



# Fifth Annual Conference of the African Borderlands Research Network

## ABORNE

### *Crossing African Borders: Migration and Mobility*

21-25 September 2011

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

The fifth Annual Conference of the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE) will be held in Lisbon, Portugal on 21-25 September 2011. Following the annual meetings in Edinburgh (2007), Bayreuth (2008), Johannesburg (2009) and Basel (2010), the 2011 conference addresses a broad range of perspectives on African borders, focusing, however, on cross-border circulation and on migration and mobility in and through African borderlands.

ABORNE (<http://www.aborne.org/>) is an interdisciplinary network of over 170 academic researchers and institutions in Europe, Africa and North America. Its members are from all disciplines of the social sciences. 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. Since April 2009, ABORNE is funded by the European Science Foundation (ESF) through its Research Networking Programme (RNP).

The fifth annual conference of ABORNE will be held at the ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute (<http://www.iscte.pt>) in Lisbon, Portugal, where the Centre of African Studies (CEA) is located. The conference foresees the participation of around 50 scholars, presenting papers in the

thematic panels outlined above. Each panel is coordinated by ABORNE members, who will select papers that best match the overall conference theme – Borders and Migration/Mobility – and the specific theme of the panel, as well as the importance and role of borders. Papers need to be circulated BEFORE the conference by a deadline set by the panel convenors.

The Organizing Committee will invite individual speakers to give keynote lectures on the conference's main theme. Parallel events will be organised during the conference, including the annual steering committee meeting of ABORNE and a preparatory meeting for the 6th annual conference of ABORNE in 2012. The conference will also include a rich cultural program accompanying the event and an excursion. The CEA and the Lisbon University Institute have a solid experience organizing international meetings and all social sciences' departments – including the Master and PhD in African Studies – will be mobilised to actively participate in the event.

Financial support (all expenses for travel and accommodation) is available for a limited number of participants. In accordance with the rules set by the European Science Foundation, speakers based in countries financing the networking programme have to be given preference in funding. These are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom). Additional funding for Africa-based scholars will be sought through various programs and African colleagues are strongly encouraged to submit abstracts for papers directly contributing to the conference theme.

Titles and abstracts are due by **January 21, 2010**. To apply, please send the following information to both [aborne2011lisboa@gmail.com](mailto:aborne2011lisboa@gmail.com) **AND** the panel coordinator(s) (see below): name, institutional affiliation and position, contact details (email and phone), paper abstract (max. 200 words). Panel coordinators will send selection results to the applicants by **February 15, 2011**. Full papers are due on **August 31, 2011**.

For more information, please contact Cristina U. Rodrigues ([crisrina.rodriques@iscte.pt](mailto:crisrina.rodriques@iscte.pt)) or see [www.aborne.org](http://www.aborne.org).

## Background and conference theme

One of the principal areas ABORNE is concerned with is migration in Africa. Movement of people, goods and information across international and intercontinental borders is a growing trend in the world. In Africa, historical accounts of movements associate them to the emergence of important social and political formations on a variety of scales. These have contributed to building and reinforcing social identities through generations and to the establishment of spatial boundaries of nations and socio-political groups. The delimitation of colonial borders – and their maintenance after independence – conditioned not only pre-existing social formations but also set the basis for building modern nations. Former “partitioned” Africans now deal with national boundaries in several different ways, mobilizing ancient identities and building new ones.

Since colonial times, African border regions have been characterised by high levels of mobility, as a result of migrant labour systems, resettlement and flight from taxation and labour demands, and more recently as a result of substantial refugee flows.

The causes for migration and circulation through African borders are in many cases associated with involuntary conditions. Africans have experienced forced migration on a grand scale, historically related to slavery and, especially in recent decades, within and across sovereign state boundaries in the context of conflict and warfare. The most dramatic conflicts of recent times have all involved enormous human flows. The Rwandan genocide led to massive

displacements into the Congo and Uganda; the Congolese crisis that ensued and the Liberian and Sudanese civil wars have led to the flight of millions of people into neighbouring states. All these examples of human flight have involved the use of borders as sanctuaries not only for victims but also for perpetrators, thus underlining the complexity of insecurity often associated with border zones.

On the other hand, the search for opportunities in employment and commerce also serves to motivate Africans in the past and present to cross borders, thereby reconfiguring new and old social and economic contexts.

