

INTRODUCTION: CROSSING AFRICAN BORDERS – MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

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This publication is one of the results of a conference organised in Lisbon in 2011 on the theme of African borders and their relationships with migration and mobility. The selected papers are a sample of the diverse perspectives on the general theme presented at the meeting. Other written contributions were presented at the event and summaries of them can be found online.¹

Unwritten contributions were the discussions and exchanges of ideas throughout the conference and the opportunity to share visions and research results. Most of the participants are members of the ABORNE – the African Borderlands Research Network (www.aborne.org), funded by the European Science Foundation (www.esf.org). ABORNE was created in 2007 and is solidly established as a fundamental platform for continuing work about borders in Africa and results of research have been consistently expanding since its existence. The network promoted this event, allowing a substantial number of its members to participate and present ongoing research and papers resulting from long-term research. Many other scholars met ABORNE members at the event and this helped to increase ABORNE's membership, as many joined the network. Publications resulting from research about African borders can be found in many scientific journals and other publications and the ABORNE website has updated links to the majority of them. This collection focuses on migration and mobility and their relationship with African borders.

African border studies

Although there is a vast literature and historical analysis on the many issues raised by African borders, sociological studies mobilising groups of scholars particularly interested on borders in Africa can be situated in the 1990s onwards, in particular after the conference “Borders and Borderline Zones in Africa” in Edinburgh in 1993. This initiative was followed by several research projects at the beginning of the following decade, like one on “Democracy, identities and Representations” (2001-2005, conducted by the Centre d’Études d’Afrique Noire at the University of Bordeaux and the University of Barcelona) or a project on “Borders of Africa: the dynamics of political loyalty and local identities” (2002-2006, conducted by the African Studies Centre of the University of Leiden. More recently, in 2007, the African Borderlands

¹ www.aborne.org/uploads/media/2011_Lisbon_Panels.pdf

Research Network (ABORNE) was created, funded by several European science institutes through the European Science Foundation.

A few papers stand out in the general research on African borders, some of them published prior to 1990, like those by Jeffrey Herbst, Fredrik Barth, Paul Nugent and Anthony Asiwaju. Even though the collective study of African borders spans a vast number of subjects – from archaeology (Hall, 1984) to political science (Larémont, 2005) or sociology (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996) – the need for an interdisciplinary approach led to the gradual integration of many relevant topics into analyses, encompassing issues such as sovereignty (Mbembe, 2002), migration (Tomimbeni, 2005), cross-border trade (Dobler, 2008; Meagher, 2003), conflict (Zeller, 2007), gender (Cheater, 1998), law and legitimacy (Abraham, 2006), traditional authorities (Zeller, 2007; Tomàs, 2006) and social change and identities (Ferguson, 1999; Dobler, 2010). Additionally, there is an important body of present-day studies focusing more and more for instance on managing and sharing trans-border natural resources or the spread of HIV-AIDS.

Generally speaking and notwithstanding the interdisciplinarity that characterises border studies, research can be grouped into approaches focusing on conflicts caused by the borders on one hand and approaches that emphasise other kinds of relationship – commitment, cooperation and intense exchanges on the other hand. Political disputes, the debate on identities and colonial borders in Africa, the occurrence or intensification of ethnic conflict or the conflict-ridden nature of post-colonial borders have caught the attention of several researchers (Asiwaju, 1985, 2003; Kapil, 1966; Nugent, 2003; Tronvoll, 1999; Sambanis, 1999; Herbst, 1989; Barth, 1969; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1982). This type of research led to a theoretical framework where important analytical categories such as democracy, citizenship and national and ethnic identities were introduced. Several other scholars focused instead on the dynamic, fluid and permeable qualities of borders and even of identities themselves, with many varied points of view emerging (Mbembe, 1999; Migdal, 2004; Pellow, 1996; Prescott, 1987; Rösler and Wendl, 1999; Nyamnjoh, 2007; Brambilla, 2009). Many of these also highlighted the role of relations in a border context between different actors beyond the ethnic group, such as the state, administrative bodies, economic agents, populations of different ethnicities and locations and religious organisations.

