches archéologiques dans la vallée de la Falémé. Ces types de collaboration, qui sont amenés à se développer à l'avenir, sont toutefois encore particulièrement difficiles à financer et à mettre sur pied, et méritent donc une attention toute particulière.

Genève, 11.12.2023

# COMMUNICATIONS DU COMITÉ • MITTEILUNGEN DES VORSTANDS • COMMUNICATIONS

## PROTOKOLL DER 49. MITGLIEDERVERSAMMLUNG DER SGAS • PROCÈS-VERBAL DE LA 48<sup>e</sup> ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE DE LA SSEA

Basel, 20.10.2023

### TEILNEHMENDE • LISTE DES PARTICIPANT.E.S

Michael Aeby, Veit Arlt, Lesley Brown, Piet van Eeuwijk, Tobias Haller, Mohomodou Houssouba, Daniel Künzler, Thomas Laely, Christine Le Quellec Cottier, Danielle Isler, Seydou Konaté, Anne Mayor, Elísio Macamo, James Merron, Brigit Obrist, Luccio Schlettwein, Fiona Siegenthaler, Gerald Stell, Natalie Tarr, Jürg Utzinger, Raphaela von Weichs, Henri Michel Yéré

### 1. GENEHMIGUNG PROTOKOLL GV 2022 • APPROBATION PROCÈS-VERBAL 2022

Das Protokoll der Mitgliederversammlung vom 28.10.2022 wird einstimmig angenommen.

*Le procès-verbal de l'assemblée générale du 28.10.2022 est adopté à l'unanimité.*

### 2. JAHRESBERICHT DES PRÄSIDIUMS • RAPPORT ANNUEL DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Die Ko-Präsidentin Anne Mayor präsentiert den Jahresbericht (siehe Seiten 7–8 in diesem Newsletter).

*La co-présidente Anne Mayor présente le rapport annuel (voir pages 7–8 de cette Newsletter-ci).*

### 3. JAHRESBERICHT DES QUÄSTORS • RAPPORT ANNUEL DU TRÉSORIER

Der Jahresbericht des Quästors Veit Arlt zeigt, dass im Berichtsjahr die Ausgaben deutlich über den Einnahmen lagen und die Rechnung mit einem Negativergebnis von CHF -2 859.45 schliesst. De facto ist das Defizit geringer, da zu Jahresende eine Rechnung

in der Höhe von CHF 2000.00 doppelt gezahlt wurde und die Rückerstattung erst im Januar 2023 erfolgte. Der so korrigierte Saldo beträgt CHF-859.45. Der Verlust ist auf das Negativ-Ergebnis unseres Depots bei der Bank Cler zurückzuführen (CHF -5 932.34). Die Finanzlage der Gesellschaft ist trotz dieses Verlusts stabil und sicher.

*Selon le rapport du trésorier Veit Arlt les dépenses de l'année 2021 dépassent les recettes, avec pour conséquence une perte de CHF -2 859.45. De facto, le déficit est moins important, car une facture de CHF 2000.00 a été payée à double en fin d'année et le remboursement n'a été effectué qu'en janvier 2023. Le solde ainsi corrigé s'élève à CHF -859.45. Cette perte est due au résultat négatif de notre dépôt auprès de la banque Cler (CHF -5 932.34). Malgré cette perte, la situation financière de la société est stable et sûre.*

Einnahmen • Recettes:	CHF 44 613,92
Ausgaben • Dépenses:	CHF 47 472,47
Bilanz • Bilan:	CHF -2 859,45
Kapital am • Capital au 31.12.2022:	CHF 60 911,58

Nach Präsentation des Berichts der Revisoren wird die Jahresrechnung einstimmig unter Enthaltung des Quästors angenommen und, wie von den Revisoren Piet van Eeuwijk und Beat Sottas empfohlen, dem Vorstand Décharge erteilt.

*Suite à la présentation, l'assemblée approuve avec l'abstention du trésorier le rapport financier et, selon la recommandation des réviseurs Piet van Eeuwijk et Beat Sottas, accorde décharge au trésorier et au comité.*

Beat Sottas tritt als Revisor zurück, als Nachfolger wird Pascal Schmid einstimmig einstimmig für die Amtszeit 2023–2026 gewählt. Piet van Eeuwijk wird als zweiter Revisor für die Amtszeit 2023–2026 bestätigt.

*Beat Sottas se retire du poste de réviseur, Pascal Schmid est élu à l'unanimité pour lui succéder pour le mandat 2023–2026. Piet van Eeuwijk est confirmé comme deuxième réviseur pour le mandat 2023–2026.*

#### **4. RÜCKTRITT DES KO-PRÄSIDENTEN • DÉMISSION DU CO-PRÉSIDENT**

Der Ko-Präsident Daniel Künzler tritt von seinem Amt und aus dem Vorstand zurück. Die Versammlung dankt herzlich für seinen langjährigen Einsatz.

*Le co-président Daniel Künzler se retire de son office et du comité. L'assemblée le remercie chaleureusement pour son engagement de longue date.*

#### **5. VORSTAND: NEU- UND BESTÄTIGUNGSWAHLEN • COMITÉ: ÉLECTION ET CONFIRMATIONS**

Die Mitgliederversammlung wählt einstimmig Henri Michel Yéré als neues Vorstandsmitglied und bestätigt die Vorstandsmitglieder (Veit Arlt, Tobias Haller, Anne Mayor, Didier Péclard, Christine Le Quellec Cottier, Anja Soldat, Chinwe Ifejika Speranza, Natalie Tarr, Henri Michel Yéré) für die Amtszeit 2023–2026.

*L'assemblée générale élit à l'unanimité Henri Michel Yéré comme nouveau membre du comité et confirme les membres du comité (Veit Arlt, Tobias Haller, Anne Mayor, Christine Le Quellec Cottier, Didier Péclard, Anja Soldat, Chinwe Ifejika Speranza, Natalie Tarr, Henri Michel Yéré) pour le mandat 2023–2026.*

#### **6. WAHL EINES NEUEN KO-PRÄSIDENTEN • ÉLECTION D'UN CO-PRÉSIDENT**

Die Mitgliederversammlung wählt einstimmig Henri Michel Yéré zum neuen Ko-Präsidenten.

*L'assemblée générale élit à l'unanimité Henri Michel Yéré comme nouvel co-président.*

#### **7. AUFNAHME NEUER MITGLIEDER • ADMISSION DES NOUVEAUX MEMBRES**

Die Aufnahmeanträge von 12 Personen werden ohne Gegenstimmen gutgeheissen.

*L'assemblée approuve à l'unanimité l'admission de 12 nouveaux membres.*

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Hugues Abriel          | 7. Werner Mathys              |
| 2. Adeline Bats           | 8. Nesisa Analisa Nyathi      |
| 3. Xavier Droux           | 9. Ernest Sasu Kwame Sewordor |
| 4. Selina Felber          | 10. Gérald Stell              |
| 5. Veronica Gomez Temesio | 11. Fanny Voélin              |
| 6. Danielle Isler         | 12. Anne Sophie Zuber         |

Demgegenüber sind im Berichtsjahr neun Personen ausgetreten, dreizehn weitere sind nicht mehr erreichbar. Die Gesellschaft zählt demnach aktuell 281 Mitglieder und 117 Korrespondierende.

*En revanche, neuf personnes ont démissionné au cours de l'année et treize autres ne sont plus joignables. La société compte donc actuellement 281 membres et 117 correspondant.e.s.*

#### **8. REDAKTIONELLE ANPASSUNG DER STATUTEN • MODIFICATION (RÉDACTIONNELLE) DES STATUTS**

Der Vorstand leitet eine redaktionelle Überarbeitung der Statuten (insbesondere Terminologie und Harmonisierung der Sprachversionen) ein. Unmittelbar autorisiert die Mitgliederversammlung den Vorstand, das Logo und die Adresse in den Statuten zu ändern.

*Le comité lance une révision rédactionnelle des statuts (notamment la terminologie et l'harmonisation des versions linguistiques). Dans l'immédiat, l'assemblée générale autorise le comité à modifier le logo et l'adresse dans les statuts.*

### **9. INFORMATIONEN AUS DER SAGW • NOUVELLES DE L'ASSH**

Bei der Behandlung der Finanzierungsgesuche achtet die SAGW noch stärker auf die Vereinbarkeit mit ihren Reglementen. So wurde unser Antrag für die European Students' Conference on African Studies vorderhand nicht berücksichtigt, da im Projektbescheid ein Bezug zur Lehre hergestellt wurde, zudem muss von vorneherein ein konkretes Tagungsthema genannt werden.

Die öffentliche Veranstaltungsreihe (vormals *La Suisse existe—la suisse n'existe pas*) wird unter dem Label *RECTO VERSO* fortgeführt werden. Die Gesellschaften sind aufgerufen, Rahmenthemen vorzuschlagen (z.B. Digitalisierung und Ungleichheit).

*Lors du traitement des demandes de financement, l'ASSH veille encore plus à la compatibilité avec ses règlements. Ainsi, notre demande pour la European Students' Conference on African Studies n'a pas été prise en compte pour l'instant, car un lien avec l'enseignement a été établi dans la description du projet ; de plus, un thème de congrès concret doit être mentionné dès le départ.*

*La série de manifestations publiques (anciennement « La Suisse existe—la suisse n'existe pas ») sera poursuivie sous le label « RECTO VERSO ». Les sociétés sont invitées à proposer des thèmes cadres (p. ex. numérisation et inégalité).*

### **10. VARIA: ERNENNUNG EINES EHRENMITGLIEDS • NOMINATION D'UN MEMBRE D'HONNEUR**

Die Mitgliederversammlung bestätigt die Ernennung von Mohomodou Houssouba zum Ehrenmitglied der Gesellschaft (siehe Würdigung auf Seite 9).

*L'assemblée générale confirme la nomination de Mohomodou Houssouba comme membre d'honneur de la société (voir hommage en page 9).*

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023 OF THE SSAS CO-PRESIDENCY

### ■ ANNE MAYOR

After 10 years of service, Daniel Künzler resigned as co-president and member of the board, which he joined in 2012. Daniel will continue teaching as lecturer in sociology at the University of Fribourg.

### ACTIVITIES

Four events were organized or co-organized by our society this year:

#### THE SWISS BENIN FORUM

This international workshop at the Museum Rietberg was organized by the Swiss Benin Initiative and took place from 30 January to 3 February 2023. Its aim was to officially present and discuss the report on Benin Bronzes held in Swiss Museums to a delegation from Benin City (Nigeria), to visit the different museums with the delegation, and to discuss in public and in a more private setting the next phase of the project. The first phase 2021/2022 was funded by the Federal Office for Culture (see report in the Newsletter 2023/1).

#### D'OU TU CAUSES? DISCOURS SITUÉS ET PARTICIPATIONS CULTURELLES: QUELLES VOIX POUR DÉPASSER LES DISCOURS DE FRACTURE?

This roundtable organized by Christine Le Quellec Cottier was held on 27 April 2023 at the Espace culturel Pôle Sud in Lausanne. The panelists and audience discussed the issue of the legitimacy of who is speaking for whom and about what. Henri Michel Yéré and Anne Mayor among others were speakers during this event (see this issue for a report on the roundtable).

#### THE COMMONS WE WANT

The 19<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) was jointly organized by the University of Nairobi and the University of Bern (Institut für Sozialanthropologie & Centre for Development and Environment, CDE). It took place at the University of Nairobi from 19 to 24 June 2023. Tobias Haller played a central role in organizing such a large conference in Africa, an undertaking that turned out to be a huge challenge. More than 600 people (450 on-site and more than 150 remotely) participated in more than 120 panels, workshops, and round tables. The SSAS board members Daniel Künzler and Chinwe Speranza were present.

#### CONJUNCTIONS OF ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC SPHERES: EMBODIED HISTORIES, MEMORY, AND MULTI-MEDIA ARCHIVES IN AND FROM AFRICA

This conference was organized by the Center for African Studies and the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) on behalf of the Swiss Society for African Studies (SSAS). It took place from 18 to 19 October 2023 at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien; on 20 October it was followed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Namibia Research Day.

### PUBLICATIONS

The book *African-Asian relations: Past, Present, Future* unites papers presented at the conference co-organised by our society and the World Society at the University of Neuchâtel in 2019 and was co-edited by Patrick Ziltener and Christian Suter (*Études africaines en Suisse & World Society Studies*). Zürich/Münster/Wien: 2022 (Lit Verlag).

Former SSAS secretary Emil Schreyger published his recollections of the early phase of the society under the title *Entstehung und Werdegang der Afrikanistik und der Afrika-forschung in der Schweiz*. 2023 (Eigenverlag).



## COORDINATION

The first issue of the Newsletter 2023 was published in June, the second one is planned for the end of the year. Special thanks to Natalie Tarr and Veit Arlt for taking care of this important medium for communication of our society.

## PLANNING 2024

For next year, a few events are already in the pipeline:

The third edition of the European Students' Conference on African Studies (ESCAS) will take place at the University of Basel in late August 2024

The 8<sup>th</sup> Swiss Researching Africa Days (SRAD) will be held from 25 to 26 October 2024 at the University of Bern.

An inquisitive mind: Mohomodou Houssouba has been enriching the Swiss African Studies landscape since 2002 as a highly productive independent scholar (picture provided by Mohomodou Houssouba).

## HONORARY MEMBER MOHOMODOU HOUSSOUBA

### ■ NATALIE TARR

At this year's General Assembly, the Swiss Society for African Studies SSAS was happy to bestow the honorary membership on Mohomodou Houssouba. Mohomodou was a member of the board of the SSAS for many years, enriching our discussions with his refreshing viewpoint as a languages and linguistics scholar, writer, and poet.