Intense cross-border migration of people is widely observed in the present day, yet often poorly understood as aspects of hazily defined “processes of globalization” or “trans-nationalism”. Trans-national and trans-continental migration demands for the construction of new identities, raises new perspectives on citizenship, and generates new dynamics of exchange and communication. In all these contexts, borders play a central role, both empirically and subjectively. Several national and international institutions have been working together and individually on issues related to migration in the world in order to understand the impacts and regulate circulation through borders. The Africa-Europe border crossings are specifically an area of great concern. The changes caused by regulation, however, encourage the development of new local and transnational strategies, with important implications to citizenship.

It is therefore important to take into account the different kinds of boundary crossers, their motivations (e.g. labour migrants, refugees and displaced persons); the distance between origin and destination (long-distance migrants, regional migration, trampoline towns’ temporary migration); the social status of migrants (middlemen minorities, qualified workers) and the implications of these movements (brain-drain issues, citizenship, urban growth). ABORNE is not merely interested to provide a platform for comparison of these human flows through border spaces, but also in assessing the extent to which borders are themselves shaped by mobility. The emergence of a discourse of indigeneity across a number of African countries has particular implications in border locations. The members of ABORNE are also interested in exploring the differences between types of mobility (e.g., floating populations as opposed to migration paths) and how these relate to forced migration.

## Panels

Focusing on the common theme of migration and mobility in and through African borderlands, the conference will address the following topics within the framework of thematic panels convened by ABORNE members. Papers contributing directly and explicitly to any of these panel themes are invited from scholars of African borderlands and boundaries at all career stages and from all social science disciplines.

### **PANEL 1: Methodologies for studying cross-border movements**

*Tara Polzer*

([tara.polzer@wits.ac.za](mailto:tara.polzer@wits.ac.za))

Research on migration and border areas in Africa brings together methodological challenges from both migration studies and borderland studies. On the one hand, these challenges arise from the context, including mobile research targets; multiple bureaucratic institutions with their respective actors, processes and archives; often uncertain legal or security conditions; a lack of reliable and comparable official data sources. On the other hand, both migration and borderland studies are multi- and interdisciplinary fields, which may open up opportunities for

innovative and multi-pronged methodological approaches, but which may also lead to confusion regarding comparisons and collaborations between researchers and communication with policy actors. This panel will bring together papers from different disciplinary backgrounds to present examples of interesting methodological approaches to studying mobility in and across borderlands, and to engage with broader disciplinary, strategic and ethical issues.

### **PANEL 2: Rethinking hierarchies of borders and border crossings?**

*Giorgio Miescher*

([gm@baslerafrika.ch](mailto:gm@baslerafrika.ch))

International borders and the respective borderlands stand in the centre of ABORNE's conceptual understanding or focus on borders. There are very good arguments to constrain oneself to this specific type of physical borders, as it certainly prevents the dilution of the terminology. But such a self-restraint can cause its own problems. Therefore, the panel wants to engage with a reflection and critical assessment of border hierarchies. What is the role and meaning of other territorial borders than international ones? Are there historical or recent case-studies showing that an internal border was/is potentially more relevant than an international border, i.e. with regard to migration or trade? And if so, what would such a hierarchical shift mean for the definition of borderlands? With regard to migration, we might not only question where the most relevant border was/is but also where such a border was experienced by the migrant(s), i.e. where the actual border experience took place. This panel welcomes both contributions which have a strong empirical focus as well as contributions concerned with theoretical debates regarding typologies and hierarchies of borders in Africa.

### **PANEL 3: The building of African territorial borders: the impact of pre-colonial and colonial migration on contemporary Africa**

*Camille Lefebvre*

([camillelefebvre@yahoo.fr](mailto:camillelefebvre@yahoo.fr))

*Jude Murison*

([jude.murison@gmail.com](mailto:jude.murison@gmail.com))

The creation of colonial borders impacted upon existing African social formations and identities, and the ability of people to move across physical space. While in many ways existing networks of trade and movement of people realigned themselves within the new framework of territorially defined rules, others continued to transcend them freely and without much change. From a governance perspective, the imposition of rigid geographical lines delineated the rights of people within the state where they were located. The displacement of those involved in liberation struggles created new networks in exile, whilst strengthening or impacting upon political networks of the host states. These evolutions of the ways people can move created different characteristics: The use of colonial and postcolonial borders as freedom opportunities, the encounter between new borders/new rules and old habits/old networks, the construction and prolongation of protracted refugee situations with second and third generations being born in exile; and the politicization of refugees within the politics of the host state. Colonization and the imposition of rigid geographical lines have changed the mobility of African people and helps us understand the motilities of today. This panel will examine the impact of the historical roots of migration, and its long durée on (i) governance and politics within the host state (state formation, elections, security), and (ii) on the exiled refugee population themselves (rights, integration, circular migration).