Both state and non-state actors have developed their own strategies, based on different concepts of international borders (Donnan and Wilson, 1999; Flynn, 1997; Dobler, 2009) which may coincide with and reinforce or, conversely, weaken each other (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996; Sambanis, 1999; Zeller, 2007; Asiwaju, 1985). Additionally, pressures at the local, regional or international levels and regional economic dynamics represent both constraints and opportunities, exploited differently by different actors (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996; Rodrigues, 2007, 2010). In appearance and in reality, most borders remain porous and subject to negotiation and conflict by different actors, collective and individual alike. African borders today have many forms throughout the continent. They have been utilised and appropriated to

different ends since independence, with obvious consequences for social and political organisation and regional integration (Nugent, 2003; Bach, 1999).

Recent changes affecting the movement of persons, goods and services involving intense trans-border mobility have promoted a more dynamic approach to cross-border studies, focusing on the new forms of social, economic and political relations and on the importance of globalisation and transnationalism. This focus was particularly addressed by the conference participants.

The conference themes

The conference on borders and migration in Africa attempted to cover a broad range of themes and issues, bringing together scholars from Europe, Africa and the United States. Migration and mobility in and out of Africa are central factors in the social, political and economic dynamics of life in borderlands. It is also one of the main concerns of state authorities, both in and outside Africa, and a key feature in African social and economic strategies. The theme, and its relation to the control and regulation of African borders, has attracted many scholars worldwide from several disciplines, which made this conference topic of high interest and allowed fruitful exchanges on an empirical and theoretical level.

Border studies have provided a critical framework for investigating the nature and implications of changing patterns of migration within Africa. A large amount of literature deals with ways in which borders have affected migration in Africa, especially labour, seasonal and forced migration. Illegal migration to Europe is currently a major international concern and several papers addressed this issue, while new trends in inter-African migration were also highlighted, together with their major social, political and economic implications.

The conference invited a number of international specialists who provided important contributions in their areas. Prof. Allen Howard from Rutgers University introduced the general aspects of border analysis in Africa in his keynote address "Sierra Leone-Guinea boundary and border zone trade: historical and comparative perspectives". His presentation covered different historical periods in the region and contributed not only to the framing of border studies in the continuous changes taking place in Africa but also fostered the discussion that followed.

The following short review cannot do justice to the programme or the many excellent contributions, but can only mention some of the themes emerging from the panels. The first panel, "Methodologies for Studying Cross-Border Movements", convened by Tara Polzer, focused on the methodological challenges from both migration and borderland studies. With the format of an open discussion or workshop, the panel discussed the challenges that arise from the context, including mobile research targets, which is precisely one of the main concerns of scholars engaged in border and migration analysis.

The second panel was more concerned with the theoretical approach to African borders (“Rethinking hierarchies of borders and border crossings?”) and was convened by Giorgio Miescher. It focused on the theoretical aspects of conceptualising borders. Presenters moved beyond “physical international borders” and discussed the role, pertinence and meaning of other territorial borders for the network and the scholars involved in it. It therefore addressed the academic “hierarchies” of these different types of border. Gardini spoke about “Multiple Borders: Migration, Land and Conflicts in Togo”, Lenggenhager focused on the “hierarchies” of borders (“From a Namibian Internal Border to the External Border of an International Nature Park”), Almeida the “African Refugee Camps” and Duh the “Importance of Somali Social Formation in Kenya-Somalia Border Crossing”. On the specific theme of the conference, migration was approached by questioning where borders are actually experienced by migrant(s).

