



Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren e.V.
ZMO Kirchweg 33 D-14129 Berlin



Still in search of Europe? The possible in arts, ideologies and travel from Africa and the Middle East

International workshop, Zentrum Moderner Orient, 6-8 March 2013

Organised in the framework of the junior research group
„In Search of Europe: Considering the Possible in Africa and the Middle East“

sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research

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Europeans are accustomed to see themselves as the centre of the world, and studying the ways people elsewhere perceive Europe carries the potential risk of unwittingly reproducing this Eurocentristic bias. But what if “Europe” is not about Europe? What if “Europe” is about building a house in Senegal with the money one hopes to earn as a migrant, claiming civil rights in Egypt in the name of political ideas of global currency, meeting the political challenge of the rising imperial powers western Europe in the Ottoman Empire of late 19th century, or developing an aesthetic language in Mozambique that is recognised as art in international art circles? The question about the search for Europe in Africa and the Middle East is, thus, not so much about a specific region or group of people as it is about a specific historical experience shared by many in various parts of the world: the search for a better future in an unequal world where some parts of the world set the standards which others have to reckon with.

But is Europe still actually setting those standards? Is it still a place people look up to in admiration and/or anger? And was the world ever so neatly divided into centre and periphery? Where is „Europe“ anyway? The actual contours of the imaginary maps of the world still need to be drawn, and so do the ways in which people think about the possible and inevitable in a changing world. In this workshop, we want to zoom in on specific moments in history and the present to develop an understanding of how people remember the past, search for a better future, think about alternatives and reckon with the inevitable in a world that is structured by complex geographic hierarchies of power.

Advance registration is required, please contact Yasser Mehanna mehanna.yasser@googlemail.com

Address

Zentrum Moderner Orient / Kirchweg 33 / 14129 Berlin / S-bahn S1 and S7 Nikolassee

Programme

Wednesday, 6 March

Arrival

18:00 introductory meeting and dinner (address to be confirmed)

Thursday, 7 March

9:00 arrival and coffee

9:30-11:00 Sites of possibility

Yves Gonzales

Enlightenment at the city of light: Muwaylihi's depiction of Paris at the beginning of the 20th century

David Morton

Maputo as archive: A reflection on evidence

11:00-11:15 coffee

11:15-13:00 Ideas and ideologies reconsidered

Bettina Gräf

Ideological knowledge production in the 1940s in Cairo: The foundation of Maktabat Wahba

Ali Raza

In search of 'communism' in British India, ca. 1917-1947

Discussant: Prem Poddar

13:00-14:30 lunch

14:30-15:15 Travelling Balkans (1/2)

Vesna Goldsworthy

The imperialism of the imagination: The European Balkans

15:15-15:30 coffee

15:30-17:15 Travelling Balkans (2/2)

Ebru Boyar:

Imagining Europe: "The Bulgarian Horrors" to the Balkan wars

Leyla v. Mende

The post-Ottoman Balkans' representations in Ottoman travel writing – Imperial perspectives on Europe?

Discussant: Bekim Agai

19:00 dinner

Friday, 8 March

9:00 coffee

9:30-11:00 Migration as expectation and memory (1/2)

Aïssatou Mbodj, CNRS

At home in Europe? Debating the future of African 'foyers' in Paris

Knut Graw

Continuity and rupture in the memory of migration: a west African trajectory

11:00-11:15 coffee

11:15-13:00 Migration as expectation and memory (2/2)

Charles Piot

Migration stories: The US visa lottery and global citizenship

Alice Elliot

Reckoning with crises, watching revolutions: re-imagining migration in a Moroccan emigrant community

Discussant: Paolo Gaibazzi

13:00-14:30 lunch

14:30-15:15 Arts and borders (1/2)

Elizabeth Harney

Prismatic scatterings: Global modernists in post-war Europe

15:15-15:30 coffee

15:30-17:15 Arts and borders (2/2)

Vanessa Díaz Rivas, ZMO Berlin

Contemporary art in Mozambique: reshaping artistic national canons

Samuli Schielke

Where is Alexandria? Wrestling with the European as other and own in Alexandria's literary circles

Discussant: Hanan Toukan

Abstracts in alphabetical order by author

Ebru Boyar (Middle East Technical University, Istanbul)

Imagining Europe: "The Bulgarian Horrors" to the Balkan wars

Based on history textbooks, newspapers, memoirs, published accounts and literary pieces, this paper investigates the Ottoman reaction to and anger over the "European" approach to atrocities inflicted upon its non-Christian, especially Muslim subjects during the uprisings and wars in the Balkans from the period starting with the publication of the British Liberal Party leader and Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone's famous pamphlet, "The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East", in 1876 until the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913. The paper also questions to what extent that reaction, which was reproduced with each and every event, shaped the Ottoman view of Europe, defined its intellectual relations with it and resulted in the construction of an Ottoman imagined Europe.

