

Family Matters Introduction

The 'Family Matters' project was carried out by seven Goethe-Instituts in Angola, Burkina Faso, DRC, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda and South Africa. The content produced was mediated/curated/directed by diverse individuals, each generously bringing themselves to the work and sharing their interpretation of the brief.

Photographs and films depicting Africans are inescapably tied to colonial histories, when they were first used to create patronising and problematic depictions to satisfy an ethnocentric and western gaze. Over the past few decades, this narrative has been challenged by creative producers living on the continent, who have taken these mediums and re-moulded them. The fragments of this project, brought together here, are all part of this growing body of respectful representation and self-reflection.

In South Africa, Zara Julius created two short video documentaries, producing careful and complex portraits that prioritised honest and fair depictions of the participants. In Kenya, Wanjeri Gakuru recorded audio interviews with five people, being aware all the time that they should not "carry the burden of representation", but rather stand wholly as themselves. In our mediation and presentation of this project, we hope to have followed Julius and Gakuru's lead.

In Angola and Rwanda each of the individuals interviewed was photographed alone, standing as the sole representative of the families they spoke about. From the DRC and Namibia we have both film and photography that shows multiple members of each family. In Burkina Faso, sociologist Mariam Congo wrote short articles reflecting on each interview she conducted and in Kenya, Dr. Lucy W. Ngige wrote a short academic article based on Wanjeri Gakuru's interviews.

Much of the content produced not only went through facilitators, photographers, website designers and filmmakers, but was also mediated by translators who moved text between multiple languages. We were asked to produce a 'takeaway exhibition' for the project in the form of a small publication. Given the depth and variety of the content produced, the 'takeaway' exhibition could only contain a fraction of the full scope of the project that includes voice recordings, videos and hundreds of photographs. The takeaway exhibition is dotted with QR codes that can be used to access this website. By existing in both physical and digital formats we hope that this project will have a high degree of accessibility.

It is also our hope that audiences will spend as many enjoyable hours as we have getting to know each of the families who chose to participate. The openness and clarity with which they shared their stories is breathtaking in its generosity and it seems only right that we continue to share as openly as they have.

- Helen Harris and Gina Figueira