### A MULTILINGUAL COSMOPOLITAN

For more than 20 years, Mohomodou has been living and working in Basel. As associated researcher at the Centre for African Studies, he has initiated and led numerous research projects; he was coordinator for West Africa in the program *Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World* based at Leiden University, involving insti-



tutions across the globe. That he became a scholar of languages seems like a logical, even organic, trajectory for Mohomodou, who grew up in Gao, Mali. Tamashek was his first tongue, but when the family moved down the dune and closer to the river Niger, he switched to Songhay as primary language as a small child. Once in school, he had to deal with not only learning French, but learning in French, the colonial language that until today dominates the Malian school landscape. There, he also started into English and Russian. At the time, Mohomodou found Russian to be the most accessible of the languages he was studying, but this is another story.

After completing his first round of studies with a diploma in teaching English as a foreign language in Bamako, Mohomodou left Mali for the USA. At Illinois State University, he completed his PhD in 1998, specializing in African American and African Diaspora Studies. He also taught English as a foreign language before taking up a teaching position in anglophone African Literature and African Diaspora Writings at Western

Illinois State. After a post-doc position at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, and a position as coordinator of study programs between US universities and institutions in Mali at different colleges in the USA, Mohomodou moved to Basel in October 2001.

### AFRICAN LANGUAGES, THE INTERNET, AND TECHNOLOGIES

As associated researcher at the Centre for African Studies (ZASB) at the University of Basel, Mohomodou taught both students in the Master's program and interested professionals in the ZASB Advanced Studies program on African Affairs. In his own research, he specialized in the translation and adaptation of open-source software interfaces. In fact, Mohomodou works to make African languages present and visible, not only, but also through human language technologies. Among other projects, he was responsible for the launch of the website [songhay.org](http://songhay.org), an encyclopedic dictionary portal. He translated 12 free software interfaces into Songhay, including Firefox and the [mozilla.org](http://mozilla.org) website. From 2018–2020, he was the coordinator for Malian languages with *Kamusi Project International*, then based at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), with the aim to develop local bilingual dictionaries and free-access online resources.

Mohomodou is very active in international networks, particularly in connecting the Malian Diaspora, and organizes and contributes to scholarly events in Mali on a regular basis. In Switzerland as well, Mohomodou brings his expertise to different projects and institutions as intercultural mediator and translator, both as a scholar and as a member of the Federal Commission on Migration. And as the first representative of the African diaspora in the board of the SSAS (2007–2016), he brought new insights and visions to our deliberations.

Mohomodou Houssouba's lexicographic workshops conducted in 2008 with support from the Organisation internationale de la francophonie gave rise to the platform [www.songhay.org](http://www.songhay.org) (photo: Mohomodou Houssouba 2008).



## HENRI MICHEL YÉRÉ JOINS THE BOARD AND CO-PRESIDENCY

■ NATALIE TARR

At our last General Assembly on 20 October 2023, we had the pleasure to welcome Henri Michel Yéré to the board of the Swiss Society for African Studies. Henri has been teaching at the Centre for African Studies, University of Basel, since 2019 after many years as Diversity and Inclusion Partner with Novartis. Returning to the University of Basel was a kind of homecoming; Henri had been part of the very first class of MA students in African Studies at the newly founded Centre for African Studies ZASB at the University of Basel and in 2006 was the first graduate of the program. He topped this off with a PhD in History in 2010. He has also a strong link with South Africa established during the time he earned his Bachelor at the University of Cape Town.

Henri is not only a senior lecturer and postdoctoral researcher but a published poet as well. His latest book of poems *Polo Kouman / Polo Parle* is written in French and Nouchi, paying tribute to the plurilingual and multi-ethnic city of his birth, Abidjan. As a writer and poet, Henri holds several positions in the art sector, such as being a member of the programme commission with the Solothurner Literaturtage, the Literary Days that take place yearly in the city of Solothurn, or as member of the jury for the Robert-Walser Prize. Recently he was on the board of the festival Culturescapes Sahara whereby he linked this commitment with his teaching by offering a class in which students engaged with artists performing in the framework of Culturescapes. In addition to writing, publishing, teaching Henri is the father of three school age boys.

We are looking forward to fruitful and enjoyable meetings of the Board, continuing to plan and organize, to discuss and debate.



Henri Michel Yéré is postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for African Studies Basel (picture: PD).

## MARCEL TANNER ERHÄLT DEN BRANDENBERGER-PREIS 2023

■ UNIVERSITÄT BASEL, BRANDENBERGER-STIFTUNG

Marcel Tanner, Direktor Emeritus des Swiss TPH, Präsident der Akademien der Wissenschaften und Ehrenpräsident der R. Geigy-Stiftung, erhält den renommierten Brandenberger-Preis. Die Stiftung Dr. J. E. Brandenberger würdigt Marcel Tanners jahrzehntelangen Einsatz auf dem Gebiet der Erforschung und Kontrolle von Krankheiten der Armut, der Stärkung von Gesundheitssystemen und der Förderung des Dialoges zwischen Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft. «Marcel Tanner hat mit seinem der Humanität verpflichteten Wirken sowie mit seinem Einsatz für den Dialog zwischen Politik und Wissenschaft zur Verbesserung der Lebensbedingungen vieler Menschen beigetragen», betont die Stiftungsratspräsidentin, Monica Duca Widmer, in der Medienmitteilung.

### VON DER WISSENSCHAFT ZUR UMSETZUNG

Für Marcel Tanner ist exzellente Wissenschaft nie Selbstzweck. Sie ist lediglich die Voraussetzung, um Ungleichheiten beim Zugang zu «Gesundsein» und «Gesundbleiben» zu sichern und somit einen Beitrag für das Wohlergehen von vernachlässigten Bevölkerungsgruppen zu erreichen. Er propagiert deshalb eine Wissenschaft, die die ganze Wertschöpfungskette, von der wissenschaftlichen Innovation, über die Validierung von Forschungsergebnissen bis hin zu deren Umsetzung in Gesundheitssystemen einbezieht.

Marcel Tanner hat nicht nur den Forschungsbereich Global Health in der Schweiz, sondern auch den Afrika-Schwerpunkt an der Universität Basel wesentlich mitgeprägt (Bild: Annette Boutellier 2020).



Vor allem in Afrika und Asien engagierte sich Marcel Tanner für die Bekämpfung von Armut- und vernachlässigten Krankheiten, schuf Zentren und Netzwerke, die Wissenschaft und Politik zugunsten breiter Bevölkerungskreise verbinden, setzte sich für einen einfachen Zugang zu Medikamenten ein und förderte unzählige lokale wissenschaftliche Nachwuchskräfte. In der Corona-Pandemie war er als international anerkannter Epidemiologe ein exponierter Vermittler zwischen Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft. Damit trug er dazu bei, die Pandemie und ihre Bekämpfung in der breiten Öffentlichkeit der Schweiz und durch Mitwirken in Expertengruppen in Afrika besser verständlich zu machen.

Marcel Tanner sieht den Preis als «Anerkennung für alle Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler, die sich im Netzwerk der Akademien und des Swiss TPH und überall auf der Welt dafür einsetzen, dass wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse besser und einfacher den Weg in Politik und Gesellschaft finden. Gerade in Krisenzeiten zeigt sich, ob der Dialog funktioniert und wo er verbessert werden kann.»

## **EIN LEBEN FÜR DIE GLOBALE GESUNDHEIT**

Marcel Tanner absolvierte ein Studium der medizinischen Biologie an der Universität Basel, das er 1979 mit einer Dissertation über die Afrikanische Schlafkrankheit abschloss. Zwei Jahre später übernahm er die Leitung des Feldlabors des damaligen Schweizerischen Tropeninstituts (heute: Schweizerisches Tropen- und Public Health-Institut Swiss TPH) in Tansania, das er mit lokalen Partnern zu einem tansanischen Forschungs- und Public Health Institut kontinuierlich ausbaute. Zurück in Basel und nach einem Master in Public Health in London wurde ihm der Aufbau des Departements *Gesundheitswesen & Epidemiologie* am Swiss TPH übertragen. Unter seiner Leitung als Direktor (ab 1997) entwickelte sich das Swiss TPH zu einem weltweit anerkannten Institut der Globalen Gesundheit. Als ein wichtiger Schlüssel zum Erfolg erwies sich die Verbindung zwischen Lehre, Forschung und verschiedensten Dienstleistungen (Reise-medicin, Beratungs- und Umsetzungsmandate.).

Marcel Tanner und seine Teams spielten eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Entwicklung von Impfstoffen gegen Malaria und den sogenannten Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), welche die Entwicklung neuer Therapien gegen Armutskrankheiten initiierten und förderten. Marcel Tanner war ordentlicher Professor und auch Dekan an der philosophisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Basel. Er war und ist eine Inspiration für zahlreiche Studierende, Doktorierende und Gesundheitsfachleute, deren Arbeiten er betreut oder deren Karriere er aktiv förderte. Heute präsidiert er die Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz und stellt seine Expertise zahlreichen nationalen und internationalen Gremien zur Verfügung.

# ÉVÈNEMENTS • VERANSTALTUNGEN • EVENTS

## CALL: THIRD EUROPEAN STUDENTS' CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN STUDIES

Master students (and advanced Bachelor) students at Swiss universities are invited to team-up and organise the next edition of the European Students' Conference on African Studies, which will be held in Basel (or another location of their choice) at the end of August 2024.

Already in 2007, students in the Master's program African Studies at the University of Basel successfully organised a first European Students' Conference on African Studies, which was a life-changing experience. It took another 15 years before the second such conference took place in Basel in August 2022 (see Newsletter 2022/2). Again, it proved to be a great success and all participants called for the conference to become a regular event.

Building on the experience of these first two conferences we invite students keen to be initiated into the practice of organising scholarly meetings and to exchange and network with students at other universities in Europe to join the team. They will be coached and supported in the framework of a practical course offered by the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel (CASB), so that they can earn credits. Core funding will be secured by the Swiss Society for African Studies and the CASB. The Swiss Mobility Program allows for easy participation and transfer of credits.

Please contact the course coordinator Veit Arlt if you are interested to join in.

**Contact:** [veit.arlt@unibas.ch](mailto:veit.arlt@unibas.ch).



Students from universities all across Europe, from Romania to Portugal and from Sardinia to Sweden, gathered in Basel for the Second European Students' Conference on African Studies, which provided a great platform for the participants to exchange (picture: Ivanca Kočišová 2022).

## CALL FOR PAPERS: RECONFIGURATIONS IN AFRICA—AND IN AFRICAN STUDIES (BAYREUTH, 30.09.–02.10.2024)

The Institute of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth will be hosting the biennial conference of the Association for African Studies in Germany e.V. (VAD) in autumn 2024. The conference theme *Reconfigurations in Africa—and in African Studies* addresses current and past crises and processes of transformation on the African continent, as well as the need to critically reflect on the means—academic, artistic and otherwise—by which we approach them globally to expand knowledge production. To this point, VAD2024 aims to bring Africa-related institutions outside of Africa, including museums, universities and associations, into conversation with parallel institutions in Africa.

AFRICA

r e c o n f i g u r a t i o n s



VAD2024 will be held in a hybrid format to enable wide participation. Seven unique streams invite academics, activists, politicians, and artists to explore these themes from inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives.

The VAD2024 Call for Papers is now open and will close on **Wednesday 31.01.2024**.

**Link:** [www.nomadit.co.uk/vad/vad2024/](http://www.nomadit.co.uk/vad/vad2024/)

Bayreuth is one of Germany's leading centres for African Studies. All Africa-related activities at the University of Bayreuth are coordinated by the Institute of African Studies, providing opportunities to advance studies in the humanities and social sciences and also natural sciences. Currently, it also houses the interdisciplinary *Africa Multiple* Cluster of Excellence with its emphasis on critical African Studies. Construction of a state-of-the-art dedicated building started in April and is due for completion in December 2024 (image: W. Markgraf GmbH & Co KG).

## EXPOSITION : FALÉMÉ, 12 ANS DE RECHERCHES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES AU SÉNÉGAL ORIENTAL (GORÉE, 30.01.–30.04.2024)

La Falémé... peu de personnes connaissent le nom de cette rivière, qui coule du sud vers le nord et se jette dans le fleuve Sénégal aux confins des actuels territoires du Mali et du Sénégal. Pourtant, depuis plusieurs centaines de milliers d'années, la vallée de la Falémé a attiré des populations humaines en quête d'eau, que ce soit pour la chasse, la pêche, l'élevage, l'agriculture ou la métallurgie.

Depuis 2012, une équipe internationale et interdisciplinaire d'archéologues et de paléo-environnementalistes de Suisse, de France et du Sénégal travaille à comprendre l'histoire du peuplement de cette vallée, en lien avec les variations du climat et de l'environnement. Elle s'intéresse notamment à caractériser l'évolution des techniques sur le temps long, à savoir du Paléolithique ancien (l'Acheuléen) à l'époque actuelle.

Cette exposition du laboratoire Archéologie africaine et Anthropologie (ARCAN) de la Faculté des Sciences de l'université de Genève raconte à l'aide de posters, de vitrines d'objets, de vidéos d'interviews de chercheurs et d'un photomontage, les défis de ce projet et quelques-uns de ses résultats. Elle renforce les liens entre l'université de Genève et l'université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar dans le cadre des partenariats prioritaires établis. Dans une première phase elle était montée du 27 au 30 novembre 2023 à l'université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD 2), Dakar. Du 30 janvier au 30 avril 2024 elle est accessible au grand public au Musée historique de Gorée (IFAN), Gorée.

**Lien :** <https://arcan.unige.ch/outputs/highlights/exposition-faleme>





## COMPTE-RENDU : D'OÙ TU CAUSES ? (LAUSANNE, 27.04.2023)

### ■ CHRISTINE LE QUELLEC COTTIER

Dans le cadre du programme Vice/Versa de l'Académie des sciences humaines avec le thème « La Participation culturelle », le Pôle pour les études africaines de l'université de Lausanne a offert une soirée au Centre socio-culturel Pôle Sud, en combinant une table ronde avec un moment musical avec DJ Hipnoise aka Dynamike. Cette rencontre voulait questionner la notion de participation culturelle face aux discours situés. Le but était de trouver des pistes pour dépasser les discours de fracture, très polarisés dans les médias, en partant du constat suivant :

La dénonciation de la perpétuation d'un système structurel de domination envers des groupes de populations racialisées ou marginalisés, dans les sociétés occidentales, fonde différents types de discours. Les plus militants, à partir de critères intersectionnels, contestent la possibilité d'une « participation culturelle », impliquant coopération et collaboration. Cette polarisation des identités a des conséquences sociales, politiques et culturelles. De fait, elle questionne le statut de discours et d'initiatives, puisque leur légitimité s'évalue selon l'origine de leur énonciateur. « D'où tu causes ? » voulait faire entendre différents points de vue, en ciblant les liens entre Européens, Africains et Afropéens.