Vanessa Díaz Rivas (Zentrum Moderner Orient)

Contemporary art in Mozambique: reshaping artistic national canons

Since the beginning of the 2000s profound changes have begun to emerge in the visual arts in Mozambique. A new movement of artists called MUVART (Art in Movement), is implementing new visual strategies for artistic production. They are creating new categories in Mozambican fine arts defining themselves as contemporary artist; their work is characterized by a high conceptual sense. The introduction of this new approach to art in Mozambique is raising questions and dilemmas about local artistic productions, theories and curatorial practices both within the circle of MUVART as in other local artistic circles. With new initiatives of art production and presentation, they are also trying to set themselves apart from what they consider to be traditional Mozambican art, questioning the existing artistic practices in Mozambique that are for them seen as traditional. With traditional art they refer to an art production that is based on specific historical Mozambican contexts such as Portuguese colonialism, Mozambique's fight for independence and the civil war. These artists work within a specific artistic style that are more related to the canons generated by the first Mozambican artists, such as Malangatana or Chissano, and are emulated by many of the artists in Mozambique. In a country where art has been heavily influenced by historical and political processes and its output equated with the search for national identity, the questions raised by contemporary artists in Maputo constitute a dilemma.

In my paper I will explore the interactions between the so called traditional and the contemporary art in Mozambique at the level of aesthetic standards, the art market and their notions of self and world that underlie their art production. Which are the existing collective ideas and material images of Europe? And how this deas and images, the awareness of a global market and the question of what counts as art, and what counts as African art, intertwine with the search for possible new ways of individual and collective self-perception in Mozambican contemporary art?

Alice Elliot (University of Leuven)

Reckoning with crises, watching revolutions: re-imagining migration in a Moroccan emigrant community

What happens when something that has become a synonym for possibility, wealth and dignity starts deteriorating, and something that is associated with hardship, corruption and impossibility starts transforming? This paper addresses the ways in which the current economic crisis in Europe and the recent revolutions in North Africa may be affecting, independently or in unison, the imagination and meaning of migration in a part of the world characterised by decades-long emigration towards, and dreaming of, 'Europe'. Through an ethnographic analysis of an area of Morocco where emigration to Europe is pervasive, the paper aims to explore how both the practicalities of everyday life and the imagination of a better outside are being affected by *l-azma* (the crisis). What happens, I ask, to the local understandings of emigration, when the desired land to which many have moved and many others hope to reach, starts showing tangible signs of weakness: when remittances drastically decrease and food must be sent to emigrant relatives to help them survive abroad? And what if, while the outside (Europe) is showing signs of weakness, the neighbouring inside (Tunisia, Egypt) becomes an unexpected point of reference through its revolutions? Observing the workings of global economic processes and revolutionary events from a local perspective, the paper aims to trace what a crisis of the outside and the transforming of the inside may entail in areas where people have for decades moved, or attempted to move, towards better horizons.

Vesna Goldsworthy (Kingston University, London)
The imperialism of the imagination: The European Balkans

My book *Inventing Ruritania: Imperialism of the Imagination*, published in 1998, was a study of the way British writing – its impact augmented by adaptations for mass entertainment industry – articulated a set of ideas of the Balkans which still influences the way the region is perceived. I coined the term “imaginative colonisation” to describe the symbolic takeover of Balkan mind-maps. The Balkans and the rest of Europe have changed a great deal since 1998. With the last few “Western Balkan” states lining up to join the EU, “Europe” no longer holds the glittering promise of prosperity it once did. Greece, the first Balkan country to join the EU, is called “Balkan” whenever it teeters on the brink of being the first to leave. As the fifteenth anniversary of *Inventing Ruritania* is marked by a new paperback edition, this paper gives an opportunity to reflect on the trajectories of Balkan and European (mis)understandings over the last couple of decades and look at their nineteenth and twentieth century roots.