#### **PANEL 4: Forced migration and the role of borders**

*Paolo Gaibazzi*

([pgaibazzi@yahoo.it](mailto:pgaibazzi@yahoo.it))

*Stephan Dünnwald*

([stephan.duennwald@lrz.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:stephan.duennwald@lrz.uni-muenchen.de))

A vast number of people in Africa have been or are on the move as a consequence of displacement, eviction, deportation and trafficking, phenomena which usually go under the (problematic) label of 'forced migration'. As institutions and sites, international borders are of crucial importance for forced migration, whether for refugees seeking protection in the adjacent state's territory or for states to expel aliens. Borderlands themselves are transformed by forced migration. For instance, large and semi-permanent refugee camps are often constructed near international borders. As governments and international aid organizations build infrastructures and conduct aid programmes new interactions with local population may occur. Involving complex forms of governance and transnational relations (e.g. transcontinental relocation programs in refugee camps), forced migrations also tend to add a layer of legal, political and social complexity to borderlands hosting forced migrants. This panel calls for contribution that explore the interplay between forced migration and borderland areas, drawing particular attention to the dynamics and transformations occurring on the ground.

#### **PANEL 5: Border crossings and economic circulation: trade, smuggling, labour**

*Gregor Dobler*

([gregor.dobler@unibas.ch](mailto:gregor.dobler@unibas.ch))

Economic reasons are certainly not the exclusive motive for migration, but they have always been a powerful incentive for temporary or permanent movement of people across borders. People move across borders in order to bridge different contexts in legitimate or illegitimate trade; they seek employment in a different country; or they might just flee a situation in the search for greener pastures elsewhere. In line with these different aims in migrating, economic migrants have variously been described as entrepreneurial pioneers, as *bricoleurs* making the best out of a difficult situation or as victims of economic globalization. The panel looks for case studies on specific groups of migrants, which are open to a comparative discussion. How is economically induced migration shaped by structural conditions, how much is it characterized by individual initiative? How are the two interlinked? And how do changing global economic conditions affect the reasons for, and the ways of economic migration, both within as well as in and out of Africa?

#### **PANEL 6: Border regimes and migrant practices: citizenship, belonging and the making of migrant subjectivities**

*Paolo Gaibazzi*

([pgaibazzi@yahoo.it](mailto:pgaibazzi@yahoo.it))

*Mattia Fumanti*

([m\\_fumanti@yahoo.com](mailto:m_fumanti@yahoo.com))

Border regimes and their effects on migration vary significantly across the African continent, ranging from the complete absence of border controls to tightly securitized border zones. However, border regimes do not solely consist of policies aimed at controlling cross-border mobility. Border regimes are linked to ideas and practices of citizenship, belonging, legality and ultimately to the nature of the border itself. Furthermore, such ideas and practices are often mediated by different actors other than the state – migrants, borderland inhabitants, private security companies or vigilantes, NGOs and others. Complex, and often contradictory as they

are, border regimes affect migrants and their lives, in Africa, and increasingly so in the African diaspora, contributing to the making, unmaking or remaking of migrant subjectivities. Whether they are locally mobile people, or transcontinental migrants, they might have to: adapt their mobility patterns; develop or resist categorizations by developing or rediscovering different identities; create new lifestyles and re-imagine their life projects. This panel welcomes contributions that help shedding light on the nexus between border regimes, mobility and migrant subjectivities.

**PANEL 7: Partitioned Africans**

*Jordi Tomas Guilera*

([jtomasguilera@yahoo.com](mailto:jtomasguilera@yahoo.com))

*Alexandra Dias*

([alexmagnolia.dias@gmail.com](mailto:alexmagnolia.dias@gmail.com))

While colonial borders partitioned African communities, the new boundaries generated a vast variety of personal and collective strategies, many of them based on ethnic and family relationships of people living on both sides of state boundaries. This panel examines how borderland residents define, value and use international boundaries; how new and old identities are mobilised and reshaped; and what role does the border and border circulation control plays. Through several concrete case studies, this panel will try to analyze the creative permeability of Africa's international boundaries in the present day – mainly through migration and trade, but also in other fields, including kinship, traditional authorities, religious ceremonies, health practices, educational institutions and development initiatives – and how this affects “partitioned” Africans nowadays.