La table ronde était menée par Michel Ndeze (RTS) et Christine Le Quellec Cottier (UNIL-PEALL). Leurs invités d'horizons différents ont pu faire des propositions et revenir sur des faits récents très médiatisés. Le public nombreux a ainsi pu écouter les débats avec :

- Ruedi Küng, journaliste, ancien correspondant Afrique subsaharienne de la SRF
- Anne Mayor, archéologue à l'université de Genève ; co-directrice de la Société suisse d'études africaines
- Boniface Mongo Mboussa, écrivain ; co-directeur du Salon africain, Salon du Livre Genève
- Pamela Ohene-Nyako, doctorante à l'université de Genève ; fondatrice de la plateforme Afrolitt.com
- Henri Michel Yéré, historien, Postdoc à l'université de Bâle ; écrivain et poète

Les échanges se sont poursuivis avec les questions du public. Les convictions et les arguments de chacun et chacune, motivés différemment, ont permis de se convaincre de la nécessité du débat, en tant que pratique sociale aux enjeux multiples. Écouter un avis divergent oblige à se décentrer, à réévaluer les repères communs, à élargir son champ de perception. Ce dialogue n'est jamais un fait acquis et il importe, sans naïveté, de le renforcer au sein d'une société helvétique qui trop souvent néglige ce qui est de l'ordre du racisme structurel, banalisé.



Podcast de la table ronde, Radio Loose Antenna : [www.mixcloud.com/looseantenna/doù-tu-causes-conférence-pôle-sud-27042023/](http://www.mixcloud.com/looseantenna/doù-tu-causes-conférence-pôle-sud-27042023/)



Compte rendu de la table ronde : Marie Butty, « Arrêtez de faire sans nous », Culture en Jeu, 105, juillet 2023, p. 17 : [www.cultureenjeu.ch/arrêtez-de-faire-sans-nous/](http://www.cultureenjeu.ch/arrêtez-de-faire-sans-nous/)

## REPORT: CHOC! LA FRIANDISE DES DIEUX, DIE SÜSSIGKEIT DER GÖTTER (THEATRE ORCHESTRE BIENNE SOLEURE, 09.–12.2023)

■ HENRI MICHEL YÉRÉ

Swiss playwright Dominique Ziegler's latest production may leave a bitter taste in the mouth of theater-goers. Whereas Switzerland is known as the country of chocolate, it is far less known for the fact that many Swiss were involved, from the early stages, in the actual enterprise of cocoa cultivation. A plant originating in South America, cocoa became one of the main crops grown out of the labour of deported African slaves through the infamous Triangular Trade. The play sets out to follow the history of chocolate by looking at the political economy of cocoa; it highlights the involvement of the Swiss in the direct exploitation of slave labour in the Americas, alongside the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the French. Among them, figures such as David de Pury, from Neuchâtel, loom large and make viewers reconsider the ways in which some wealthy Swiss families acquired their fortune.

Served by a cast of actors of Swiss and African descent, Ziegler intelligently distributes the many roles amongst his multilingual crew, who alternatively break into French or German, as they are supported by subtitles. The challenging aspect of the play lies in the rapid succession of the different historical sequences, which span from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries—almost six centuries reviewed in the space of two hours on stage. The spectator may feel an overload of information. Besides most of the play focuses essentially on the actions of the European characters, for the African ones are often displayed as victims (except for two specific sequences)—even though this effect is greatly curtailed by the casting of figures such as King Louis XIV of France, played by Fidèle Baha, a brilliant actor with roots in Côte d'Ivoire. The play is grave, yet informative and entertaining—one that stays in the viewer's mind for a long time.



Scene capture of the play *Choc! La friandise des dieux* (picture: Theater Orchester Biel Solothurn 2023).

The commissioned play was commissioned and first presented by the Théâtre Orchestre Bienne Soleure in September 2023. Further shows were staged at Fribourg, Neuchâtel, and Burgdorf.



A video trailer introducing the play is available on the website of the Theatre Orchestre Bienne Soleure featuring further information.

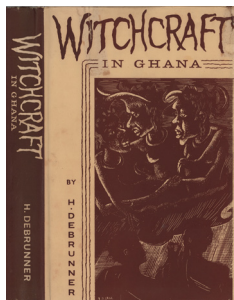
**Link:** <https://www.tobs.ch/de/schauspiel/stuecke/stueck/prod/781/>

## REPORT: REVISITING HISTORIES AND CULTURES OF AFRICAN DIASPORAS, RELIGION AND BELIEF (BASEL, 09.–10.06.2023)

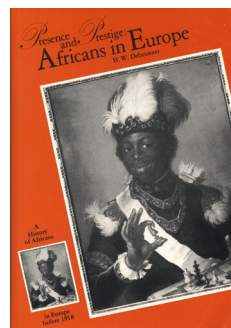
■ DAG HENRICHSEN, ERNEST SEWORDOR, VEIT ARLT

In June 2023, the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) and the Centre for African Studies of the University of Basel (ZASB) commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Hans Werner Debrunner (1923–1998) with an international Symposium entitled *Revisiting Histories of Cultures of African Diasporas, Religion and Belief*.

Debrunner was a scholar of African history and religion and a pioneer of African Studies in Switzerland. He researched *Witchcraft in Ghana* for his PhD at the University of Zurich, from where he graduated in 1956. After obtaining his degree, he lived and taught in Akropong and Accra (Ghana) in the framework of the Basel Mission and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana for several years before eventually settling in Basel (Switzerland).



Here he worked as a high school teacher with occasional academic teaching assignments and postings, maintaining a steady scholarly output throughout his life. In 1961, Debrunner published his first monograph with the Presbyterian Book Depot, a publishing house in Accra. *Witchcraft in Ghana: A study on the belief in destructive witches and its effect on the Akan tribes* built on his doctoral project. The book was widely read across the world in the decades following its publication and continues to generate interest as the Symposium illustrated. Debrunner's scholarly curiosity went beyond Africans on the Af-



rican continent as his internationally acclaimed voluminous book, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe: A History of Africans in Europe before 1818*, published by the BAB in 1979, shows. The book's appeal hinged on its substantial and timely contribution to the evolving field of African diaspora histories in Europe, including Switzerland. Building on his previous research, Debrunner pioneered seminal investigations into the history of Swiss colonial entanglements in Africa, resulting in *Schweizer im kolonialen Afrika*, likewise published by the BAB (in 1991). It is therefore befitting that the Symposium, marking the centenary of Debrunner's birth and revisiting some

of his works, was held at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien. The Symposium received the generous support of the Freie Akademische Gesellschaft (FAG), the Debrunner family, the association AfroBasel, the Basel Mission Archive at Mission 21, BAB and ZASB, altogether making it possible for a transgenerational group of scholars to convene and confer for two days. We were joined by an agile audience of local and regional scholars, others attending via Zoom.

The main programme was preceded by a modest exhibition of documents partly produced by Debrunner, curated by Patrick Moser of the Basel Mission Archive. This was followed by a city tour highlighting the relationships between Basel and Africa offered by Veit Arlt, who together with his co-organisers, Dag Henrichsen and Ernest Sewodor, opened the conference. Formerly Basel-based scholar, Cassandra Mark-Thiesen (now at the University of Bayreuth), presented the keynote address, which drew on her personal encounters with Debrunner's works and how his perspectives on knowledge production in West Africa and in Basel Mission narratives deepened her own critical reading of historiography and debates relating to decolonising African history.



Some of the participants: Nana Opere Kwakye, Susanne Hubler, Dag Henriksen, Maria Mbiti, Guy Thomas, Albert Debrunner, Meera Venkatchalam, Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, Malika Kraamer, Ablavi Amegnonka (picture: Veit Arlt 2023).

The Symposium not only brought to the fore the intellectual legacies of Debrunner, but also the discursive engagements by African intellectuals with Debrunner's (limited) understandings of local histories and belief systems.

Maria Mbiti (Berne) introduced the private archives of her father, John S. Mbiti, a prominent African theologian and philosopher. The focus on these special archives, housed in Switzerland, succinctly reminded the gathering of the importance of African intellectual heritage in Switzerland. Debrunner was very much aware of this, as made clear in his now classic *Presence and Prestige*, which charted African presence and heritage in Europe over several centuries. As Paul Grant (University of Wisconsin-Madison) emphasized: "In the last forty years, nearly every history of Africans in Europe" cited this book. His focus followed Debrunner's work on Africans living and working in Basel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the spiritual "gifts", which "Europeans received from Africans". This was underlined more broadly by the audio-visually enhanced presentation of Angelantonio Grossi (Saint Mary's College of California) on the presence and disruptions of spirits, ancestors, and priests in contemporary African diasporas and how these gain prominence by means of contemporary technological mediations.

Whilst we as organisers had anticipated some interest in Debrunner's works, we were surprised by his influence in, notably, Ghanaian historiography and local/regional discourses, and the continued relevance of his diaspora explorations. In this spirit and with the aim of "de-academising" the Symposium, a round table with the founders of the association AfroBasel, Eddyleisy Handschin-Figaro and Aaron Handschin, reflected on community concerns and possibilities of re-assessing and promoting African dias-

pora histories in Basel. Aspects of Hans W. Debrunner's personal archives, housed at the BAB, were introduced during the Symposium by his son, Albert M. Debrunner (Basel) alongside BAB archivist Susanne Hubler Baier, which altogether provided a solid foundation in order to refigure diaspora histories and thus, in part, African scholarship in Switzerland.

The Symposium demonstrated that the foundational works Debrunner produced as a missionary-cum-scholar not only elicit critical discourses amongst scholars today. More important, revisiting Debrunner's works was a crucial reminder of what has been insufficiently done and thus remains to be done—deepening our commitment, scholarly or otherwise, to understanding the histories of religions, beliefs, and cultures in global Africa, studying people of that continent, their diasporas, and longstanding connections to the wider world. The Symposium therefore stands as an invitation to bridge academic pre-occupations with impactful interventions in the real world, beginning from Basel.

**Dag Henrichsen** is responsible for academic relations and special projects at the Basler Afrikabibliographien. Contact: dh@baslerafrika.ch.

**Ernest Sewordor** earned his Master in History at the University of Ghana, Legon and a PhD in Urban Studies at the University of Basel, where he has now started a postdoc. Contact: ernest.sewordor@unibas.ch.

**Veit Arlt** is the managing director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel. Contact: veit.arlt@unibas.ch.

## REPORT: FELWINE SARR AT THE KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL (BASEL, 04.06.2023)

■ NATALIE TARR

On a warm, sunny afternoon in June, Felwine Sarr read from his new book *Les lieux qu'habitent mes rêves* (The Places where my Dreams Live), his first novel, in the new building of the Kunstmuseum Basel. Sarr is best known for his philosophical texts of political thought and action in Africa through his publications *Dahij* and *Afrotopia*. Together with Bénédicte Savoy, he has put the ongoing discussions on restitution on the academic and political agenda in 2018 with their solidly grounded publication *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. A New Relational Ethics*. A trained economist, Sarr has taught at the University Gaston Berger in Saint Louis du Senegal for over a decade before moving across the Atlantic to become a lecturer in African Philosophy at Duke University, North Carolina (USA). In fact, his father wanted him to study something solid, like engineering, Sarr told the audience. He himself would have preferred taking classes in literature and philosophy. In the end, economics seemed to be the in-between subject both his father and he could live with. Now, some decades later, his wish seems to have been heard.

So today, we had the chance to get to know Felwine Sarr as a poet and writer of fiction. Henri Michel Yéré, senior lecturer at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel and a published poet himself, moderated the event, while actress Elmira Bahrami read excerpts from the German translation. While talking about how he became a writer and researcher, Sarr commented that he believed it better for a writer's training not to study literature. This rings a bell with all those in the audience who have deliberated on the topic of creative writing classes and honing one's writing skills since other well-known writers second Sarr's belief. Yéré continued his conversation with Sarr, saying that in dealing with one's own reality, we need to poetically inhabit the



world. Indeed, the first task of poetry is to open readers' eyes. Remaining lucid is thus a must, being at the basis of understanding and accepting reality, Sarr believes.

Yéré went on to ask Sarr if *Les Lieux* was in part autobiographical since one character comes from Orléans, where Sarr had studied. It seemed, Yéré continued, that Sarr was paying tribute to people and places who helped him become who he is today. Now Elmira Bahrami introduced the novel by reading some pages describing a day in one of the twin brother's life, the main characters in *Les Lieux*. The brother described in this passage is a well-known and cherished marabout in Senegal and Sarr emphasized that he wanted to depict the fantastic in a simple way in order to normalize it. Spirituality and esoterism are part of everyday life but have been brutalized. They need to be accepted as different orders of knowledge, Sarr emphasized. Many people, western educated Africans included, see this as superstition. Little has been written about goodness in relationships, Sarr commented, publishers always asking for conflict. But in Sarr's novel the two brothers love each other and are closely connected spiritually.

In order to portray the two brothers, one of whom stayed in Senegal while the other one emigrated, Sarr said that it is important to also portray the people close to them. He took this opportunity and let people enter his novel whom he had encountered in real life, paying tribute to them. Yéré then went on to ask Sarr about his thoughts on restitution, a discussion, which has been ongoing and has evolved since the publication of Sarr and Savoy's report in 2018. African youth need to gain a sense of aesthetic confidence, Sarr believes. Africa does not have to catch up to anything or anyone, he continued, alluding to the economist Thandika Mkandawire's speech in 2011. Instead, Africa needs to realize its full potential. It is like the pain of a missing limb, Sarr explained, which disappears if you get a mirror showing this missing limb. Restitution is like that, something is missing, but no one knows what exactly is missing.