Yves Gonzales (Université de Lyon II/Gremmo)
Enlightenment at the City of light: Muwaylihi's depiction of Paris at the beginning of the 20th century

Although it would be difficult to find a history of the Modern Arab World which does not mention its publication at the beginning of the 20th century, Al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith Isa Ibn Hisham*, which narrates the discovery of the « Modern Egypt » by a Mameluk Pasha coming back to life years after his death, is generally considered as an unsuccessful novel, especially for the second part of the story, written years after the publication of the first one. Perhaps accurate in the light of the development of the Modern Arabic novel, such a reading does not pay enough attention to the sociological background of this narration of a not so imaginary trip to Paris by three Egyptians at the time of the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Coming almost one century after al-Tahtawi's excitement for the life in the French capital at the age of Enlightenment, this very critical depiction of the social realities of the « City of light » tells a lot about a shift in the representation of the European life in the minds of some of the Arab intellectuals at the time of the rising Arab nationalism. Clearly, Al-Muwaylihi distances himself from a number of somehow naive Arab travellers mesmerized by the alleged superiority of the Western societies of the industrial age. But, like Faris al-Shidyaq's attempt half a century before with his sarcastic account of the Orientalist knowledge, al-Muwaylihi's attempt to set a more balanced and clear-sighted relationship with the leading European countries of the time will prove to be very short-lived.

Bettina Gräf (Zentrum Moderner Orient)
Ideological knowledge production in the 1940s in Cairo: The foundation of Maktabat Wahba

The question I'm dealing with in my paper is if we can speak about ideological knowledge production concerning Islamic ideas in the 1940s in Egypt (after the turn to Islamiyyat literature of those who were formerly labeled as liberal intellectuals in the 1930s). And if so, what has this shift to ideological knowledge production to do with capitalist structures in economy and society, with so-called “print-capitalism” (Anderson 1983), and a reading consumer culture.

These questions will be addressed by using the example of a popular (in the double meaning of well-known and non-elitist) Islamic publishing house and bookstore, Maktabat Wahba, which was founded in 1946 in Cairo by Wahba Hasan Wahba (1923-2003) who was a member of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. According to the son of the founder of the publishing house Sultan Hasan Wahba, who runs the bookstore today, the first book his father had ever published was *Min huna nabda'* (From here we start) by Khalid Muhammad Khalid, a scholar of Islam who supported the idea of socialism. The second book was a reply to this book named *Min huna na'alam* (From here we know or Our beginning in wisdom), published in 1950, by Muhammad al-Ghazali, who favored the idea of Islam as a comprehensive system in opposition to Khalid's propositions.

For my part, though, I am interested in the different authors around Maktabat Wahba in the 1940s and 1950s and in the social and cultural conditions of publishing their ideas at a very specific moment in time—the beginning of the Cold War. I will explore the question of what was possible for these writers and how were their own perceptions of Islam changed when confronted with local and translocal ideologies and movements that at the time were vitally relevant and seemed indeed to be inescapable. I'm further interested in the material conditions of this text production and will finally address the question how the paradigm of “print-capitalism” can be related to the successful publication of Islamic books.

Knut Graw (University of Leuven)

Continuity and rupture in the memory of migration: A West African trajectory

One of the most striking features of West and North African migration to Europe since the late 1980s has been the almost complete anonymity of its protagonists. Another important feature of contemporary migration is that it is often represented as if it had no past. Concentrating on an individual account of migratory experience that dates back before the highly mediated boat arrivals of West African migrants, this paper attempts to understand some of the dynamics and motivations underlying the recent history of migration between West Africa and Europe. By focusing on an individual narrative of African-European migration the paper attempts to do so from a perspective that allows both to grasp the individual or existential dimension of migration as well as the historical nature of the border regimes governing individual trajectories. As the destination of the migratory trajectories described is Europe, the paper simultaneously offers a first hand commentary to the question whether Europe still represents an important point of destination in the contemporary migratory imagination.