Panel three on “The Building of African Territories through Borders”, convened by Camille Lefebvre and Jude Murison, contained presentations on a diverse range of country case studies (Cameroun, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda). The panel took a historical perspective, examining the impact of pre-colonial and colonial migration on contemporary Africa. Overall, the papers attempted to shed light on how colonisation and the imposition of geographical lines have changed the mobility of African people, and how this can help us understand mobility today. Els's presentation was on the “Dhimba in northwestern Namibia: Identities and belongings through migrations and (hi)stories”, Imbert-Vier asked “What is a migration boundary built for? The case of the ‘Barrage de Djibouti’”, Locatelli focused on “Ethiopian cross-border migration and the making of a ‘culture of the enemy’ in Eritrea”, Walker presented “To Zanzibar and back: Comorian mobilities in colonial and post-colonial Zanzibar”, Vaughan “Colonial Migration from French Equatorial Africa to Darfur”, Pahimi the “Pratiques fiscales et dynamique des migrations transfrontalières entre le Nord Cameroun, le Nord-Nigéria et le Sud tchadien” and Murison raised the question “When did you cross the border? The differing rights of Rwandan refugees and migrants in Uganda”.

Panel four, for which the convenors Paolo Gaibazzi and Stephan Dünwald invited papers on “Forced Migration and the Role of Borders” gathered presentations around two focuses. While some of the papers explored movements over inner-African borders focusing on integration and identity formation, a second set of papers dealt with European bordering processes in Africa and their effects on migration. Anthony Asiwaju showed the relevance of cross border movements under different colonial regimes for today’s border zones, while Tandia and Bakewell dealt with the agency of refugees and the role of the UNHCR refugee regime and informal integration. Integration, agency and identity were keywords also in Drotbohm's presentation on the arrival of deportees on the Cape Verdean Island of Brava. Fornale and Lemberg-Pedersen analysed the progression of European migration and border management in Africa, which increasingly affects the conceptualisation of borders in African states. Gormo's paper was on “Migration forcée des Tchadiens dans le département du Faro au Nord Cameroun”.

Panel five approached border circulation from an economic and trade perspective (“Border crossings and economic circulation: trade, smuggling, labour”) and was organised by Gregor Dobler. It started from the assumption that, although economic reasons are not the exclusive motive for migration, they have always been a powerful incentive. Papers in this panel analysed different dimensions of the economic dynamics for migration, including its importance for livelihoods and collective strategies (Kuschminder, Siegel and Andersson on “The Changing Face of Migration in Ethiopia”; Cross on “Migrants, borders and labour regimes in Mauritania: between militarisation and mobility”; Morgado on “Strategies for Survival in an Adverse Context [Niger]”); the changing reasons and justifications for migration over time (Tati on “Territory and border crossing for livelihoods among (voluntary and forced) migrants from DRC to Swaziland” and Lobo on “Making a life: female migration from Boa Vista Island, Cape Verde”) as well as the hidden purposes of border control by states (Polus on “Does Botswana create a new Gaza Strip?”). Two of the papers focused on smuggling, envisaging it as a generator of a “smuggling” culture, a substitute for state economic policy and, in certain contexts, as resistance movements (Hüsken on “The Culture of Smuggling in the Borderland of Egypt and Libya” and Bermant on “The moral economy of underground cross-border transactions at the border between Europe and Africa”).

Panel six, convened by Paolo Gaibazzi and Mattia Fumanti, was concerned with the linkages between “Border Regimes and Migrants’ Subjectivities”. The common assumption by the panel was that borders are not only state institutions having regulatory effects on mobility and citizens; they are also discursive practices that shape people who cross or inhabit border areas into particular kinds of subjects. The panel did not therefore confine its field of enquiry to identity politics, but also explored ways of being. All the papers in this panel took up the challenge of exploring border regimes and subjectivities by using an empirical approach, and hence the panel’s emphasis on practice, i.e. migrant as well as government practices. The panel had presentations by Russell (“Rwanda, Burundi and the Negotiation of Border Regimes in a Narrow Space”), Tsianos and Kuster (“Border regimes and migrants’ practices: citizenship, belonging and the making of migrant subjectivities”), and Graw (“Of Borders and Horizons: Reflections on Migratory Expectations in Africa and beyond”, co-authored with Schielke).