Felwine Sarr (picture: Guillaume Perret 2023).

To conclude, a person in the audience asked Sarr, if he had the opportunity to re-write the book, would he write it in the same way? Writing is a process, Sarr answered, doors open along the way. If you have a plan, chaos cannot be heard, but while writing, he lets chaos come in and tries to understand it. So, in the end, you will write what you have to say, not what you wanted to say.

**Natalie Tarr** is linguistic anthropologist and associated researcher at the Centre for African Studies, University of Basel. She is also the founder and co-curator of The Africa Bookshelf, a collection of works of fiction and faction, whose storyline is situated in Africa. Contact: [natalie.tarr@unibas.ch](mailto:natalie.tarr@unibas.ch). **Link:** <https://tinyurl.com/Africabookshelf>.

## REPORT: AFRICAN STUDIES PARTNER WITH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES FOR CONFERENCE (BASEL 31.08.-01.09.2023)

■ ALEXANDRA HOFMÄNNER, ALAIN MÜLLER, PASCAL SCHMID, AND VEIT ARLT

At the end of August 2023, the Centre for African Studies and the Department of Social Science of the University of Basel co-hosted the bi-annual conference of the Swiss Association for the Study of Science, Technology, and Society (STS-CH). It attracted some 200 scholars from a variety of academic disciplines and fields of study, 40 percent of whom came from institutions abroad. Under the title *Science, Expertise, and Other Modes of Knowledge: Trends, Patterns, and Prospects*, the conference offered opportunities for these scholars to exchange and discuss issues in more than 30 panels.

Special session *The dynamics of knowledge and policy: The social sciences and humanities in Africa* at the STS-CH 2023 conference (picture: Niamh O'Neill 2023).



The opening words to the conference were offered by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Basel, Martin Lengwiler—incidentally, one of the founding members of the STS-CH association some twenty years ago. Bruce Lewenstein (Cornell University, USA) opened the conference with a keynote on *Citizen science, participation, inclusion...and STS*. The first day was closed by the public Carl Schlettwein Lecture of the Centre for African Studies, which was presented by Fredrick Ogenga (Rongo University, Kenya). His topic was *Pan-African Digital Peacebuilding*. The keynote of the second day was presented by Sally Wyatt (Maastricht University, Netherlands) who engaged with the effect of 9/11 on Science and Technology Studies and its evolution since that time.

The STS-CH 2023 conference drew a large crowd. The encounter between African and Science Studies proved very fruitful (picture: Niamh O'Neill 2023).



The large number of participants effectively displayed areas of common interest to the fields of African Studies and STS: panels raised a variety of topics such as knowledge politics, policies, and governance; public health; life sciences; feminist materialism; the Anthropocene; science in citizenship and state-building; IT, computing, digitization; innovation and entrepreneurship; sociotechnical transitions; technological infrastructures, and many more.

As interdisciplinary fields of research and teaching, both African Studies and STS are accustomed to engaging with topics across different disciplinary traditions. However, physically bringing together scholars from these two interdisciplinary fields provided an exceptionally inspiring opportunity for personal exchange. Contacts were established between scholars that would have otherwise not met at scholarly events in their own fields of study.

More broadly, the conference provided a venue for engaging the many common intellectual issues that these two interdisciplinary fields bring to the table. A panel discussion was held on *STS and the Global Politics of Knowledge* to offer a focused forum for such issues, including the discussants Henri Michel Yéré, Elísio Macamo, Lerato Posholi, Bruce Lewenstein, and Amit Prasad. This panel was organised by Alexandra Hofmänner and Nil Uzun, and was chaired by Torsten Voigt and Sally Wyatt.

The conference organisers actively advocated for participation by researchers from the Global South and successfully raised travel funds from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). In addition, the ZASB ran its Summer School for PhD candidates under the auspices of Elísio Macamo and Pascal Schmid during the week running up to the conference. This timing afforded these PhD students the opportunity to participate in the conference proceedings. The summer school was dedicated to the topic *Making knowledge policy-relevant: The SSH's role in global sustainable development*. This year's group of summer school doctoral candidates—from Ghana, Senegal, Cam-



eroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Togo, Congo, Angola, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Germany, and Switzerland—was exceptionally motivated and their presence greatly enriched the conference. In particular, they presented some of the outcomes of their discussions at the Summer School in a special session on *The dynamics of knowledge and policy: The social sciences and humanities in Africa*, chaired by Elísio Macamo.

Bringing together scholars and expertise from African Studies and STS created a memorable moment for both academic communities. We would like to express our gratitude to the Swiss Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Swiss National Science Foundation, the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel, the Research Network Africa ZASB, and the Swiss Academy of Sciences for their financial support, to the Centre for African Studies and the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Basel for their institutional backing, and to the student assistants for their dedicated support in the run-up and during the conference proceedings.

#### **6<sup>TH</sup> BASEL SUMMER SCHOOL IN AFRICAN STUDIES: MAKING KNOWLEDGE POLICY-RELEVANT: THE SSH'S ROLE IN GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Graduate students are typically highly motivated to carry out research that is relevant to current policy issues and benefits society. Standard practices and traditions of scientific knowledge production, however, do not guarantee that these objectives can be achieved in the context of graduate research projects. There is a need for training courses that address theoretical and conceptual issues and practical challenges. The Basel Summer School in African Studies 2023 addressed the challenge of policy relevance in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in general and in area studies in particular.

The participants of the 6<sup>th</sup> Basel Summer School in African Studies with Alexandra Hofmänner, Fabian Kaeser and Marion Bétizeau (picture: Pascal Schmid 2023).

The overall aim of the Summer School was to support participants in developing conceptual, theoretical, and practical tools to live up to the highest scientific standards and to leverage the transformative potential of their respective research projects. To achieve this, the program included interactive training sessions, presentations and discussion of the participants' individual research, a practice-oriented Advanced Study Skills workshop, as well as participation in the international conference *Science, Expertise, and Other Modes of Knowledge: Trends, Patterns, and Prospects* (see above). The Leading House Africa provided funding for ten PhD candidates from African universities to participate in the programme. The number of 16 participants allowed for intensive engagements throughout the programme.

Six training sessions with specialized faculty introduced participants to epistemological debates, theoretical and methodological foundations, and case studies concerning the relation between basic and applied knowledge, the transfer of knowledge, and the



development and implementation of policies. Three afternoons were reserved for the presentation and discussion of the participants' respective research projects, focusing on methodological issues. In lively discussions, participants benefitted from the feedback from the Summer School faculty and engaged in discussions among their peers. An Advanced Study Skills workshop introduced participants to concepts and practical tools for transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge, which they then applied to their respective project. A pitching session with resource persons from the research-policy nexus allowed students to prepare a targeted and concise presentation of their research and to improve their presentation skills.

Linking the Summer School to the 2023 conference of the Swiss Association for the Studies of Science, Technology & Society (STS-CH 2023) proved to be of great benefit. Summer School participants not only presented the results of their group work in a special session, but also had the opportunity to attend and contribute to the panel discussions and to network with the international conference audience.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENT: 6<sup>TH</sup> CODESRIA-ZASB SUMMER SCHOOL ON AFRICAN STUDIES**

The theme of the Basel summer school will be picked up in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Codesria-ZASB summer school on African Studies and Area Studies in Africa, which will be held in Dakar from 26–31 August 2024. The call will be circulated by CODESRIA shortly. **Link:** [www.codesria.org](http://www.codesria.org).

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## REPORT: CONJUNCTIONS OF ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC SPHERES: EMBODIED HISTORIES, MEMORY, AND MULTI-MEDIA ARCHIVES IN AND FROM AFRICA (BASEL 18.–20.10.2023)

■ DAG HENRICHSEN

The international conference *Conjunctions of Archives and Public Spheres*, organised in Basel by the Centre for African Studies and the Basler Afrika Bibliographien on behalf of the Swiss Society for African Studies, can be regarded as a highlight in this year's activities of the African Studies network in Basel. 26 presenting scholars from all echelons of the career and from three different continents, among them ten from southern Africa, provided multiple, critical, and creative perspectives, all discussed in particularly lively and at times controversial ways by an attentive audience. Up to 50 persons attended on site, others joined online.

The initial call for papers already indicated that the main themes of the conference—con- and disjunctions of archives and public spheres, multi-media archives and intermediality, (de-)coloniality, memorialisation, and heritage practices—resonated with timely concerns amongst historians, anthropologists, media and museum scholars as well as curatorial and performative practitioners. Their varied contributions (see the conference programme below), offering case studies from or with regard to various African regions and from historical as well as contemporary collections, provided succinct examples of re-visiting, re-configuring or discovering (neglected) collections and public ways of memorialisation. Switzerland-related archives (BAB's so called Dammann multi-media collections, the film collection of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, and the Namibia collection at the Bernisches Historisches Museum) were scrutinized in particular whilst one of two *Creative Encounter* sessions introduced the Basel-based *Blackfluencer* digital archives project on contemporary African diaspora narratives in Switzerland.



Recorded performance, Omaruru (Namibia), 1954 (picture: Ernst und Ruth Damann, BAB PA.39 D01 1281).

On the one hand, critical debate focused recurrently on the known and yet challenging epistemic colonialities of archives, scholars, and research institutions alike. On the other hand, multiple decolonial approaches were introduced, not the least necessitated by engagements by post-colonial publics with historical narratives, as in the case of imaginaries relating to a Senegalese religious leader or with reference to new performative productions of experience and knowledge in the fields of African fashion or social media landscapes.

Some scholars queried and grappled with “the place and space of embodied histories in audio-visual archives” (Ferdinand de Jong), whereas others raised probing questions



with regard to “the other archives” such as “the undisciplined and ephemeral archives that cannot be archived” (Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja), with public performative creations and artists as mediations/mediators.

Whilst often engaging with the “repressive rationalities and fantasies” of colonial archives (Lorena Rizzo), some contributions opened up ways to highlight and yet transform such limitations (and ideologies) in imaginative forms. In this respect, the Swiss premiere of the film “Under the Hanging Tree” by director and scholar Perivi Katjavivi during the second “Creative Encounter” with its entangled narratives on post-colonial crime and multi-generational colonial trauma proved particularly convincing.

Most presenters visited Basel for the first time, generating multiple potential future relationships of various sorts. The multi-generational scholarly, curatorial, as well as art-practising audience made for particular lively debates and gave space for numerous (self-) critical reflections for each and every one, not least for the Swiss institutions involved or discussed. At present, the organisers are reviewing the presented contributions in order to select a few for publication.

The organisers are very grateful to the board of the Swiss Society of African Studies, who accepted the conference proposition in the first place, negotiated the support by the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences and further supported the conference days by also conducting its General Assembly during the event. We are once again thankful to the Academy and the Freie Akademische Gesellschaft who funded the travels and expenses of African scholars, in particular. As always, the presence of our colleagues from the South proved to be crucial.

Filmstill *Under the Hanging Tree* (Perivi Katjavivi 2023).

## PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2023 (PRE-CONFERENCE)

14.00–16.00 Guided tour of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien

16.00–18.00 *Africa in Basel* city tour curated by CAS

THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2023

9.30–10.00 Welcome- Dag Henrichsen (BAB) & Lorena Rizzo (CASB)

10.00–12.00 Session 1: Colonial Archives, Multi- and Intermediality

Chair: Giorgio Miescher, CAS, University of Basel

Morgan Robinson (Mississippi State University): *‘Um Lamu Herum’*:

*Documenting Spaces of Knowledge Production*

Anka Schürer-Ries (University of Bayreuth): *The Dammann Album(s) @*

*Iwalewahaus—between Digital Spheres, Repatriation & Colonial Debates*

Fabian Krautwald (Binghamton University): *In the Footsteps of Empire:*

*Ernst and Ruth Dammann’s Quest for Memory in East and Southern Africa*

13.00–15.00 Session 2: Embodied Knowledges. Re-claimed Archives 1

Chair: Kadiatou Diallo, CAS, University of Basel

Christoph Rippe (Independent Scholar, Berlin): *The Extended Archive of the Mariannahill Mission—Photographs and other Objects in Situations of Intermediality*

Rory Kahiya Tsapayi (University of the Western Cape): *The Pirate Tourist: Incongruities of Genre in an Anthropological Photo Archive*

Ferdinand de Jong (New Europe College): *The 'Smile' of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba: Registers of Refusal in the Public Sphere*

15.30–17.30 Session 3: Embodied Knowledges. Re-claimed Archives 2  
Chair: Aden Kumler, Art History, University of Basel

Ndjaka Mtsetwene (University of Lucerne): *Historical Syncopation: The Convergence of Western Historicisation and African Philosophies of Historicisation in Sound Archives in the Context of Sonic Afromodernity*  
Siviwe James (African Fashion Research Institute, South Africa): *The Archiving and Remaking of a Memory Project*  
Till Förster (University of Basel): *Looking Back to the Future. Pictures, Images, and Discursive Formations about Lies and Realities*

18.00–19.00 Creative encounters I: Podcasts

Elisa da Costa (University of Basel): *Blackfluencers—Centering Black People and their Narratives in Switzerland*

FRIDAY 20 OCTOBER 2023

9.00–10.00 Keynote

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (Independent Scholar, Windhoek) & Martha Akawa (University of Namibia): *Archival F(r)ictions*

10.00–12.00 Session 4: Media, Politics, Economies, and Infrastructures  
Chair: George Meiu, Anthropology, University of Basel

Raffaele Perniola (University of Basel): *Scratches in the Record—Namibian Music Archives—Practices, Accessibility, Tensions, Audiences & Outlooks*

Estrella Samba-Campos (Universidad Complutense de Madrid): *The Sound-Text Archive of Muslim Women of West Africa and Mustian Communities in Sierra-Leone through Social Media: New Digital Agencies and Practices of Creed*