Elizabeth Harney (University of Toronto)

Prismatic scatterings: Global modernists in post-war Europe

This project focuses on the histories of visual practice amongst artists hailing from colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and African Americans working in post-war Europe. It will challenge standard histories of this historical moment by identifying the 'connective tissues' of modernity that supported diverse communities of practice. Recent scholarship has addressed the "alternative" modernities of colonial and postcolonial sites outside of Europe and the nature of artistic modernisms that arose in them. Despite the development of, and now growing challenges to, the 'alternative modernities' model, conventional art historical narratives continue largely to focus on two facets: the demise of modernism in Europe and its subsequent rebirth in New York or the splintered post-war continental aesthetic scene that produced varied forms of abstraction and realism. These histories omit the vibrant intellectual networks of global artists working in Europe in the post-war moment. Like those of an earlier inter-war generation, these artists--united in their shared condition of exile and with continued ties to 'elsewhere'-- networked in salons, studios, art academies, jazz halls and cafés. A number worked alongside colleagues in the Art Informel, Cobra, or Lettrism movements. They developed their practices in the shadow of the Algerian revolution, within the psychic and political struggles of decolonization and 'thirdworldism,' and against the backdrop of post-war socio-cultural revolutions and Cold War politics. This research ultimately asks how one might re-think the global face of contemporary art practice and the strictures of Fortress Europe by re-visiting the matrix of cross-cultural exchanges in the post-war era.

Aïssatou Mbodj (CNRS, Paris)

At home in Europe? Parisian 'foyers' and the memories of West African migration to France

In the 1960s and 1970s, West African labour migrants arriving in Paris mostly from the Senegal River valley, where hosted in residences called 'foyers'. They were deemed provisional but soon came to provide accommodation for short and often long periods of immigration. Today, the population of the 'foyers' only accounts for a minority of African immigrants living in Paris and the suburbs, but the foyers are still nodal points for several West African communities, landmarks for new comers, and icons of this immigration in the public sphere.

Existing research on the foyers has focused on their role in transnational networks, especially on the dynamics of community-based associations linking a community centred on one foyer and one or several villages back in Senegal or Mali. My own project takes a different stake, focusing on the lived experience and the affective memory of people residing in the foyers.

During the last decade the Parisian 'foyers', often in a state of decay, have been included in a large rehabilitation scheme, involving renovation of the buildings and changes in the juridical status of these residences. This process, debated and contested among the residents and the institutions in charge of it, stirs narratives from the residents about the ways they have come to appropriate, as individuals and groups, these buildings and sites. This paper wishes to explore the ambivalent attachment to the 'foyers', where people do not feel "at home" but that they still claim as their own spaces.

Leyla v. Mende (Zentrum Moderner Orient)

The post-Ottoman Balkans' representations in Ottoman travel writing – Imperial perspectives on Europe?

In my dissertation project I analyse Ottoman travellers' writings and their manifold representations of the newly independent Balkan states. In the course of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire lost almost all its European provinces. Travellers who conducted journeys to the region were confronted with "former subjects", new neighbours and competitors simultaneously. My analysis focuses on how that specific past and present shaped the Ottoman travellers' representations of the Southeast European states and what those representations can tell us about the travellers' own identity formation. Furthermore, I aim to shed light on the network of relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe and the location of the Balkans herein.

Ottoman travel writings on the Balkans are part of several independent and yet connected debates: they are part of the discussions within the Ottoman literature of crisis - as Christoph Herzog calls it - which searched for answers to the perceived "backwardness" of the empire and more particular of the Ottoman debates on the Balkans. At the same time the Ottoman travellers' writings on Southeast Europe are part of Ottoman travel literature to other regions and, last but not least, part of a Western European discourse on the Balkans.

In my paper I want to concentrate on the last aspect: I claim that the Ottoman travellers' self-image intentionally or accidentally created in their writings about the Balkans very much resembles that of European travelers. This specific self-image of Ottoman travelers had a strong influence on their representations of the Balkans in relation to / as a part of Europe, again comparable to their European peers. Based on those assumptions I will discuss in how far it is possible to characterize the Ottoman travel writings on the post-Ottoman Balkans as European writings about Europe. "European" and "Europe" are not defined as geographical notions but rather understood as terms which point, firstly, to a specific set of perspectives and mindsets in regard to the Balkans, and secondly, to certain characteristics attributed to "Europe" and applied as measuring tools to the Balkans in order to judge and define the region as an imagined self and / or other. Yet, I don't intend to reduce the Ottoman travel writings to a mere imitation or appendix of European travel writings about the Balkans. I rather aim at illustrating the comparable conditions and aims of European and Ottoman travellers in regard to their representations of the Balkans.

