

KOSMOS WORKSHOP

CROSSINGS & COMPARISONS IN AFRICAN LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Susanne Gehrmann &
Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong



Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong, Susanne Gehrmann © Charlott Schönwetter

Our co-convened KOSMOS-sponsored workshop (8.-11.10.2018) focused on literary languages in Africa, its diasporas and specific contact zones as well as possible ventures of cross-reading African literary and cultural productions in more than one language. The main motivation behind the conceptualisation of the workshop's theme and panels was to invigorate new debates, perspectives and theories about the language wealth of the continent and to critically illustrate how these languages speak to one another in literature.

The workshop brought together young and advanced scholars from our partner universities, namely Ibadan, Stellenbosch, Nairobi, Lomé, and Vienna. Moreover, colleagues and PhD students from universities in and around Berlin were invited.

The opening event included poetry recitations by all participants of the workshop as an academic cum artistic 'exercise', which affirmed the multitude and wealth of African languages. Engaging debates and critical insights into the crossings of African languages in cultural productions enlivened nine panels that compared and juxtaposed Yoruba, Kiswahili, French, English, and Portuguese as literary languages. The approaches used in the cross-regional and cross-linguistic readings included feminism, media studies, dialogic

reading and analysis of genre innovation. Further, through the paradigm of code mixing and code switching, the panelists did not only cross and compare languages, but also explored the geopolitics in which these languages were used. Questions of curricula building and didactic questions around the teaching of African literatures on the continent and in Europe were also discussed. Travelling texts and archives inspired several papers as well as a round table in honour of Janheinz Jahn (1918-1973) whose archive is kept by the institute.

The KOSMOS workshop closed with group sessions organised to generate possible areas for future research and joint collaboration between the Department of African Studies and our partner universities. One important result with regard to the determination to compare and to cross over was to include further debates on theory and methodological tools stemming from different academic traditions. Furthermore, the association of two scholars, Godwin Siundu (Nairobi) and Uhuru Phalafala (Stellenbosch) as cooperation partners in our HU research group on the Jahn archive, is another tangible outcome of the workshop.



© Charlott Schönwetter



© Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, HU Berlin

About the Authors:

Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong is Lecturer of African Literatures and Cultures in the Department of African Studies at IAAW.



© Charlott Schönwetter

Susanne Gehrmann is Professor for African Literatures and Cultures at IAAW.



© Susanne Gehrmann