Panel seven, dedicated to “Partitioned Africans” and organised by Jordi Tomàs and Alexandra Dias, was designed to present the human factor in Africa’s international boundaries. It investigated how borderland groups define, value and use international boundaries with varying emphasis on social, cultural, religious and economical aspects. The panel was divided in two sessions. Georg Klute participated actively as a discussant during both. The cases were Nigeria/Cameroon (Njoku and Udeoji, “The Bakassi Peninsula Zone in Nigeria-Cameroun Border Relations”), Senegal/Mauritania (Kane, “Identity and Restored Citizenship”), Senegal/Guinea-Bissau (Tomàs on “An international border or just a territorial limit?”), Eritrea/Ethiopia (Dias, “From porous border to wall”), Mozambique/Zimbabwe (Patrício, “Ndau identity in the Mozambique-Zimbabwe borderland”) and Uganda/Sudan (Hollstegge, “Narrating and practising the state border between Uganda and Southern Sudan”).

Some topics discussed were common to all panels. These were the relation between informality and formality; negotiations (and failures) between state control of borders and migrants' agency; the translocality of migration as opposed to established international boundaries; the sense(s) of belonging for migrants and the role of borders in relation to it. Although one of the panels was exclusively devoted to discussing the methodological aspects of border analysis, the majority of the presentations stimulated discussion on the limits and possibilities for border research in Africa. National and international policy on migration and the way migration in and out of Africa is shaped and conditioned were another cross-cutting theme throughout the conference.

Migration and borders

One of the principal areas of African border studies 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 with the emergence of important social and political settings on a variety of scales. These have contributed to building and reinforcing social identities through generations and establishing 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 laid the foundation for building modern nations.

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. Intense circulation and exchange in borderland areas, often related to economic dynamics, in which labour and trade play a central role and determine border crossings, still create and reshape new and old social and economic contexts. The search for opportunities in employment and commerce also motivates Africans to cross borders in the past and present, thereby reconfiguring these new and old contexts.

On the other hand, the causes of migration and circulation across African borders are often 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. 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.

Intense cross-border circulation is widely observed, yet often poorly understood as aspects of hazily defined “globalisation processes” or “trans-nationalism”. Trans-national and trans-continental migration requires the construction of new identities, both in the countries of origin and the new locations

chosen by the immigrants, and generates dynamics of exchange and communication. Borders play a central role in this context, both empirically and subjectively.

To understand the reciprocal implications of borders on migration, it is 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 place and destination (long-distance migrants, regional migration, trampoline towns' temporary migration); the social status of migrants (middlemen minorities, qualified workers; brain-drain issues) and the implications of these movements (brain-drain issues, citizenship, urban growth). 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 across borders. 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 on citizenship. Some concerns regarding cross-border circulation involve finding out how identity (original and at destination) is moulded and modified, transformed and reinvented by long-distance migration and the possibilities of integration in destination locations.

ABORNE is not merely interested in providing 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.

The sample papers

The first paper, "Profiling Ethiopian Migration: A Comparison of Ethiopian Migrant Characteristics to Africa, the Middle East and the North" (Katie Kuschminder, Lisa Andersson and Melissa Siegel) deals with the characteristics of migrants from Ethiopia to three different migration destinations – Northern countries, other African countries and the Middle East. The paper is based on a household survey that shows that the characteristics of migrants and their households of origin differ depending on migration destination. Furthermore, the study highlights the role that increased migration flows to Africa and the Middle East in recent decades have played in reshaping the profile of Ethiopian migrants. Finally, it shows that current Ethiopian migration flows coincide with some of the current global migration trends but at the same time contrast with some of the overall migration figures for Africa.