David Morton (University of Minnesota)

Maputo as archive: A reflection on evidence

My doctoral research involves the history of the construction of the shantytown suburbs of Maputo, Mozambique, from the 1940s to the present. I look at the streets and houses and compounds and backyards of these neighborhoods, and I also look at the apartment towers of the City of Cement, which were occupied by shantytown dwellers following independence in 1975. In this research, small acts rather than big events take precedence: the granular detail of house construction, wall maintenance, materials procurement, the elbowing for space, the small ways authority was invoked, and the changing understandings of citizenship, possession, authority and the individual all such actions and gestures imply, both before independence and after.

The paper I propose is a reflective essay on the implications of using the built environment, and the infinite micro-decisions that give it shape, as my principal body of evidence. Histories of colonial Africa tend to rely on the record of state action—on colonial laws and African transgressions of the law, on colonial plans and how Africans were subjected to those plans. Such histories treat laws as they were written and plans as they appeared on drawing boards as if they were representative of relations of power as they were actually experienced. The built environment of Maputo, however, tells a story that cannot be reduced to binaries of colonial action and African reaction, and of oppression and adaption to oppression. Rather, one discovers a more varied terrain of conflict, as well as initiative and expectation and aspiration. And one finds further reason to reject the practice of treating colonial history and post-independence history as if they were two neatly bounded periods of time.

Charles Piot (Duke University)

Migration stories: The US visa lottery and global citizenship

This paper discusses Togolese who apply for the US Diversity Visa lottery. More Togolese per capita apply for the Green Card lottery than those from any other African country, with winners attempting to game the system by adding "spouses" and dependents to their dossiers. The US consulate in Lomé knows this gaming is going on and constructs ever-more elaborate tests to attempt to decipher the authenticity of winners' marriages and job profiles – and of their moral worth as citizens – tests that

immediately circulate to those on the street. This paper explores the cat-and-mouse game between street and embassy, situating it within the post-Cold War conjuncture – of ongoing crisis, of an eviscerated though-still-dictatorial state, of social death and the emptiness of citizenship under such conditions, of a sprawling transnational diaspora and the desires and longings it creates, of informationalism and its new technologies, of surveillance regimes and their travails. I suggest that the DV lottery constitutes a generative fantasy about exile and citizenship and global membership today.

Ali Raza (Zentrum Moderner Orient)

In search of 'communism' in British India, ca. 1917-1947

As in the rest of the colonized world, the Russian Revolution also had a profound impact on British India. Of the more intriguing aspects of this impact were the varying understandings, appropriations, translations, and creations of 'communism' by a wide section of the political spectrum. Through a brief survey of some of these narratives, this paper will, firstly, highlight the varying articulations of 'communism' in British India. Secondly, and more importantly, an attempt shall also be made to ground these conceptions within historically contingent political and geographical imaginaries that reveal much about the political and intellectual zeitgeist of this period.

Samuli Schielke (Zentrum Moderner Orient)

Where is Alexandria? Wrestling with the European as other and own in Alexandria's literary circles

Taking as its starting point an ongoing ethnographic research and an artistic-literary experiment with literary circles in Alexandria, this presentation looks at the complex and at times paradoxical ways in which literates of the city are compelled to engage with the figure of the European as an ambiguous point of reference for literary styles, and creative trajectories, and the city itself. Looking at the linkages between trajectories of writers and cultural activists in the globally connected and often internationally funded downtown scene, and the revival and contestation of the city's cosmopolitan heritage, I pursue the question about why the relation to the European Other is such a compelling issue for creative paths, and what it tells about the contestations over a city divided along many lines. The engagement with the European as potentially both alien and own creates a powerful frame of comparison that can both facilitate and limit creative visions and their social relevance. These complex engagements are partly related to political struggles over memory and the future direction of the city and the country, but they are also intimately related to writers's and cultural actors' personal trajectories, locations in class society, and livelihoods. The presentation incorporates and addresses the experimental collaboration with Alexandrine authors and artists for the Still In Search of Europe? Exhibition, thus also addressing the issue about the uses and consequences of experimental and collaborative forms of research.