13.00–15.00 Session 5: Mediations, Transformations, Publics and Heritage 1  
Chair: Ute Holl, Media Studies, University of Basel

Mario Schulze (University of Lucerne): *Research Film Provenance. The 16mm Film Collection of the Former Swiss Tropical Institute*  
Anette Hoffmann (University of Cologne): *Creating Sound Installations with Historical Recordings: Two Examples from the Lautarchiv in Berlin*  
Madeleine Leclair (Musée d'Ethnographie, Geneva): *Sonic lecture on the exhibition project 'Afrosonica—Soundscapes'*

15.30–17.30 Session 6: Mediations, Transformations, Publics and Heritage 2

Ndapewoshali Ashipala, Tuuda Haitula, Chalden Sabab, Wilhelmina Uupindi, Yvett //Hoëbes (Museums Association of Namibia) & Samuel Bachmann, Anna-Pierina Godenzi, Nadia Djibrilla (Bernisches Historisches Museum): *The Organic Museum—Continuous Transformation*

18.15–19.15 SSAS General Assembly / Annual Meeting

19.30 Creative Encounters 2: Film Screening & Discussion  
Perivi Katjavivi (University of Namibia): *Under the Hanging Tree* (2023)

## REPORT: SYMPOSIUM “50 YEARS MEDICUS MUNDI SWITZERLAND: THE CHANGING ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH COOPERATION AND GLOBAL HEALTH” (BASEL, 02.11.2023)

■ NATALIE TARR AND MARTINA STAENKE

The discussion on decolonization and decolonizing partnerships, work, and how we go about collaborating internationally is a topic the NGO world has put high on its agenda. While the concepts of decolonization and decoloniality still need further reflection, their political demands correspond with a critical assessment and self-assessment of aid as expressed by actors within and outside the aid sector, also in the field of international health cooperation. To mark its 50-year anniversary, Medicus Mundi Switzerland (MMS) organized a one-day symposium to reflect about the work of internationally active NGOs, civil society organizations, and trans-continental partnerships with regard to this call for decolonization. MMS is a network organization of Swiss NGOs and professionals working in international health cooperation. As such, it provides a platform for its members to exchange knowledge, experience, and ideas and to collaborate.

The president of MMS, René Stäheli, welcomed the audience by contextualizing the year that MMS was established, reminding the audience of the many globally influential events MMS's founding year, 1973, contained: Richard Nixon was still US president, the oil crisis or oil shock targeting countries, who had supported Israel during the Yom Kippur war was in full swing at the end of 1973, Pinochet had coup d'état-ed his way into power in Chile, to name just these few. Before proceeding to the first part of the symposium entitled *Are we ready for decolonization?*, a trilingual video message in Italian, German, and French by Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis officially opened the symposium.



Sulakshana Nandi (WHO Europe) stressed the importance of decolonization for health equity (photo: Christoph Engeli MMS 2023).

### ARE WE READY FOR DECOLONIZATION?

Who produces what knowledge and how, was the main question Sulakshana Nandi of WHO Europe reflected upon in her speech. This question was supported by others: What knowledge informs our decisions? Who gathers it and how? Who do NGOs from the global North support why and how? The experiences globally active NGO workers highlight and use in their work are those experiences that guide how health programs are conceptualized and, ultimately, who will benefit from them on the ground. The point Nandi stressed was that anytime a global organization becomes active, thorough research of the space, where work will be conducted, is needed. Understanding the

Labila Sumayah Musoke and Thomas Schwarz presenting the report on Swiss NGOs (photo: Christoph Engeli MMS 2023).

social organization of a society, the hierarchies, how communication functions, or the role and power of elites, is crucial to sustainable work and cooperation, she concluded.

Next, J. Carolyn Gomes, vice chair of the Global Fund, took up this thought in her speech, questioning the role civil society has or should have in working towards a more equal world. Because one prerequisite for health for all is a just, inclusive, equitable society. How can we know, Gomes asked, sitting in our silos, ruminating? This last sentence can be emphasized on the *can* or the *know*. Gomes stressed the inter-connectivity of racism, white supremacy, and the colonial remnant in global health. This does not only perpetuate the inferior status of the people, but also penetrates our organizations and the work we do. Colonial structures in aid-giving pervade how funding institutions distribute grants. So, we need to be able to answer questions such as who represents whom? Who do we listen to? Who and what do we need to challenge? We must ask ourselves hard questions and we need to look at the unconscious biases, which still exist in ourselves and in our organizations. We need a paradigm shift in global health that no longer questions that countries in the Global South can solve their own health problems.

International aid is indeed a complex undertaking. This was highlighted by a comment from the audience, calling for a reorientation of funding structures to prioritize (long term) movements instead of (terminal) projects. An understanding of local politics, civil society, and social organization is imperative for equitable partnerships to function, be this locally or among partners in international collaborations. The presentation by Medicus Mundi International representatives Labila Sumayah Musoke and Thomas Schwarz introduced a report based on their joint mandate from MMS titled



*Swiss NGOs engaged in international health cooperation: How to respond to the call for decolonization?*. The report summarizes the votes of network members on how they have taken up the call for decolonization and what can be done to push this process much further. Key areas where action is needed as identified by Network members include concrete steps in the fields of communication, programme management, financing modalities, and the overall setup of partnerships and collaborations. The report concludes with the question: “What next steps to be done as a Network?” and most important “Walk the talk” and “Act locally”.

Keeping the big picture in mind seems to be an obvious prerequisite for NGOs work, but is not always lived up to by their representatives on-site. Maybe it is a question of



not being able to see the forest for the trees. Classism within countries and/or internal corruption of elites is not a topic willingly spoken about or investigated in detail by international organizations when decisions about aid are made. These reflections were continued in the panel discussion closing the first part of the symposium. Here, professionals from three different Swiss NGOs came together. The discussants dealt with the question “Are we ready for decolonization?”; the “we” refers both to those bringing or giving aid—the NGOs—and to those receiving it. Here, Axelle Kabou’s book *Et si l’Afrique refusait le développement?*, published in 1991, on how Africa could refuse development as defined by the global North, animated the discussion. In her text, debated across disciplines then as well as now, the Cameroonian economist and development specialist criticized foreign aid concepts. But Kabou also took African elites to account for relying on this aid instead of deciding themselves what kind of “development” their countries were supposed to work towards.

### **INSIGHTS INTO THE PROCESS OF DECOLONIZATION BY MMS MEMBERS**

During the half-hour coffee break that followed, colleagues took the opportunity for mellow networking and reactivating old connections. With renewed energy the audience as well as the speakers were ready to delve into the second part of the symposium, dedicated to insights into the process of decolonization by MMS members. This second part started with a joint talk on decolonization processes by Terre des hommes Switzerland’s (tdh CH) representatives Hafid Derbal, working from Basel, and his colleague Tayson Mudarikiri, based in Harare, tdh co-program coordinators for Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa. The main question they put to the audience was: How can we be drivers of change? Thinking about this, NGO workers need to keep their position within the organization in mind. Derbal and Mudarikiri offered several possibilities to work towards more equitable collaborations, their own co-running of a program being the best example. One important prerequisite, they suggested, is that programs be implemented by local partners, while Swiss partners help with fundraising. This ideally results in co-lead programs such as theirs. Knowledge Hubs in the part-

ner country in the Global South are responsible for the production and gathering of local knowledge, needed for projects to be adequately designed, implemented, and led.

The two tdh CH colleagues renewed the call for funding of movements (instead of projects) made earlier with a similar suggestion: Support advocacy! Young people have to be included in decision-making processes as well, they need to be able to participate in translating programs into action on the ground. Training them or creating opportunities and spaces for training can be a good place to start this process. Martin Gallard, responsible for partnership projects at the Foundation tdh in Lausanne, also emphasized how important a shift in power dynamics is in his presentation. Gallard seconded Derbal and Mudarikiri’s call for the localization of aid, this being a first step towards decolonizing aid. Now, we need to also look at funding, partnership, governance, and management. In other words, we need to look carefully at who makes the decisions. To conclude, Gallard stressed the importance of language. How we use language and which language we use are crucial; images matter, his two colleagues had mentioned as well.

Funding agencies are a tough terrain to break through or into, however. They are not interested in decolonization debates and continue to be structured in a very top-down way. This of course will not stop aid organizations and workers from internally debating these questions. We need to check our privileges and keep our eyes open to what we will and want to become in our international cooperation and partnerships. Challenging the structures of funding agencies is one more step towards this goal.

The Novartis Foundation was present at the symposium with the director of Population Health Johannes Boch. He made a strong argument in favour of creating Health Tec Hubs in African partner countries, a thought along similar lines as tdh’s Knowledge Hubs mentioned above. Boch said local ownership of projects and intersectoral collaboration were a must if we wanted to truly work equitably. We need to keep asking

what, exactly, the added value of Novartis Foundation—or an NGO from the global North—is to the local situation and reality. Local steering committees could be responsible to ensure these questions were asked and answered.

Swiss Red Cross (SRC) colleagues Fortunat Büsch, based in Berne, and Atobian-Kouassi Kokouvi in Lomé, talked about the transformation process the SRC is presently implementing. They, too, stressed how central it was that people talked about the importance of language. In this vein, international cooperation partners can empower local communities by speaking of them as resilient instead of labelling them as vulnerable. The two colleagues presented the discussion presently going on between the SRC and the Benin Red Cross (BRC) and how the two organizations can become partners. Modelling their partnership on the well-established one between the Togo RC and the SRC, the BRC has a good example it can follow. By partnering with the SRC, the BRC can reposition itself with the Benin Ministry of Health and the government in general, striving towards a smoother running of their projects.

The second part of the symposium was concluded with a Q&A session. One question from the audience put to the panellists was how international aid donors could ensure the decolonization process was not misused as ethics washing. A delicate question that needs to be taken into consideration continuously by all parties involved. Now presenters and the audience put the extended lunch break to good use by eating and for animated discussions and networking.

## **MONEY IS POWER**

The afternoon started off with a short quiz, testing the attention level of participants and making sure everybody was back on track. After this playful digestive wake-up, Cheikh Mbacke Gueye, director of the Medicor Foundation and trained philosopher, held a refreshingly different presentation. This last session was dedicated to the statement *Money is Power*. Gueye, based in Liechtenstein, presented without PowerPoint

slides, which allowed the audience to fully concentrate on his words. Gueye elaborated on the question if cooperation at eye level was possible at all. For it to become possible, we need to continuously engage with our bubbles and reflect on our work and how we work. Participation, he continued, is about empowering those that are not heard. Here also Gueye stressed the point made earlier that we should not fund projects, but instead need to concentrate on institutions—and these we need to fund directly.

In order to attain this goal, we need to engage with what Gueye called cultural interpreters and translators. They are crucial to grasp the complexity of a society. Cultural sensitivity is at the heart of sustainable projects. And learning from one's mistakes is crucial for an organization's growth. Reports thus need to include also those things that went wrong so that mistakes could be learned from, Gueye concluded.

## **HOW WILL THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH COOPERATION LOOK LIKE IN 15 YEARS?**

The last panel concentrated on the questions "How does a meaningful and responsible international health cooperation look like in 2040?" and "What will be the role of western NGOs in global health in 2040?"

To summarise, it can be said that there was a visionary position and a somewhat sober view of the situation in 15 years. The majority would like to see international health cooperation based on partnership at eye level, solidarity, resource sharing, and exchange of knowledge.

They would like to establish a culture of listening in depth what the needs of the people in a certain context are. International NGOs should no longer disrespect the experience and knowledge of national NGOs or poach talented people from them. Overall, we should always keep the spirit of the Alma Ata Declaration in mind and not lose sight of the goal of "health for all".



Panel Discussion with Kaspar Wyss (Swiss TPH); Itai Rusike (CWGH/MMI); Lorenz Indermühle (FAIRMED); Sulakshana Nandi (WHO Europe) on the question *How Will the International Health Cooperation Look Like in 15 Years?* (photo: Christoph Engeli MMS 2023).

presentations by different professionals at the symposium. Looking in from the outside into this NGO bubble, I was happy to learn that creating more equitable partnerships is a wish taken seriously for shaping North-South collaboration. What I missed, however, was more trans-disciplinary engagements, communicating with colleagues/experts outside the NGO world. As the colonial discipline par excellence, questioning our methodology and decolonizing our work has been at the core of anthropological ruminations for decades. Looking beyond one's silo or bubble, we can discover exciting, relevant, and new concepts and ways of going about trans-continental work. As the symposium has called for, an ongoing critical reflection of the work, partnerships, research, and collaborations is needed. A first step has been done, now let us continue to stay on our toes.

The somewhat sober view assumes that monetary support for the Global South will gradually decrease, as armed conflicts and climate change mean that countries increasingly need the money to deal with their own disasters. It is therefore more necessary than ever to empower people in the communities and give them the skills to take care of themselves.

From a global perspective, it is important that the global community does not give up the fight against poverty and social inequality, just as NGOs must do more than ever before at a political level to go for a change of the financial and economic world order.

As a linguistic anthropologist, I (Natalie) was thrilled to see that the importance of language, interpretation, and translation—in its wider sense—was mentioned in different

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This report and further information are available on the website of Medicus Mundi Schweiz. **Link:** [www.medicumundi.ch](http://www.medicumundi.ch).

# RESEARCH • RECHERCHE • FORSCHUNG

## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND EXHIBITIONS ON HERBAL MEDICINE IN UGANDA AND SWITZERLAND

■ THOMAS LAELY

Uganda is rarely mentioned in the Swiss media—except, in recent months, for its harsh repression of sexual minorities or the dubious success of the cyber currency “World-coin”, with which newcomers seem to be able to earn quick money (NZZ 03.10.2023). On the ground, however, it is estimated that more than 80% of the Ugandan population has no secure access to medical facilities, biomedicine, or hospitals in the Western tradition. People continue to rely largely on traditional herbal medicine, which remains one of the cornerstones of the Ugandan health system.

