



Invitation to an ABORNE Workshop on

“Bewildering Borders”

Transnational Conservation and Resource Governance in Africa

To be held in conjunction with the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria from **Friday 27th to Saturday 28th September 2013** with an excursion and discussion of a planned publication to a former border post in a lake shared by Austria and Hungary (Neusiedlersee) on Sunday 29th.

Background

The African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE) is an interdisciplinary network of over 250 academic researchers and institutions in Europe, Africa, North America and Asia. Its members are from all disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, as well as a range of policy institutions. They share a long-term interest in all aspects of international borders and transboundary 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. Through its Research Networking Programme (RNP), the European Science Foundation (ESF) has funded ABORNE since April 2009, to convene thematic conferences, workshops and PhD-level training events on the topic of African borderlands. For a detailed introduction to ABORNE, visit the network website at www.aborne.org.

The workshop seeks to create a forum in which researchers and practitioners can reflect on the past and ongoing success and failure of specific examples of **Transnational Conservation and Resource Governance in Africa**, and discuss the challenges and priorities in the years ahead. We also expect this event to strengthen existing and forge new lasting links between the fast-growing research and policy community concerned with African borderlands and Cross Border Cooperation (CBC), and to strengthen the capacity of existing African institutions in particular.

Workshop Format and Objective

Ca. 15-20 academic scholars and practitioners from policy-making institutions will present and discuss their ongoing work on the topic **Transnational Conservation and Resource Governance in Africa**. The aim of the workshop is twofold:

- a) To bring together scholars and practitioners with extensive experience in their respective fields for a productive dialogue.
- b) To collect draft chapters for an edited volume on the workshop topic in the [ABORNE - Palgrave book series](#). The publication of a shorter briefing aimed at policy institutions will also be considered.

Workshop Theme

Decolonization and conservation are perhaps the two most important driving forces behind the trend to realize large Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TCAs) in Africa. However, some big dreams for an extensive unmaking of borders as the conceived “scars of colonization” as well as the offshoot for an “African Renaissance” under the ambitious brand of “Peace Parks” have not yet fully materialized. The Workshop (and the focus on the planned publication) take a broad perspective on TCAs to examine their problems and the potentials on the conceptual and empirical level. Some of the setbacks noted in the literature concern the obvious differences between the states “sharing” such a transborder zone. These may be attributed among other factors to the divergent historical trajectories of these areas in relation to colonial and post-colonial states and the viable economic interests in forms of resource exploitation irreconcilable with the overall aim of biodiversity protection.

This workshop therefore intends to focus on past and present processes of re-spatialization in border areas in Africa with significant, commercially viable resources, such as game/tourism in transfrontier parks, the transborder management of various ecological areas (including lakes, rivers, estuary systems) termed as “wilderness areas” although they may be used by local peoples for their livelihood since ages, and other (transboundary) natural and cultural resources. It will consider the practical and theoretical implications of spatial control mechanisms set up to regulate access to existing resources and political initiatives to create new forms of income generation for local communities and the national economy. Special attention will be given to an economic development strategy geared for marriage with notions of stability, peace, nature conservation and the involvement of local communities in a realm of transnational cooperation. The “bewildering of borders”, i.e. the introduction of transnational conservation regimes for wildlife and nature protection, thus targets the peaceful civilization of conflicts about legitimate access and use of resources in border areas. Transfrontier Conservation Areas are a vast experimental field for a potential substitution of contingent forms of resource exploitation with

‘soft’ or sustainable new forms of integrated, consultative and joint resource management schemes in borderlands.

The booming wildlife tourism industry has thus entered into direct competition with other resources such as mining. It has also been associated with new forms of governance directed, at least in South Africa, towards social transformation through Black Economic Empowerment, employment equity, community-based development, co-management and individual skills training schemes, among other measures of a more equitable distribution of wealth. It will be of special interest to compare certain achievements in one part of the African continent with the lack thereof in other parts and enquire into possible political causes on the level of the governance of nature. The Workshop may explore empirically how transboundary development initiatives benefit a possible dissemination of such transitional modes of governance to other countries in the region. However, environmental policies targeting the joint goal of transboundary global biodiversity protection and regional integration through peace building and the creation of mutual trust have to consider a sometimes radical divergence in local histories and interests of local communities across the border(s).

One specific focus of the Vienna workshop should include the adequate involvement or, empirically, rather non-involvement of local communities, particularly indigenous peoples who were often pushed towards state boundaries until recent times. Historically accumulated relations of power, exposed by unilateral forms of exclusion from areas once “nationalised” as parks or conservation zones are targeted by the analysis of forms of exclusion and, perhaps emerging forms of inclusion and participatory governance. In this regard, the exploitation of ‘ethnic’ cultures and indeed ethnicity as such will also be explored. ‘Living Museums’ (i.e. local people representing and, in fact, ‘staging’ their cultural peculiarities) and other forms of an increasing commodification and display of cultures in spatially confined/dedicated locations where they are allowed to exist are of interest in this regard. These forms of “community participation” have become an important concern for anthropologists, as elaborated by Jean and John Comaroff in their seminal essay on “Ethnicity, Inc.” (2009).