Mamadou Kane's paper, "Identity Strategies, Cultural Practices and Citizenship Recovery: the Mauritanian Refugees in the Senegal Valley", discusses the complex issues of identity (re)construction in the "Djolly Senegal" refugee community. As a result of the conflict in 1989, these Mauritanian refugees developed strategies for integration into the Senegalese part of the borderland, facilitated by a common

language. Yet the process of losing and regaining their status nowadays, as they move freely between the two countries, is paralleled by a more complex process of identity quest or recovery. The paper examines these identity issues by focusing on the migrants' experience and the cultural bridging strategies that they have developed.

The third paper "Migrants, borders and labour regimes in Mauritania: between militarisation and mobility" by Hannah Cross also focuses on migration into Mauritania from the south. It describes the channels of this migration – 1) pendular border crossings of the Senegal River from neighbouring regions in Senegal and Mali and southern Mauritians moving north; 2) labour migration from further afield in West Africa, linked historically to fishing and mineral-led growth; 3) intended migration to Europe from West and Central Africa; 4) refugees. The paper is concerned with reconciling the connections and contradictions between migration and borders, which represent opposing economic and territorial regimes and are often viewed separately. Throughout the article, evidence provided by ethnographic research among migrants who have returned from, passed through, or remained in Mauritania supports the whole argument. The main conclusions, however, focus on the broader, structural causes of mobility and restriction, drawing attention to key historical factors in these competing political economies.

Jean Gormo's paper, titled "Forced Migration of Chadians in the Faro Division in Northern Cameroon (1980-2010)" describes and analyses the forms of integration of Chadian refugees in Cameroonian society, trying to understand their role in the dynamism of a particular region (the Faro Division). Coming from a country of high instability, the arrival and settlement of these refugees produced visible local effects, particularly from sociocultural or economic points of view. The author discusses these effects in his article, placing (and questioning) them as an explicative variable of economic, sociocultural and political dynamisms in the division.

The article "Does Botswana create a new Gaza Strip? The analysis of the 'fence discourse'" (Dominik Kopiński and Andrzej Polus) is an analysis of the 2003 Botswana government plan to build an electric fence, a physical border between Botswana and Zimbabwe. Official discourse based this intention on the control of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock. However, as it coincided with growing tensions between Botswana and Zimbabwe and increased (illegal) migration from Zimbabwe to Botswana, the fence acquired many parallel meanings. During the description of the evolution of this border and migration associated with it, the authors discuss five dimensions of "fence stories", namely – environmental, phytosanitary, international and political and economic and social.

Aboubakr Tandia's article, "Beyond the 'Genius of Suffering': the paradox of an alienated border regime: refugee integration and social transformation in cross-border Dagana (Senegal-Mauritania)" is a discussion of the nature and role of border regimes from the perspective of refugee regimes and integration. It looks at refugees as part of a border people whose agency informs the close relationship between border and refugee regimes. It analyses the transformative potential and achievements of

refugee practices in local integration and their effects on borders and refugee regimes. Focusing on the experience of a refugee community based in the cross-border zone of Dagana between Senegal and Mauritania, it contends that refugees are agentless even in the context of a rigid boundary regime. On the contrary, as authentic and legitimate actors of local integration, refugees participate in the transformation of host communities and the border regions they live in.

The article "Territory and border crossing for livelihoods among (voluntary and forced) migrants from DRC to Swaziland: the re-imagining of a borderless spatial system" (Gabriel Tati) stems from the idea that migration across international borders represents an important livelihood strategy. Taking the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a case study, the paper examines ways in which, through the spatial trajectories of migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, different meanings are assigned to bordered territories. It questions the extent to which (voluntary and forced) migrants create a borderless spatial system that circumvents the geographically defined state. The core argument is that the interplay of weak institutional policy apparatus along the inter-state borders makes it easy for migrants to create their own rules for free movement to fit their social aspirations and in this process a meaning to cross-border mobility is socially assigned and values are developed over time across geographical boundaries. The author supports his argument through with life stories of migrants living in Swaziland, which provide clear evidence of the changes affecting socio-spatial strategies.

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