



Call for papers:

ABORNE Conference on 'How is Africa Transforming Border Studies?'

*Hosted by the School of Social Sciences,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
10-14 September 2009*

The African Borderlands Research Network - ABORNE(<http://www.aborne.org/>) - is an interdisciplinary network of over 70 academic researchers and institutions in Europe, Africa and North America.

Its members are from all disciplines of the social sciences, with an emphasis on anthropology and history. They share a long-term interest in all aspects of international borders and trans-boundary phenomena in Africa. The emphasis is largely on borderlands as physical spaces and social spheres, but the network is also concerned with regional flows of people and goods as well as economic processes that may be located at some distance from the geographical border. From April 2009, ABORNE will be funded by the European Science Foundation as an ESF networking programme.

ABORNE will hold its third annual meeting at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, from 10-14 September 2009. Papers are invited from scholars of African borderlands and borders at all levels. Financial support is available for participants.

Both 'border theory' and border studies as a field owe much of their cross-disciplinary origins and development to scholars of the American Southwest. By the late 1990s, spurred by the rapid development of the European Union, Europeanist scholars had contributed not only a wealth of empirical studies but also significant theoretical insights and concepts to border studies. What then of Africa, the peripheral poor relation of the area studies' family? African borders have often been seen as incomplete or exceptional in relation to mainstream border theory – due to their supposed porosity, negotiability, arbitrariness, and lack of impact on popularly rooted social identities. Increasingly, however, Africanist scholars are making two arguments concerning the supposed exceptionalism of African borders. Firstly, many African borders are not indeed as irrelevant, porous and arbitrary as widely assumed. Secondly, many of the characteristics of African borders, in their diversity, are also present elsewhere. With increasingly global theorising, the US-Mexico and European borders may well turn out to be the exceptions to the global norm. African borders will contribute to helping us illuminate the functioning and meaning of borders in the global context. It is this process of bringing theory into Africa and Africa into theory which guides the present conference.

There are many characteristics of border management, border life, and borderlanders that operate at borders everywhere, that inform the comparative and analytical foundations of border theory, and to which African borders are no exceptions. Indeed, African borders often

exemplify extreme border characteristics. While for example the performance of sovereignty and control is a high-profile feature of any border post, it is particularly salient at African borders where the performance may exist in inverse relation to the substance of the state. Similarly, as borderlanders everywhere produce their own border theory rooted in social practice, thereby contesting the conventionally bounded citizenship imaginary of the state, the distance between borderlander and state claims to territory and identity in Africa are often significant, with few avenues for closing the gap. Few African countries, in contrast to Mexico and some others, have authorized dual nationality for its citizens, despite the impossibility of preventing it in practice.

Apart from furthering existing border theory, the empirical and theoretical insights gained from studying African borderlands are already transforming the wider field. ABORNE's 2009 annual meeting will offer a unique platform for both established experts in the field and younger scholars with empirical insights "fresh from the field" to explore the most fruitful avenues of investigation. Together, we will seek to contribute more to the field than an additional set of empirical case studies. We aim to sharpen the cutting edge of the borderlands research agenda for years to come, and thereby contribute to the re-making of border theory in the 21st century.

Prospective areas of current and future enquiry include the meaning of 'national' borders in pre-, post-, multi- or trans-national societies. While the Westphalian map remains in place, giving borders transnational political identities of their own, to what extent do they have stability as cultural markers? Should we start to consider national differences as purely political and economic matters: are there customs stations for customs? Using the idea of borders as conduits, how do borders facilitate cultural exchange just as they equilibrate the disparities of value of commercial exchange, disparities that are themselves reflected in culture and in social contestation? In many senses, therefore, the territorial border becomes less a boundary dividing identities into two nations than a bridge linking them in mutual dependence. Are these new forms of political and identity organisation only a reaction to uncertainty caused by the weakness or even the absence of state structures? Can these orders substitute the state in the long run? Might the strength and persistence of local political models lead to the transformation of the state as the only and unique model of organised power? Or do they foreshadow a specific form of interlacement between non-state actors and the state that will lead to heterarchical political settings in Africa and elsewhere? If so, what kinds of new borders – manifested physically, discursively, symbolically – are arising around such political forms?

We invite paper submissions on the following themes, but also welcome other related topics:

1. Conceptual frameworks for borderland research in Africa and the world
2. Boundaries and borderlands in a comparative perspective: methodologies and theoretical insights
3. The meaning of 'national' borders in pre-, post-, multi- or trans-national societies
4. Borderlands and cross-border economies
5. Borderlands and cross-border politics
6. Mobility across fixed and mobile borders
7. Borders in African philosophies
8. Inserting the history into borders and borderlands into history
9. Representations of borders and border crossing in cultural production
10. Borders, identity and borderland identities

Within this wide range of themes, we are seeking papers with the following characteristics:

- Papers that are conceptual in nature;
- Papers that seek to relate African fieldwork data to larger bodies of (theoretical) work;
- Papers that are explicitly comparative in focus.

Titles and abstracts are due by 30 April, 2009. To apply, please send the following information to both David Coplan (david.coplan@wits.ac.za) and Tara Polzer (tara.polzer@wits.ac.za):

- Name
- Institutional affiliation
- Contact Details (email and phone)
- Abstract (150-200 words)
- Whether you are already a member of ABORNE
- Whether you wish to become a member of ABORNE

For more information please contact David Coplan (David.Coplan@wits.ac.za), Tara Polzer (Tara.Polzer@wits.ac.za) or Wolfgang Zeller (wolfgang.zeller@helsinki.fi) or see www.aborne.org.