During the Covid19 pandemic, the inadequacy of public medical care in Uganda worsened, with serious consequences especially for women and children. This led to an increased interest in traditional, mainly herbal medicine, both among the public and health authorities. The WHO generally encourages African member-states to promote traditional medicine (TM) and its practices and to integrate them into their health systems. However, TM in Uganda is confronted with a loss of biodiversity cultural heritage. These issues must be addressed if TM is to be a part of future primary health care, a source of innovation, and a socially and environmentally stabilizing cultural heritage.

Two Ugandan museums, the Uganda National Museum and the privately run Igongo Cultural Centre, which have been involved in a collaboration with the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich (UZH) since 2015 ([www.pointsofview.uzh.ch](http://www.pointsofview.uzh.ch)), came up with the idea of developing exhibitions on medicinal plants, widespread in both countries to this day. We have reported on this topic in a previous issue of this newsletter (see Newsletter 2/2020). In this context, museums are primarily understood as platforms for communication and dissemination as well as a means of shar-



The Ugandan-Swiss project team at Kampala International University (photos: Thomas Laely 2023).

ing, with which a broader, also rural audience can be reached, especially if they take the form of traveling exhibitions. The topic is of great importance today, as complementary medicine in Uganda is threatened from several sides.

On the one hand, there is the question of how to ensure that the relevant, sometimes secret, knowledge is passed on to the next generation. On the other hand, it is necessary to secure the tree and plant population, which is threatened in certain cases. Furthermore, there is the problem of biopiracy, in which commercial, national, and often transnational companies seek to patent the relevant knowledge for their own use in order to obtain Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). They thus exclude others from commercial exploitation or to demand royalties for use.

*Traditional Medicine in Transition Workshop held in Mbarara in October 2023 (photo: Thomas Laely).*

Most of the funds for the exhibitions in Uganda were raised from the Public Benefit Fund (Lottery Fund) of the Canton of Zurich. They are supplemented by contributions from the Ugandan museums. In preparing the exhibitions, it became apparent that further research is needed, both in the fields of ethnobotany, epidemiology, and the broader socio-cultural context. At the beginning of 2023, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), under its new *Solution-oriented Research for Development* (SOR4D) program, launched jointly with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation SDC, made a substantial contribution to the project. It was developed in 2022 by the Department of Systematic and Evolutionary Botany/Botanical Garden UZH together with several Ugandan institutes: Makerere University, Kampala, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara, Kampala International University, as well as the Dr. Sekagya Institute of Traditional Medicine/PROMETRA Uganda, based in Mpigi, plus several Traditional Healers Associations and Botanical Gardens.

Our Swiss partners, in addition to the Botanical Institute and Garden UZH, are the Zurich-Basel Plant Science Center (ETH/UZH/Basel University) and the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies at UZH. The exhibitions will be curated in mobile, traveling, and digital forms, and are conceived not only in a distinctly participatory way by all partners involved, but will also embrace cross-cultural parts: Swiss herbal medicine is to be the subject of exhibitions and research too, given that the Ugandan partners have been keenly interested in it since the beginning.

Hence, in February 2020, shortly before the Covid19 pandemic, representatives of the Ugandan museums came to Switzerland for an initial exploration of local herbal medicine. Separate exhibitions designed together with the Ugandan curators are planned



for Switzerland for 2025 and 2026. If they will feature mobile and digital formats as in Uganda in addition to the stationary exhibit, remains to be clarified.

A kick-off meeting with all partners took place in Kampala, Mpigi, and Mbarara in Uganda from 25 September to 5 October 2023. The workshops involved the research assistants of the different institutes as well as other stakeholders. The aim was to get to know each other and to jointly discuss and decide on content-related and methodological questions of research organization and implementation. Part of the discussion was the participatory photovoice method which is intended to ensure that several perspectives are brought in through a bottom-up process. The photovoice methodol-

ogy was introduced by Mélanie Surchat, who works at ETH Zurich. We established contact with Mélanie in October 2022 at the Swiss Researching Africa Days (SRAD), where she presented her research on waste workers in Rwanda, Uganda's southwestern neighbor.

An important part of the workshop consisted in time and budget planning so as to be harmonized among all participants. This included further necessary fundraising, since the financing of important parts of the project is not yet secured. These include the exhibitions in Switzerland, the construction of demonstration herb gardens in Uganda, and the cost of obtaining a permit to conduct research in Uganda. The research permit must be obtained from the Ministry of Justice and submitted to the National Council of Science and Technology and its National Ethics Review Committee. The process requires submitting the research plans and questionnaires and having them translated into each of the local languages in the selected Ugandan districts. Additionally, it is necessary that the compensation rates for all participants and respondents are defined. For this purpose, the corresponding committee provides standards that vary according to the cost-of-living index of the individual districts in Uganda. Finally, to avoid local resistance during the research, the local authorities and stakeholders have to be called together and informed at the beginning of each period of fieldwork; their transportation needs to be organized and paid for and refreshments offered.

Communicating the aims of the study and the use of the data must be based on "informed consent". For this purpose, the planned benefit of sharing shall be presented to and discussed with all stakeholders, especially with the healers. First and foremost, their fear of being exploited and that the shared knowledge will be sold off must be overcome. Finally, looking at all the activities and costs, it became clear to the participating institutes that the planned research would have to be strongly cut down in order to stay within the cost and time frame. It remains to be seen how far the goals

set can be achieved. These include the sensitization for the significance of traditional medical plant knowledge and skills and its natural and cultural resources in Ugandan society. That TM can contribute to an improved healthcare service and overall health needs to be communicated together with its effectiveness—safe plant-based home remedies. In this regard, museums are expected to play an essential role as communication and dissemination vehicles. They shall ensure a sustainable knowledge transfer and access to reliable plant knowledge as well as promoting a sustained cultivation and use of medicinal plants in appropriate plant gardens. The workshop in Uganda has definitely helped to approach the project with more realistic expectations and to create a basis for a transparent and at the same time critical collaboration between the quite diverse partners.

**Thomas Laely** is an associated researcher at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, University of Zurich (ISEK). Contact: [thomas.laely@uzh.ch](mailto:thomas.laely@uzh.ch).

## STORING FOOD IN CERAMICS. MULTISCALAR AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF STORAGE JARS USED IN THE LOWER NILE VALLEY (EGYPT AND SUDAN) DURING THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

■ ADELINE BATS

The theme of food storage takes center stage in the study of human societies, providing information about diverse societies' strategies in ensuring population food security and the multifaceted utilization of agricultural surpluses and policies. However, in today's context, food reserves are commonly housed in metal silos equipped with refrigerated airflow to thwart cereal overheating and mold development. Additionally, the incorporation of phytosanitary products further fortifies protection against pests and decay. This industrialized approach to cereals management, coupled with the dynamics of the global grain market, has fundamentally reshaped our perspective on food product management. Therefore, the shift has led to a loss of traditional technical knowledge and agricultural expertise, impeding our capacity to scrutinize the strategies and choices made by ancient or non-industrialized societies.

### THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF FOOD STORAGE

Since the 1980s, the exploration of storage history has gained considerable momentum, driven in large part by François Sigaut (1940–2012, scholar at EHESS). He focused on the conditions created by humans to ensure the efficient preservation of perishable foodstuffs. However, for ancient societies in the northern Nile Valley, the issue of food storage has rarely been directly explored and has been sporadically studied through iconographic, textual, or archaeological data. The primary focus of these studies often revolves around estimating ration quantities or delving into the social organization of stock management. However, the crucial technical aspect—specifically, conservation atmospheres—has been consistently overlooked. As a result, these studies frequently



Jars discovered in a storeroom at Ayn Soukhna (picture: Georges Castel, Ayn Soukhna archaeological mission 2014).

interchange the terms “granary” and “silo”, erroneously treating them as synonymous, disregarding the distinct characteristics of the preserved commodities, and proposing socio-economic interpretations of dubious nature. These inaccuracies can be attributed to the fact that the works of François Sigaut and those associated with his program were primarily published in French, resulting in limited global dissemination.

For ancient Egypt and Nubia, storage devices were plentiful, with mud-brick silos and jars standing out as the primary ones. While I have already explored the functionality and applications of mud-brick silos, my current focus is to delve into the uses of jar

storage in the northern Nile Valley. This entails a comprehensive study drawing on all available sources to identify the variables and constants in the utilization of these containers. Jars may have served purposes ranging from domestic storage to the exchange of foodstuffs.

### **THE COURSE OF THE STORINJAR PROJECT (DECEMBER 2023 TO NOVEMBER 2025)**

To conduct my investigation, I have privileged access to various unpublished corpora, including jars unearthed at Ayn Soukhna (an Egyptian archaeological site affiliated with Sorbonne University, the Institut français d'archéologie orientale Ifao in Cairo, and the Suez Canal University), those housed in the gallery storerooms discovered at Wadi el-Jarf (an Egyptian archaeological site affiliated with Sorbonne University and Institut français d'archéologie orientale in Cairo), and the Egyptian and Sudanese jars from the site of Kerma Doukki-Gel (a Sudanese archaeological site affiliated with the University of Geneva, Sorbonne University, and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). Some of these artifacts are currently housed in the Museum of Art and History in Geneva, with others soon to be transferred to the University of Geneva. These corpora are treated as case studies and will be compared with textual, iconographic, and archaeological data.

The study will involve a techno-functional analysis of the jars, employing principles to distinguish macro-traces left by potters from marks indicating the ceramics' uses. Potter's traces and petrographic analyses by Mary F. Ownby from the University of Arizona will shed light on the technical decisions behind creating containers for preserving and transporting liquids or processed foodstuffs. Furthermore, Martine Regert from CNRS will analyse food residues on Sudanese jars, focusing on residues to identify the types of plants or lipid-rich foods stored in these jars, including meat, fish, animal fat, and hive products.

In addition to these analyses, I will conduct experiments with university students, agricultural practitioners, and organic food experts, including agronomist Jean-Michel Savoie from the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE) at Bordeaux. These experiments aim to determine if the grains and other foodstuffs are still consumable after storage in experimental jars.

My overarching objective is to discern the diverse roles of jars in the economies of ancient Egypt and Nubia. This will contribute to a better understanding of the subsistence economy of these ancient populations in the northern Nile Valley, as well as trade and supply networks, and surplus management.

**Adeline Bats** holds a PhD in Egyptology from Sorbonne University. She is currently a post-doctoral researcher and Research and Teaching Fellow at the University of Geneva in the ARCAN department, having secured funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (FNS) for her research project. Contact: [adeline.bats@unige.ch](mailto:adeline.bats@unige.ch).

**Website:** <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/217261>



## UN CHŒUR SUISSE AU SERVICE DE LA DIPLOMATIE FÉDÉRALE AU CAMEROUN

■ IDRISSE DESIRE MACHIA A RIM

Le 5 août 2021, Martin Strub présente la copie figurée de ses lettres de créance à Mbella Mbella Lejeune, Ministre camerounais des Relations extérieures en tant que ambassadeur de la Suisse au Cameroun. Depuis son accréditation dans ce pays stratégique d'Afrique centrale, Strub accorde de l'importance au développement des échanges culturels. Ce recours au « soft power » en tant qu'instrument de politique extérieure est sous-tendu par un enchevêtrement d'enjeux. Ce mois de septembre 2023, les populations de Yaoundé ont eu le privilège de vibrer au rythme des sonorités musicales du groupe « Gospelchor Am Münster » venu du Canton de Bâle avec le soutien de l'ambassade de Suisse. A cet effet, des concerts de musique religieuse ont été organisés. Dans une logique de partage, la scène fut conjointement occupée par le groupe suisse, des artistes et chœurs de gospel camerounais.

### CHRONIQUE D'UNE RENCONTRE CULTURELLE

Une fois arrivé au Cameroun dans la nuit, le « Gospelchor Am Münster » a pris le soin de se reposer car l'agenda des jours suivants prévoyait un ensemble d'activités à Yaoundé, la capitale politique du Cameroun. Dans le cadre de la communication sur les prestations musicales programmées, l'ambassadeur Martin Strub et deux responsables de la chorale suisse notamment Oliver Vedin (maître de chœur) et Daniel Raaflaub (directeur de la chorégraphie) ont été invités dans la matinée du 22 septembre 2023 sur le plateau de la Télévision nationale camerounaise (CRTV). Le diplomate suisse a saisi cette opportunité pour présenter l'importance du multilinguisme suisse ainsi que la nécessité de promouvoir la richesse culturelle helvétique à l'étranger. Par ailleurs, il a relevé l'importante représentativité de la culture camerounaise en



Suisse et exprimer ses vifs remerciements à l'endroit du gouvernement camerounais et toutes les personnes qui aident l'ambassade au quotidien dans sa mission diplomatique sur le plan culturel.

La première prestation du groupe « Gospelchor Am Münster » a eu lieu le samedi 23 septembre 2023 dans la somptueuse salle inauguratrice du palais des Congrès de Yaoundé. Il convient de préciser que plusieurs séances de répétitions se sont déroulées en avance avec Indira Baboke, la célèbre et talentueuse artiste gospel camerounaise. Dans la salle majestueusement apprêtée avec le concours de la dynamique Cécile Ngongaa Nya, secrétaire à l'ambassadeur suisse, on a pu dénombrer plus d'une centaine d'invités. Dans son mot introductif, le journaliste Charles Eburné Ndoh a d'abord souligné la dimension originale de l'évènement et présenté ses principaux acteurs. Ensuite, il a apprécié la présence des chefs de missions diplomatiques européennes et africaines. Pour finir, monsieur Eburné Ndoh a successivement donné la parole à l'ambassadeur Martin Strub ainsi qu'à Pierre Ismaël Bidoung Kpwatt, Ministre camerounais des Arts et de la Culture pour leur mot d'ouverture.

