

Workshop Programme

The Production of Possibilities: Living and Governing Potential Futures in Africa

9-10 November 2017

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Kirchweg 33, 14129 Berlin

Convenors: Paolo Gaibazzi (ZMO)
Abdoulaye Sounaye (ZMO)
Julian Tadesse (ZMO)

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Concept Note

The workshop attempts to inquire into the ways in which individual and collective actors in contemporary Africa experience and control the production of possibilities in the midst of uncertainty. Indeed, it suggests that uncertainty itself might be best understood as proliferation of possibilities, regardless of the positive, negative or neutral values attributed to them. It thus asks how possibilities emerge and fade, and what discourses and practices govern the making of potential futures in Africa. It further inquires into the kinds of experiences, dispositions and relationships that engaging such possibilities entails. Our aim in this workshop is to bring together empirical studies and conceptual discussions on the ways uncertainty and potentiality are lived and governed in Africa. We ask how engagement with contingency results in attitudes, practices, discourses and dispositions geared towards exploring potentials and possibilities. Furthermore, the workshop aims to inquire how different actors engage the realm of the possible and the way in which potential scenarios of the present and the future are produced in various African contexts.

Day I – 9 November 2017

9.00 – 9.30 **Arrival at ZMO and Welcome (Katrin Bromber)**

9.30 – 10:00 **Introduction to the Workshop**

Paolo Gaibazzi, Abdoulaye Sounaye and Julian Tadesse

10.00 – 11:30 **Envisioning Possible Futures**

Abdoulaye Sounaye: Eschatological musings among reformist Muslims in Niger

Daniel Mains: "Constructing Possible Futures through Urban Infrastructure in Ethiopia"

Discussant: Charles Piot

11:00 – 11:15 **Coffee Break**

11:15 – 12:45 **Economies of Potentiality**

Julian Tadesse: "Narratives of potentiality – Entrepreneurship promotion in Ethiopia"

Gisa Weszkalnys: "First oil or stranded asset? Explorations on the wrong side of history in São Tomé e Príncipe"

Discussant: Marco Di Nunzio

12:45 – 14:00 **Lunch**

14:00 – 15:30

Vernacular Speculation

Paolo Gaibazzi: "West African traders speculating in Angola's boom and bust economy"

Carl Rommel: "Men in the making: Youth football and masculine speculation in post-2011 Egypt"

Discussant: Sandra Calkins

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee Break

15:45 – 17:15

Critical Narratives of Possibility

Marco Di Nunzio: "Uncertainty, Marginality and Multiplicity: A view from an African Success Story"

Sandra Calkins: "Possibility and Loss"

Discussant: Daniel Mains

17:15 – 17:30

Summary and General Discussion

Day II – 10 November 2017

9:30-11:00

Social Lives of Possibility

Alice Elliot: "Contagious possibility: permutations of the possible in North Africa"

Charles Piot: "Mobility as an End"

Discussant: Katrin Bromber

11:00 – 11:15

Coffee Break

11:15 – 12:45

Migration as Horizon of Possibility (Part I): Possibilities and Limits

Samuli Schielke: "A bigger prison. Egyptian migrations and the walls of possibility and impossibility"

Alexandra D'Onofrio: "Mediterranean crossings: possibilities in loop"

Discussant: Paolo Gaibazzi

12:45 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:30

Migration as Horizon of Possibility (Part II): Retrospectives and Anticipations

Knut Graw: "Migration and Voice: Notes on West African Migration Memories"

Dinah Hannaford: "Possibility and Promise in an African Global City: Return Migration and North-South Migration to Dakar, Senegal"

Discussant: Abdoulaye Sounaye

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee Break

15:45 – 16:45

Final Discussion & Publication Plans