

Vacancy for a Ph.D. position, January 2010

Title of the programme

Mobile Africa Revisited:

A comparative study of the relationship between new communication technologies and social spaces (Chad, Mali, Cameroon, Senegal, Angola)

Programme Coordinators

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Counterpart Institute

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Outline of the PhD project in Anglophone Cameroon

In this research programme an interpretation will be offered of the relationship between the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), social space, mobility and marginality in Sub-Saharan Africa. In six case-studies (Central Chad, West-Cameroon, Central Mali, Senegal, North Angola and South-East Angola), the programme seeks to arrive at an interdisciplinary analysis of the dynamics of mobility, social relations and communication technologies.

Title of the case-study in Anglophone Cameroon:

Communication technologies, Politics and Mobility in the Bamenda Grassfields and amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Cameroon and the diaspora.

Summary of case study proposal:

In this marginal Anglophone region in Cameroon where the state is perceived to be Francophone-dominated, the history of ICTs is closely linked to the perception and articulation by Anglophones (largely originating in the Bamenda Grassfields) of political, cultural and economic marginality. The region has a long history of mobility, hence the concept of mobile margins is applied to the communities that exist between Cameroon Grassfields, diaspora (Europe and USA, but as well within Africa, i.e. South Africa). In this project transformations in the mobile margins, arising in relation to ICTs with their significant transnational character, are linked to the construction of political, socio-economic and cultural identities and the articulation of politico-social aspirations. ICTs are explored as vehicles for physical and social mobility away from (perceived) marginality and also for staying in touch with the place called 'home' in the interest of negotiated social change. The study thus seeks to understand how the people of this region have increasingly discovered and struggled for recognition, representation and social transformation through the possibilities offered them by new information and communication technologies.

First the lorry made it possible for them to discover the marvels and dangers of colonial plantation agriculture in the coastal region. Here first arose the tensions and attractions of feeling at home away from home. With better roads and increased mobility such places became less mysterious, more visible and real as predatory sites of accumulation, where migrants slaved away without relent. Still more technological advances (airplane, television, Internet and mobile phone) are taking people of the region further afield into distant foreign lands and virtual spaces, as families and

communities sacrifice sons and daughters to forage for opportunities in Africa, Europe, North-America and elsewhere. The interaction between migratory trends and stay-at-home communities appears to be giving rise to a wholly new social landscape, not always of a positive nature. As evident from complaints by diasporic Cameroonians, the expectations of modernity through consuming foreign goods have engendered highly mercantilist attitudes by kin and acquaintances determined to treat those in the diaspora essentially as disposable wallets on legs. The economic, political, social and cultural implications of all these encounters with and negotiation of ICT should be fascinating to study.

The candidate is expected to be:

1. prepared to carry out ethnographic fieldwork (qualitative, in-depth interviews, participant observation) in the area of the case-study concerned. Knowledge of south-west Cameroon (Grassfields) is necessary; Research with the diaspora community is preferably based in the Netherlands or in South Africa;
2. interested in combining a historical/anthropological perspective in research.
3. possess a good knowledge of English;
4. prepared to travel to Leiden and Cameroon for proposal writing/training and for writing-up of the PhD thesis;
5. prepared to attend workshops and seminars of the programme;
6. produce half-yearly reports to be send to the programme coordinators of the ASC, in which all financial aspects and the proceedings of the research are explained, inclusive of all evidence (original tickets, original receipts) of the costs made;
7. Available and prepared to do the PhD full-time for a duration of three years and end the 3 years programme with a completed PhD thesis conform international academic standards.

Contract

Includes stipend of 1,000 Euro per month, research and transport costs will be covered by the programme. The candidate is expected to start immediately and be in position for 3 years in a full-time engagement. The contract period is April 1, 2010 until March 1, 2013

To apply for this PhD position the interested candidates are requested to send:

- 1.) A copy of Research MA degree or Mphil an electronic copy of MA or Mphil thesis or dissertation
- 2.) A letter of motivation
- 3.) A preliminary (draft) research proposal inspired by the theme of the Cameroon case study
- 4.) Evidence of familiarity and engagement with ethnographic research
- 5.) Declaration of availability to pursue the PhD full time for the next 3 years.
- 6.) The names and addresses of two referees

Please send application electronically or by post to:

Inge Brinkman, Programme Coordinator, African Studies Centre, PO Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands

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The final date of application is 15th of February 2010