Dans leur prise de parole respective, ces hautes personnalités ont apprécié les efforts consentis par les parties suisse et camerounaise en matière de promotion d'échanges culturels et ont souhaité un déroulement serein du concert. Le spectacle a débuté dans sa première partie par la prestation du « Gospelchor Am Münster » qui laisse le soin à l'artiste Indira Baboke d'introduire leur tout premier chant de la soirée. A travers une dizaine de belles mélodies qui sont exécutées en langues officielles suisses et adossées sur des chorégraphies impressionnantes de par leur originalité, les spectateurs venus nombreux n'ont pas manqué de reprendre certaines chansons en chœur, danser, acclamer et réclamer la reprise de plusieurs chants à leur terme.

La deuxième partie du concert était consacrée à l'œuvre d'Indira Baboke. Elle a exécuté pendant près d'une heure un répertoire gospel qui a permis au public de vivre et de découvrir la diversité culturelle camerounaise. On a ainsi pu voir les choristes bâlois rejoindre les autres spectateurs pour encourager cette brillante artiste et son orchestre à travers des applaudissements, cris de joie et de pas de danse parfois inspiré du voisin.

Le concert s'est terminé par une prestation conjointe mettant en scène Indira Baboke et le chœur suisse, signe d'une fraternité chrétienne et d'une acceptation mutuelle des valeurs exogènes. Après le mot de fin du présentateur aux environs de 21 heures, la satisfaction des différents invités est perceptible. L'ambassadeur Martin Strub est félicité par ses homologues diplomates et les membres du gouvernement camerounais présents. Il en repart à son tour satisfait sans toutefois manquer d'annoncer au préalable les prochaines échéances du groupe « Gospelchor Am Münster ».

Avant son deuxième concert, le « Gospelchor Am Münster », de connivence avec l'ambassade de Suisse et l'UNICEF, a pu organiser une session de formation d'une quinzaine d'associations culturelles (Ngoma pour la culture, Arbre de Noël, Académie Sainte Cécile etc.) aux techniques de chant. Afin d'exprimer leur reconnaissance selon la tradition camerounaise, ces associations ont offert en guise de présent une étoile au groupe suisse. Ce cadeau symbolise le soleil, signe d'un avenir encore plus radieux des relations culturelles helvético-camerounaises et d'un rayonnement mondial du chœur suisse. Après cette formation, les populations camerounaises ont vécu la rencontre musicale entre le « Gospelchor Am Münster » et le Chœur des Piccoli. Ce concert de musique organisé une fois de plus avec le soutien de l'ambassade de Suisse s'est tenu dans la soirée du 27 septembre 2023 à l'église orthodoxe de Bastos, quartier opulent de Yaoundé qui abrite l'essentiel des représentations diplomatiques étrangères. Le ministère des Arts et de la culture du Cameroun était représenté par son secrétaire général par intérim, Nkéné Jacques Blaise. L'assistance était émerveillée par la qualité du spectacle, raison pour laquelle le lendemain, elle a répondu d'avantage présente au concert offert dans le même édifice sacré par le « Gospelchor Am Münster », accompagné sur scène par l'Académie Sainte Cécile du Père Vladimir.

### **ENJEUX D'UNE PRÉSENCE BÂLOISE**

Au-delà de cette volonté manifeste du « Gospelchor Am Münster » de renforcer sa visibilité à l'international à travers la démonstration de son savoir-faire artistique et

son désir de se frotter à d'autres cultures, il est en outre question de reconnecter les populations camerounaises au passé historique marqué par la présence des missionnaires bâlois au Cameroun en contexte colonial. Ainsi, il est important de rappeler que les liens culturels entre ce pays et la Suisse sont lointains. Ce rappel permettrait à chaque partie de s'approprier l'histoire pour mieux aborder le présent et envisager le futur des échanges culturels.

Ce fut le 23 décembre 1886 que la « Basler Mission » s'implanta effectivement au Cameroun sous-protectorat allemand, soit quelques années après la signature du traité germano-douala du 12 juillet 1884. Son œuvre sociale est remarquable si bien qu'à la fin de l'année 1912, elle enregistre à son compte et d'après les travaux du Professeur Salvador Eyezo'o, 14 stations avec 314 annexes, 13 200 membres, plus de 2600 catéchumènes, 319 écoles primaires etc. La venue du chœur suisse au Cameroun a permis aux artistes et musiciens camerounais de renforcer leur visibilité et de promouvoir la culture camerounaise sur la scène internationale. L'implication de l'ambassade de Suisse dans ces activités n'est évidemment pas désintéressée. En effet, depuis l'arrivée de l'ambassadeur Martin Strub, on observe une volonté affichée de recourir à la diplomatie culturelle pour des raisons de prestige.

L'enjeu consiste aussi à présenter la Confédération suisse comme un partenaire fiable sur lequel devrait compter le Cameroun dans sa marche vers le développement. C'est d'ailleurs ce qui aurait justifié la présence de Martin Strub à la cérémonie de dédicace du livre de Noëlle Nguenama Ondoua, une ancienne boursière de la Confédération le 21 novembre 2021 au salon international de l'artisanat, l'organisation d'une conférence-débat sur le système éducatif suisse en février 2022, la visite du musée ethnologique des peuples de forêt à Yaoundé en mars 2022, la participation à la journée internationale des femmes le 08 mars 2022, la réception de quelques futurs boursiers camerounais à la résidence de l'ambassadeur de Suisse en juillet 2022 etc. Par ailleurs, dans un environnement politique complexe où la rencontre de hautes personnalités

de l'État n'est pas toujours aisée, le concert offert au palais des congrès était l'occasion pour l'ambassade suisse d'étoffer son carnet d'adresse et de se rapprocher tactiquement des milieux dirigeants camerounais et étrangers présents dans le pays. Le choix de l'artiste Indira Baboke pour accompagner le chœur suisse, en dehors des enjeux folkloriques, aurait donc en outre consisté à attirer ce gratin politico-diplomatique compte tenu de sa « proximité » avec la présidence où exerce son père en qualité de directeur adjoint du cabinet civil.

In fine, ce séjour du « Gospelchor Am Münster » a permis à l'ambassade suisse de mettre en perspective les spécificités linguistiques suisses pendant les prestations. Ce multilinguisme traduit la diversité culturelle helvétique et participe à la consolidation de l'identité de la Confédération. D'un point de vue pédagogique, le Cameroun a subtilement été invité à s'inspirer du modèle suisse pour consolider son unité nationale en dépit des divergences culturelles entre ses populations anglophones et francophones.

**Idriss Désiré Machia A Rim** est titulaire d'un PhD en histoire contemporaine réalisée dans le cadre d'une codirection entre les universités de Yaoundé I et de Lausanne. Ancien boursier d'excellence de la Confédération suisse et de l'université de Fribourg, il s'intéresse aux relations africaines de la Suisse. Contact : machiadesire@yahoo.fr.

## NEW META-CATALOGUE FOR THE AFRICANA COLLECTIONS AT THE RESEARCH LOCATION BASEL

On 24 August 2023, the new research portal PARC (Portal for African Research Collections) was launched. PARC aims to make all Africana collections in Basel accessible and visible in one meta catalogue. For the first time, the collections of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Mission 21, Museum der Kulturen Basel, Swiss TPH, and the University of Basel are searchable in a single catalogue. This facilitates access to the collections regardless of location. In addition to bibliographic and archival collections, ethnographic objects, photographs, posters, films/videos, sound recordings and digital collections (incl. audio-visual media) can also be found. The search is conducted either by hovering over a map of Africa or by using the conventional free text search field with various filters.



PARC is to be understood as an innovation project and is open to other partners, especially African ones. Therefore, PARC is technically oriented towards the demands and challenges of the African market, so that access is guaranteed and knowledge exchange can take place. This includes optimisation for low-bandwidth operation as well as tools for decentralised data management so that data providers can retain ownership of their data. The data will not be adapted to a predefined data model but will be adopted directly. The goal of the technical design was that the portal would remain functional even with a poor Internet connection. This will ensure good access for researchers and students on the African continent. The intention is to integrate additional holdings within Switzerland and Europe or at African institutions.

If you are interested to link your holdings to the portal please contact the coordinator of the project Reto Ulrich. We would be happy to consider your participation in PARC.

**Contact:** [ru@baslerafrika.ch](mailto:ru@baslerafrika.ch)

**Link:** [www.parc-portal.org](http://www.parc-portal.org)

## DEAL WITH IT—AFRICAN HERITAGE IN BASEL

# DEAL WITH IT

Afrikanisches Erbe in Basel

On the occasion of the launch of PARC, the University Library Basel hosts an exhibition sharing perspectives on the handling of African cultural assets in Basel collection and research institutions. Why is Basel, of all places, home to such a large number of institutions related to the African continent? This development builds on a longer tradition in the region of academic engagement with Africa. With the university's clear commitment to research about, in, with and for Africa, Basel has developed into an international centre for interdisciplinary African research.

The exhibition discusses the individual and collective history and present of five Basel institutions from the perspectives of students who participated in a project course offered in spring 2023: the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Mission 21, the Museum der Kulturen Basel, the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, and the University of Basel. It also integrates further Africa-related organizations such as the Afrika-Komitee Basel. The institutions as well as visitors to the exhibition are invited to discuss their points of view. Deal with it! A space for discourse is created.

**Duration:** 24.08.2023–31.01.2024

**Opening hours:** Monday to Friday 08:00–20:00  
Saturday 10:00–20:00



The institutions presented in the exhibition were invited to respond and comment on the presentation. The juxtaposition of these views encourages visitors to discuss their own point of view (picture: University Library Basel 2023).

**Organization:** Basler Afrika Bibliographien

**Management:** Alice Spinnler and Reto Ulrich

**Curation:** Elisa da Costa and Benedikt Wyss

**Research/texts:** Clara Graber, Gian Gaggiotti, Mario Kull, Ivana Tipura, and Viviane Sprecher

**Scenography:** Bravo Ricky GmbH

**Graphics:** Sylvan Lanz

**Support:** Christoph Merian Stiftung, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, FDHA, Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft, Tweaklab AG, University Library Basel

# ENCOUNTERS • RENCONTRES • BEGEGNUNGEN

## MELUSI NKOMO: ACADEMIC GROWTH ACROSS CONTINENTS

### ■ MELUSI NKOMO

Melusi Nkomo is an Associate Research Scholar at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIRS) at Princeton University in the USA. He is an anthropologist with research interests in African politics, the African state, labour/work, and their intersection with cultural and social activities, particularly in extractive (mine) environments. From 2019 to 2023, he was on a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Zürich (Political Geography). He was previously a Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)-supported Visiting Doctoral Fellow at Harvard University's Center for African Studies. He earned a PhD in Anthropology and Sociology from The Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in 2018, an MA in Political Science from the University of Osnabrück in Germany in 2012, and a BSc in Social Work from the University of Zimbabwe in 2008.

Nkomo's current research is part of a larger SNSF-funded project called *Frontier Settlements: Territories of Artisan Mining Labor in Africa*, which investigates the political, social, and network connections that allow extractive labour to become embedded in the local context, revealing the conditions under which extractive frontiers materialize in contexts where the extraction and commodification of natural resources are often highly contested. His most recent article examined how artisan and small-scale mining, as a pervasive socioeconomic and general way of life in Zimbabwe, is involved in political mobilization, strategies, and participation and is an essential force in party-state expansion and power consolidation. Part of his argument is that informal (sometimes unregulated) mining activities provide fertile ground for forming political identities and subjectivities that cannot be described simply in terms of class or liberal politics.

Picture: Melusi Nkomo

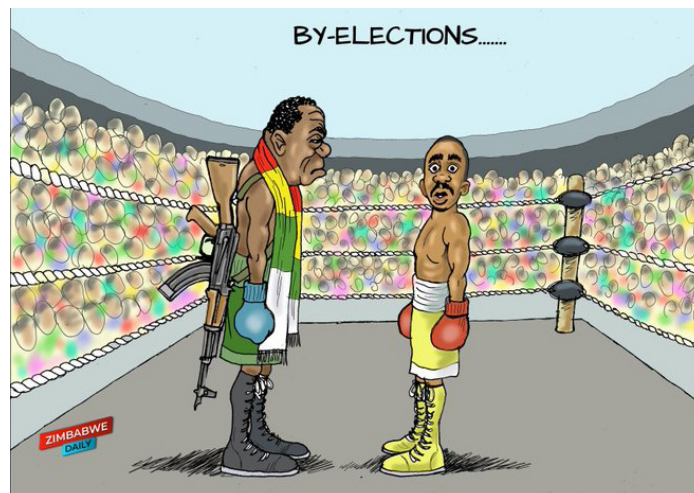


## ZIMBABWE'S POLITICS OF DELAY AND PURSUIT PREDATION

■ MELUSI NKOMO

Retaining power in Africa, according to the well-known authoritarian playbook, entails a stranglehold on the security apparatus (police, army, secret services, etc.), control of additional state resources, and the use of brute force to oppress internal opponents. Since the early 1990s, numerous African governments have added the electoral institution to this mix, using it to stage elections, but with predictable results that favour the authoritarian. A substantial body of scholarly research and popular opinion has established that incumbent regimes, from Algeria to Zimbabwe, apply the electoral calculus to maintain power while adhering to the most minimal of democratic standards and practices. Many of these elections are held in an atmosphere of voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, gerrymandering of constituency boundaries, and judicial and electoral commission corruption and bias.

If the recently conducted August 2023 elections in Zimbabwe are any indicator, there is cause to believe that African authoritarianism is becoming immune to electoral controversies and brazen in withstanding criticism and pressure from within and without the countries' boundaries. Protests and consternation are merely background noises to a shrewd and resolute authoritarian, who is adept at juggling a variety of political strategies, including elections, coercion, promises of democratic reforms (or piecemeal progress), and international diplomacy, all in a very unpredictable manner. President Emerson Mnangagwa, the incumbent and the candidate of the ruling Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), received 52.6 percent of the vote, while his nearest competitor, Nelson Chamisa of the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change, received 44 percent.



Cartoon commenting the by-elections published by the online newspaper Zimbabwe Daily on 15.11.2023.

