

Photography in Bamenda

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This dissertation project analyses the power of photography in the Cameroonian town of Bamenda. During long-term fieldwork several kinds of power and various genres with powerful meanings in the realm of photography have been examined. A main focus of the project is how material pictures or at least their mental images (eg. meanings) can be transformed.



.Gay Photo Studio, Bamenda, May 1981.
("Gay" means "cheerful" in this context.)

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*„They [people] like it [photography] too much...
(young man, Bamenda 2003).“*

Background

Several exhibitions (eg. Snap me one [1998], L’Afrique elle-même in [2000] etc.) and works on photography in the sub-Saharan area were realized. But certain aspects of the production and especially the ways of distribution and consumption concerning photography, the impact of photography on people’s life, empirical examples about the global circulation of pictures and some modes of transformations in the realm of photography have rather been neglected so far.

Specific Objectives/Research Questions

By using Mitchell’s (1986,1994) distinction of “pictures” as material objects and “images” as mental constructions the work addresses the following questions in the field of photography:

- How does photography act on people and how do people use photography?

- What are the types (genres) of pictures and what are their images?
- How are pictures and images typically (re-) produced and transformed?

Methodology

Several methods have been applied from (participant) observation, interviews and open-ended talks. As a major cross-cutting methodological approach serves the object-centred and the action-centred perspective.

Results and Relevance

In a town like Bamenda the kinds of use and the powers of photography are or were in many respects different, though similar compared to Central Europe. The work will fill in a gap by providing an overview on typical pictures (genres), images and their transformations in a sub-Saharan region.