

## **Panel G: Which way research on gender, belonging and culture in African studies in the Nordic countries? Looking at the past and the future (chair/coordinators: Mai Palmberg & Eva Evers Rosander)**

### **Panel description**

African studies in our part of the world have often been part, the major part, of development studies. This has meant a priority, not to say exclusivity to social sciences, a social engineering *raison d'être*, and often a framework of 'us' assisting 'them'. In more recent years there are ever stronger demands that research is useful, that its success be measurable, and its results translatable to usefulness for policy makers. Despite these trends there have been important countertrends, represented by (1) gender research, (2) research into images of Africa and contemporary arts by Africans, and (3) an emerging field of studies of the African diaspora. The two first have been represented in the 1990s and this decade at the Nordic Africa Institute with one research programme each. These programmes have now been discontinued. A diaspora cluster has been started, but seems mainly socio-economic. All three research themes have internationally had as one of their methods a deconstruction of received notions of African patterns of belonging and social behaviour: In the gender research questions have been put both about patriarchies and the applicability of Western feminism; in the culture research our images of Africa are examined, and the contemporary cultural expressions of urban Africa seen as both exciting and authentic; the diaspora research foregrounds complex patterns of belonging and the economic power of the diasporic Africans.

#### **1) Mai Palmberg**

#### **2) Eva Evers Rosander (Associate NAI Senior Researcher)**

#### **2) Raisa Simola (University of Eastern Finland): MAMI WATA, A WATER GODDESS**

Mami Wata is a powerful water goddess / water spirit in various parts of West Africa; even today is she very much alive in people's lives. In addition to 'common people', Mami Wata has inspired writers, artists and scholars to create their interpretations of her. For example, recently (2009) a big art exhibition on the arts for water spirits was arranged in Washington; and earlier (2003) in Finland, in the Helinä Rautavaara museum, rituals around Mami Wata in Benin were presented. In my paper, I am interested in the figure of Mami Wata in arts in general – in her visual form – and in the figure of Mami Wata in some fictive texts in particular. Comparison between Mami Wata in African children's fiction and mermaids in Western children's fiction might be fruitful as well.

#### **3) Helena Oikarinen-Jabai (Aalto University)**

In my presentation I will discuss about the Africa relationship of second generation Afro-Finnish youngsters. I am conducting a participatory research with Afro-Finnish youngsters. With a team we organize video and photo workshops, where the research participants are involved in the reporting process by creating material - for example, photos, books and videos. These products are part of the research reporting and also part of my data. In the presentation I will describe how youngsters relate to Africa and what are their images about Africa.

#### **4) Katharina Pohl (Bielefeld University): The African Other and the Universalized Self**

Norway and to a lesser extent also Germany have been and still are particularly committed in giving “development assistance”. Seen from the perspective of both countries, these activities seem to be remarkable: although Germany, contrary to independent Norway, possessed colonies outside Europe, neither of the countries ever regarded itself as a leading colonial power. Therefore, they have only played a marginal role in postcolonial debates – considering themselves innocent of any ‘colonial guilt’. The central subject of investigation in my paper is the question of how in public discourses in Norway and Germany the humanitarian efforts of these countries in Africa are portrayed and to what extent autostereotypes of especially Norway as “humanitarian super power”, i.e. as particularly established “donor country”, are generated and reinforced. At the same time I would like to investigate if and how the “development assistance” provided by national organizations and institutions is portrayed as a specific feature separating the respective country from other states, i.e. how “development assistance” is created as an element of national self-description. In this sense, I will argue that the nation state as a spatial concept might be contested by phenomena such as globalization but that perceptions of national identity and belonging are still rather persistent – even in discourses implying an increasing political internationalization. In a second step I will try to analyze the question to what extent moral values such as charity or concepts such as democracy or human rights are being instrumentalized as central differentiation categories for generating hetero- and autostereotypes. In this context, special attention will be paid to two seemingly conflicting processes: that of universalization and that of nationalization. Here, the main questions will be how certain ideas (i.e. the above-mentioned notions) are constructed as universally valid in discourses on “development assistance” and how these then universalized concepts can be used in order to create explicitly nationally connotated self-images.

#### **5) Hanna Acke (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität): “Det folk som sitter i mörker och dödens skugga” - Uses of images of the African Other for the negotiation of Swedish identity**

This paper will not be looking at Africa as the space of interest, but at “Africa” as an imagined space in nineteenth and early twentieth century Swedish thinking. It thereby takes up research themes that have been employed by the NAI-projects Cultural images in and of Africa and its subproject The Nordic Colonial Mind, transforming their focus insofar as it will concentrate mainly on the uses of the Other for the construction of the Self. In my presentation I will be addressing the question of how Africa as a category is used to construct Sweden as a nation and as an integral part of Europe in the discourses of the missionary societies in Sweden around 1900. I argue that the so-called “foreign” mission of the nineteenth and early twentieth century played an immensely important role for the development of Swedish self-images. The central sources to be analysed will be publications of the Swedish missionary societies. How are images of the Swedish Self and of the African Other (re)established through the categorisation of religion, culture, nationality, gender, race and class? What knowledge about Africa and its people(s) do the actors of this discourse produce in Sweden? Which identities and traits do they thus ascribe to themselves? And how is Sweden integrated into ideas of Europe as the “cradle of civilisation” in the course of this process?