If, also, there is one growing trend, it is the authoritarian's delay and dogged endeavour to frustrate the opponent, even without apparent force, whether planned, purposeful, or inadvertent. The voting date was set for 3 May 2023, barely three and a half months before the big day. The voters' roll made available to the opposition and the public was riddled with errors, was incomplete, and delivered late. While opposition rallies were not completely banned, they were not completely allowed either; they were obstructed and happened at the whim and pace of the state (which of

course included cancellations on spurious public health and safety grounds). Candidates, particularly opposition candidates, were nominated at a glacial pace, encountering every bureaucratic stumbling block imaginable. The courts invalidated some of them for omitting genuine or fabricated technicalities, then reinstated them following an appeal, or re-invalidated them again, resulting in frustrations that prompted some to withdraw from the election entirely. The exorbitant nomination fees of USD 20 000 for presidential candidates and USD 1000 for parliamentary candidates did not help matters. All of which sapped the opposition's mobilization efforts. Their camp was scampered, exhausted, and half demoralised when the contest day arrived, but still, the delays and pursuit continued. On election day, most of the opposition's strongholds saw vote ballots run out at voting places that opened hours later than the 7am opening time.

But the authoritarian also demonstrates an adeptness in garnering pre-election goodwill from various stakeholders (local and foreign) before and after the election day. It is possible that the authoritarian has gotten too cunning to be caught blatantly breaking democratic rules, so he creates a scenario in which he blames everyone and everything but himself. If there were delays in delivering ballot boxes or announcing results, it was a technical and logistical hitch that might happen to anyone. After all, even the most established liberal democracies in the western world do not have perfect voting systems. Simultaneously, the authoritarian endears himself to a significant portion of the population, and to outsiders, via all the apparatuses of power and mechanisms of patronage at its disposal—administrative, diplomatic, legal, social, and cultural institution mechanisms, knowledge, and discourses. Consequently, in the event of rigging, significant interested parties may doubt that it ever happened or downplay its impact; the doubt is sufficient for the regime to justify its claim of legitimacy. Any voices of disapprobation, such as the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) observation mission, which reported that the election “fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines

Governing Democratic Elections,” have their significant members diplomatically sidelined, and gaslighted, such as the fate of Nevers Mumba, the mission's head (whose commitment to the African continent and its people was questioned).

The authoritarian is conscious of the uncertainties of transition periods, but also of ephemerality of political controversies in the age of sizzling social media trends. The hot, online moral outrages fade as quickly as they appeared, literally swiped away from the smartphone screen by the thumb. The spotlight is thus made to soon disappear. The authoritarian is more willing than ever to wait it out. Then harder oppression may resume, abductions and imprisonment of opponents (which may have been reduced in the run up to elections) without bail and delays in bringing them before the courts of law promptly, disproportionately prolonging conflicts in court, in regional summits, in the media, on social media, in public, and filibustering in parliament. Or simply exploiting constitutional loopholes to discredit elected opponents or exploiting and exacerbating noticeable differences within opposition parties to debilitate them further.

Prolonging and postponing issues for disproportionately long periods of time is a powerful political tool for the authoritarian. The issue, then, is not merely of “despots counterfeit democrats” having “figure[d] out how to rig elections and get away with it”, but they have also figured out how to facilitate demoralizing inertia within the opposition itself. On many levels, cultivating such an environment is undeniably coercive. Yet, once again, in Zimbabwe, it is a game of time, another 5 years of back-and-forth before the next election, a politics of delays and “pursuit predation”, until the next electoral cycle.

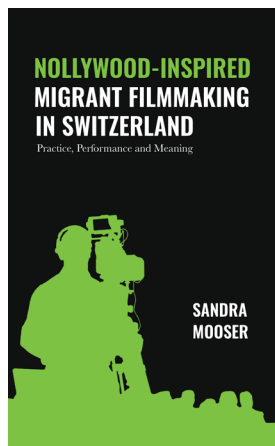
**Melusi Nkomo** is Associate Research Scholar at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS), at Princeton University in the USA. Contact: mn8973@princeton.edu.



# PUBLICATIONS • PUBLIKATIONEN • PUBLICATIONS

## REVIEW: NOLLYWOOD-INSPIRED MIGRANT FILMMAKING IN SWITZERLAND—PRACTICE, PERFORMANCE AND MEANING

■ Katrin Nahidi



The academic institutionalisation of postcolonial theory and the historical decolonisation efforts in recent decades have led to a critical self-examination within Anthropology. This has brought to the forefront the historical entanglements of anthropological knowledge production with Western colonialism and imperialism. In her book *Nollywood Inspired Migrant Filmmaking in Switzerland—Practice, Performance, and Meaning*, social anthropologist Sandra Mooser provides a practical example of what postcolonial anthropological research can look like. Such research approaches are particularly innovative because they introduce new methods that have the potential to facilitate the decolonisation of knowledge production.

*Nollywood Inspired Migrant Filmmaking in Switzerland—Practice, Performance, and Meaning* is a complex and multifaceted study of the media self-representation of African migrants living in Switzerland. In her book, Sandra Mooser describes and analyses the production process, in which she collaborated with a group of African migrants in order to create a Nollywood-inspired film. The 96-minute feature film *Paradise in My Mind*, which they produced together, premiered in Bern in 2015. With this film, the performers created a platform to represent themselves and share their own experi-

ences of migration. This means that knowledge was not produced ‘about’ migrants; rather, the film itself became a medium for migrant and diasporic knowledge production. Through this approach, the film also raises critical questions such as “Who speaks?” and “Who produces knowledge?”. In doing so, it highlights the diversity of the African diaspora, while also supporting further democratisation within the various migrant societies, as they can be found in Switzerland.

The migrant filmmakers chose the Nollywood genre to audio-visually represent their experiences in the film. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, is the second-largest global film industry after the Indian Bollywood and originated in the 1990s. Nollywood films cover a wide range of themes, including love, family, culture, religion, and social issues. The films are often low-budget productions that can be produced relatively quickly and easily, involving both professional and semi-professional filmmakers and performers. However, Nollywood films have not only gained popularity among Nigerian audiences, but have also reached a global and transnational viewership through cost-effective distribution channels, such as VHS, VCD, and, more recently, also the internet.

In her anthropological study, Sandra Mooser convincingly argues that the Nollywood genre, with its transcultural nature, is particularly suitable for capturing the experiences of African migrants in film. The first chapter of the book provides an important overview of the historical development of the Nigerian film industry and compares Nollywood-inspired films with Migrant Cinema. Through this theoretical framework, the author establishes the thesis that the produced film can be understood as a communicative form of ‘social exchange’ in the transnational context. The second chapter delves into a theoretical discussion of methods, primarily through engagement with the French ethnologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch and his Shared Anthropology. It is interesting to note that artistic mediums such as film and performance are presented here as methodological approaches in Anthropology. In doing so, the outstanding

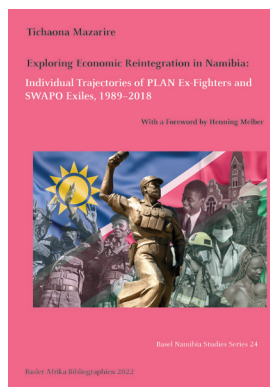
quality of the research becomes apparent, as the collaborative film project attempts to dismantle historical and current power dynamics that often persist in anthropological research. This is particularly evident in the third chapter, which closely examines the film production and its contexts. By focusing on the production processes, the author also addresses the role of the researchers, revealing that hierarchies, which often still exist in anthropological research today, can be attenuated or even eliminated in collaborative film projects. This chapter describes how the group came together, developed the script, and produced the film. Of particular interest is the insight into the motivations that drove the amateur filmmakers to tell their stories in the form of a Nollywood production. While the motivations of the project participants varied, they all aimed to present their own experiences from multiple perspectives. Some participants aimed their work at an African audience to shed light on the challenges of migration, such as economic and social discrimination, which they had experienced. Others sought to address the Swiss host society through their performance and use the film as a medium to counteract racist stereotypes against African migrants. In the final chapter, the author provides a very personal insight into the production processes. She critically reflects on her own role and her 'white privilege' as a researcher. The book portrays the frictions and tensions during the production process and the limitations of social anthropological research in a postcolonial context.

In summary, Sandra Mooser presents a highly successful research endeavour that results from the symbiosis of anthropological fieldwork and the film *Paradise in My Mind*. In doing so, she not only makes a significant contribution to steering anthropology towards a postcolonial perspective, but also to advancing the democratisation of migrant societies. Self-critically and thoughtfully, the media anthropologist leverages her privileged position to amplify often marginalised voices and make them heard and seen in the film *Paradise in My Mind*, which is freely accessible on YouTube.

SANDRA MOOSER: NOLLYWOOD-INSPIRED MIGRANT FILMMAKING IN SWITZERLAND—PRACTICE, PERFORMANCE AND MEANING. NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE 2022 (CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING).

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## REINTEGRATION OF LIBERATION FIGHTERS AND EXILEES

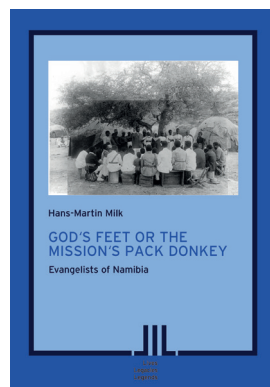


*Exploring Economic Reintegration in Namibia: Individual Trajectories of PLAN Ex-Fighters and SWAPO Exiles, 1989–2018* draws from life histories to present constraints and possibilities that have shaped former SWAPO exiles' economic reintegration in post-colonial Namibia from 1989 through 2018. The book advances three arguments, each of which pushes beyond existing scholarship on Namibia and/or economic reintegration broadly. Collectively, these arguments challenge dominant narratives that have generalized former SWAPO exiles' economic reintegration experiences, highlighting that there is no single narrative that can describe their unique life stories of reintegration in the post-colony.

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TICHAONA MAZARIRE: EXPLORING ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION IN NAMIBIA. INDIVIDUAL TRAJECTORIES OF PLAN EX-FIGHTERS AND SWAPO EXILES, 1989–2018. BASEL NAMIBIA STUDIES SERIES. BASEL 2023 (BASLER AFRIKA BIBLIOGRAPHIEN).

## PIONEERING NAMIBIAN EVANGELISTS



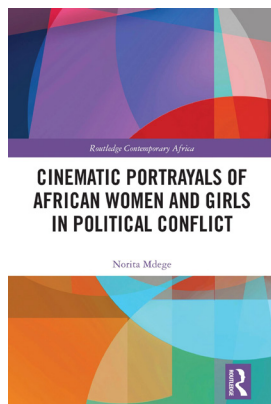
The title of this book originates from the self-description of Namibian Evangelists in their own words. African evangelists of the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) played a crucial but mostly overlooked role in shaping the spiritual and social networks that transformed indigenous communities from the early nineteenth century. The author draws from a wide range of German, Namibian and South African archival sources that have been supplemented with a large number of interviews, to explore the history of the indigenous evangelists of the RMS. African supporters were often the first heralds of the new religion at remote villages and cattle posts before the white strangers made an appearance. The

Namibian evangelists' familiarity with the traditional culture and the local vernacular endowed them with a credibility that many of the European newcomers found difficult to acquire. By interweaving mission and church history between 1820 and 1990 with a biographical approach, the author brings a hidden chapter in Namibian history to life.

Hans-Martin Milk, born in southern Africa, grew up in Namibia and lived there until he left into Exile in the 1970's. He returned to Namibia after Independence to teach in Kavango. During this time he started his historical research on the RMS and the Kavango.

HANS-MARTIN MILK: GOD'S FEET OR THE MISSION'S PACK DONKEY. EVANGELISTS OF NAMIBIA. BASEL NAMIBIA STUDIES SERIES. BASEL 2023 (BASLER AFRIKA BIBLIOGRAPHIEN).

## CINEMATIC PORTRAYALS OF AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS IN POLITICAL CONFLICT



The role of cinema is important in providing information about the situation of women and girls in political conflict, and the main characters often also become signifiers of wider social, political and economic ideas, at both global and local levels. Drawing on fictional and biographical cinematic representations, this book considers films covering a range of different regions, experiences, historical periods and other contexts, to draw a nuanced picture of African women and girls who participate in or are affected by African political conflicts. The films are analysed using a decolonial feminist cultural approach, which combines cultural approaches, African feminisms and the contrapuntal method to ensure

an inter-textual, intersectional and decolonial examination. The book engages with multiple themes and topics, including nationalism, nation-building, neocolonialism, memory, history, women's and girls' agency and activism. Through these themes and topics, the author, who is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow at the Graduate Institute Geneva, explores how the films represent African women's and girls' agency in relation to their participation in social, economic and political activities.

NORITA MDEGE: CINEMATIC PORTRAYALS OF AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS IN POLITICAL CONFLICT. ROUTLEDGE CONTEMPORARY AFRICA SERIES. MILTON 2023 (ROUTLEDGE).

## LA FORCE ET BEAUTÉ DES LANGUES DITES CRÉOLES : LE NOUCHI D'ABIDJAN À TRAVERS LA POESIE



Mêlant passé, présent et avenir, Polo kouman/ Polo parle est le nouveau recueil poétique de Henri Michel Yéré. Écrit en nouchi et en français, sous la forme d'un dialogue poétique entre Polo et l'Avenir, il démontre que la poésie possède, parmi l'éventail de ses pouvoirs, celui d'outrepasser la linéarité du temps et celui de démultiplier nos visions. Puisant dans les deux langues ce qu'elles ont de plus privé pour le révéler par la parole, les poèmes se répondent les uns aux autres et ne se ressemblent pas. Malgré l'abandon de ses ancêtres, Polo résiste, rêve et éprouve les désolations de l'existence et les espoirs qui en découlent. Si les visions sont multiples, une seule certitude émerge de ce recueil : lorsqu'il y a dialogue, toute solitude finit par disparaître.

« À ceux qui prétendent que je ne parle pas français : je veux dire que ma parole démolit les murs. Ceux qui m'ont entendu sont transformés. »

HENRI MICHEL YÉRÉ: POLO KOUMAN/POLO PARLE. LAUSANNE 2023 (ÉDITIONS D'EN BAS).