The workshop intends to analyze such processes of re-spatialization comparatively with a strong empirical direction. A wide range of political/legal, economic/social and/or ecological/biological aspects may be explored between the antidotes of (resource) conservation and exploitation. We thus intend to break with a state-centric perspective and rather propose to focus on multi-sphere or participatory forms of governance, including transnational agendas. However, with all attention given to global agencies, regional and local actors including the ‘subversive’, ‘unofficial’ and perhaps even ‘resistant’ agency driven by the residents of these borderlands shall also be investigated.

The key question(s) may then be: If and how may a new vision for the protection of wildlife and biodiversity contribute to a political healing of the ‘scars of colonial history’ (i.e. the decolonization of the national borders dissecting Africa according to European design) and thereby engender more viable forms of natural resource management? And, on the flipside of the coin, how are some of the new governance idioms used to lure away from the benefits of the powerful and the possible disadvantages for less connected local communities – in many cases those people referred to by the notion of “borderlanders”. The livelihood goals of borderland residents are not just about the trickle-down of visible economic benefits to the broader constituency, but also about the recognition of local identities, the respect for divergent histories and cultural concepts of authority and of due process in opinion- and will-formation. Effective participation, and, perhaps most importantly, legal guarantees to secure land rights and natural resources are thus to be seen as key elements for a sound basis of conservation governance.

A further concern in this regard is the inclusion and adequate participation of local communities, including indigenous peoples, who lived on many of these territories and used their resources for their livelihood. It appears important to emphasise that in most if not all concerned cases, this resource use appears to have been fairly sustainable, since otherwise there would be nothing to conserve. What are thus the realistic prospects for the morally loaded normative discourse on the re-spatialization of large areas of the entire African borderlands – the proclaimed ‘healing of colonial scars’? Most commonly projected rewards of the peace parks model to overcome border frictions emphasize the enhancement of peace-building, the creation of regional stability and mutual empowerment through joint resource management plans of development on the one hand and empowerment, social transformation, decolonization and the potential solution of global environmental concerns over a rapidly degenerating biodiversity on the other hand. Against this optimistic scenario the proposed workshop may probe into some negative prospects predicted by some local players involved: i.e. a tacit re-nationalization of lands, a concealed land-grabbing in the name of conservation and natural resource protection, a cut off from local accesses to formerly owned lands, a reversal of community-based natural resource management schemes or an increasing control of newly invented parastatal institutions over the lives of local people.

The organizers welcome contributions that are pitched at the regional level as well as those based on more local-level fieldwork.

Some **specific questions to be considered** are:

- How far have the various initiatives for transfrontier or peace parks evolved and what are the intermediate results for the various stakeholders?

- How does the “opening” or (re-)bordering of border areas (“re-spatialization”) with commercially viable resources, such as game/tourism affect local communities and indigenous peoples?
- How do indigenous peoples/local communities in border areas benefit from wildlife management and other natural and cultural resources in transfrontier parks?
- What specific articulations of the commercialisation of wildlife and culture (“Ethnicity Inc.”) can be observed?

Expected Contributions

To ensure continuity in the discussions participants will be expected to attend the entire event from the morning of 27th to the afternoon of 28th September 2013. All participants commit themselves to contributing a written paper, a power point presentation, or both, in line with the workshop theme as outlined above. The papers must be pre-circulated and submitted by the **deadline: 15th September 2013.**

Funding

For the participants, the following costs will be covered: All expenses for travel to and from Vienna, accommodation including breakfast (arrival 26th- departure 29th September), lunch and coffee/tea breaks, one of the dinners and possible visa costs. Participants must book their own transport and their expenses will be reimbursed after the event against original receipts and flight boarding cards. In compliance with the rules of the funding organisations, flights must be booked as economy class. Early booking is essential to avoid costly tickets, for which the secured funding is not sufficient. Therefore, only expenses for flights booked no later than 25th August 2013 can be refunded.

How to Participate

Those interested to participate are requested to submit the following documents:

- Title and abstract of the paper or presentation they propose to deliver (max. 500 words)
- Up-to-date CV

These documents should be combined, in the above order, into one pdf file and sent to **both** of the following addresses:

werner.zips@univie.ac.at

edith.neubauer@gmail.com

The deadline to submit these documents is 15th of May 2013.

Location

The host institution and local partner for this event is the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology, at the Faculty for Social Sciences, University of Vienna, Austria.

Vienna University lies in the centre of Austria's capital city. September has a relatively mild climate.

It is planned to organise an overnight excursion to the former border post between Austria and Hungary in the middle of Neusiedlersee, from Saturday 28th to Sunday 29th. The purpose for this meeting will be an informal round table on the planned publication and further networking. At this point we cannot promise to cover the excursion financially – this will depend on the actual budget situation due to funding. However, you will be informed in time about this.

Transportation and accommodation

Participants from overseas should arrive at Vienna International Airport. Transport and hotel accommodation in Vienna will be coordinated closer to the event and further details will be circulated in due course

Members of the Organizing Committee

Dr. Manuela Zips-Mairitsch, Workshop organizer, University of Vienna

Prof. Werner Zips, Workshop organizer, University of Vienna

Mag. Edith Neubauer, Workshop Secretariat, University of Vienna

Wolfgang Zeller, ABORNE Coordinator, Edinburgh University

Prof. Paul Nugent, ABORNE Chairman, Edinburgh University

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