



Call for Papers

## Linking borderlands research and policy in Africa and Europe: Tackling translation challenges

Niamey, November 29- December 4, 2017

In early 2016, two contrasting developments made visible long-term trends in how Europe and Africa interpret their borders. In Europe, where political rhetoric had quickly focused on a 'refugee crisis' with radical proposals to secure Europe's borders, the notion of a police-able border, possibly one located outside Europe, was quickly growing in prominence. The EU was moving towards a more centralised version of border management; at the 2016 GLOBSEC meeting in Bratislava in April, the focus lay on the creation of a European security strategy. This securitisation discourse has important repercussions for African countries, particularly in the Sahel region, where the combination of increasing terrorism threats and efforts to externalise the EU's borders intertwine and where the securitization agenda frequently plays out against the background of a dilution of statehood.

The African Union and other regional bodies, meanwhile, continue to push for clearer border demarcation coupled with cross-border cooperation between sovereign states and the opening up of new trade corridors. Their actions are mainly driven by an interest in cross-border cooperation and trade expansion.

Both developments, securitization and regional integration, are deeply indicative of a number of prominent border management policy challenges that await both European and African leaders in the near and distant future. Just as European leaders disagree over the right balance between 'managing' migration flows, supporting conflict resolution and securing borders, African institutions are often torn between an international securitization agenda and their own visions of development and growth.

Neither of these challenges come with a clear and prescribed path of action. It is in this lack of clarity and the often reactive nature of border policies both north and south of the Mediterranean that we identify a need for a deeper engagement between not only African and European researchers on borderlands, but particularly between research and policy.

The challenges of translating research into informing policy and practice are well-known, yet have become particularly acute in recent years. Researchers are often reluctant to refashion their work into applied research that offers concrete policy recommendations, often fearing that findings will be simplified and instrumentalised. This is all the more salient in the context of borderlands studies, where researchers often argue against the very paradigms that inform policy measures.

In the context of Europe and Africa, these difficulties intersect with a crucial divide in knowledge production. European researchers tend to work in academic structures that encourage independent research with occasional, light-touch engagement with policy—more often than not as the designated critical voice in the room. African researchers often work in underfunded institutions that survive only through policy consultancy work. This means that knowledge produced in European institutions is often published in very long-term cycles and in ways that are not accessible to policy makers. In contrast, knowledge produced in African institution is often swift in answering focused policy research questions, but offers little consideration towards academic theory or building a sustainable knowledge base. As a result, academic theory continues to develop extremely slowly in Africa and policy-relevant, yet academically rigorous, research in Europe remains rare.

Thus, two types of exchanges are urgently necessary should border management become more deeply informed by research and should research be more reflective of why certain decisions in border management are taken. The proposed workshop will initiate what will, we hope, become a regular forum for discussion between European and African borderlands research and practice. We aim at reopening the debate on borderlands research and practice from two angles:

- The debate between researchers
- The debate between research and practice

The two debates will focus on a number of sub-themes:

- Findings and methods in borderlands research: Are they robust in the eyes of policy makers seeking evidence for policy decisions? If not, why not?
- Policy and practice in borderlands management: Does borderland practice reflect what we have learned from research? If not, why not?
- Translation challenges: Why exactly is it so difficult for researchers and policy-makers to communicate across their divides? What concepts, language, frameworks and interpretations can be jointly developed to overcome this divide and establish a genuine and continuous process of dialogue that reflects the flexibility and fluidity of borderlands research and practice?

## Call for papers

We are seeking case studies on the topics outlined above. Both junior and senior researcher or practitioners are invited to apply with empirically researched papers.

- ▶ Please submit a **brief abstract of no more than 300 words** (which states clearly what type of research/ fieldwork or data the case study draws on).
- ▶ Authors are requested to also submit a **short narrative biography** of no more than 200 words.

- ▶ Abstracts to be sent by email with the subject line 'European/ African borders conference Niamey' to [aborne.niamey@gmail.com](mailto:aborne.niamey@gmail.com)
- ▶ **The call for papers closes on April 24, 2017.**
- ▶ Submitting a first draft of the proposed paper by October 15, 2017 is a precondition for participation in the workshop.
- ▶ Contributions in both English and French are welcome. There will be help with translations during discussions.