



## Program Point Sud 2015

# African Mobilities and Postcolonial Border Regimes/ Mobilités africaines et les régimes postcoloniaux des frontières

Date and Place  
April 10 – 12, 2015 Dakar  
Report



## 1. Organisers

Professor Dr. Heidrun Friese, Intercultural Communication, Anthropology, University of Technology, Chemnitz – Faculty of Philosophy

Dr. Judith Albrecht, Anthropology, Berlin (video documentation)

## 2. Themes and Objectives

The workshop focused on the European and African colonial histories. It proposed to ask how entangled colonial pasts are shaping current practices and narratives of ‘undocumented’ mobilities, the respective postcolonial border-regimes and current governance.

Contemporary migration routes have a historical background which recalls the slave trade along the sub-Saharan routes, North Africa and the Mediterranean, a ‘silenced’ background which has hardly ever been taken into account in scientific discourse on current mobility. With reference to Paul Gilroy however, one could call this powerful postcolonial configuration indeed a *Black Mediterranean* and its historical entanglements, asymmetrical relations of power and political arrangements are forcefully shaping today’s realities of the area.

Against this background, the workshop proposed to take a closer look into the relations between sub-Saharan mobilities, political transitions in North Africa and Europe’s policies, new governance and border-regimes. It proposed as well to ask how the recent political mobilization and political changes in North-African countries are shaping routes and practices of mobility to Europe, how these are currently being negotiated, and how they are connected to highly contested terms such as migration and democracy.

Thus, the workshop has been organized around four main topics addressing

1. Entangled Narratives of Colonialism and Mobility (Historical Views)
2. Mobility, Nation-States (Sovereignty) and Governance in Postcolonial Settings
3. Mobilities, Mobilization and Political Transitions
4. Mobilities and Crisis (Security, Environment)

The kick-off workshop brought together scholars from various African countries (Sénégal, Ghana, Cameroun, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Egypt and Tunisia). Contributors had a multi-disciplinary background encompassing history, sociology and anthropology which allowed for a vivid and fruitful interdisciplinary exchange. Some participants had as well a background in political activism and/or civil society organizations and this experience enriched the overall debate.

## 3. Methodology and Results

In 2007, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman published a rather short article: *‘Humanity on the Move’*. In the same year, John Urry published a book on *‘Mobilities’* establishing what since then has been coined as the „mobilities paradigm“. Whether we want to buy into that concept or not, mobilities force us to re-think and to re-configure historical concepts of the social, the political and the post-colonial. However, specific mobilities in colonial and/or post-colonial

situations have hardly been looked at so far. Especially the historical and contemporary entanglements between African and European policies regarding the various forms of mobilities and their various, multi-layered dimensions haven't been addressed so far in an interdisciplinary perspective. At the same time, mobilities urge for the development and adoption of 'mobile' concepts that challenge fixed and stable conceptual architectures.

The format of the workshop – papers were made available in advance – allowed for intense discussion and truly interdisciplinary engagement. It focused on four main topics:

1. It asked how different colonial configurations shaped current practices, the ordering of citizenship, the various border regimes, as well as asymmetric relations of power.

Not least the contributions of historians brought the attention to different historical articulations of 'traditional' or 'ante-colonial' practices. Even if the colonial powers abolished „indigenous slavery and the slave trade in the Gold Coast colony”, the “history of indigenous slavery in Ghana has not died” (A. Perbi). Even if local practices undermined the establishment of borders by colonial powers, colonial pasts are shaping current practices of mobilities and the respective border-regimes.

Not least such a view emphasized forcefully that we can hardly speak of “the” colonial situation directed by a single site of power. Instead we have to look into the specificity of different and multilayered historical articulations of “colonialities” that are framing current practices of mobilities, the ordering of citizenship as inclusive and exclusive site of rights and the space of the political, border regimes and new configurations of power.

Since relations of power can hardly be situated in a single, centralized force any longer, the various structurations and entanglements of post-colonial economies and elites have to be addressed. As a closer look evidences, the collusion between West/African states and the EU allows for a combination of border-management, security, issues of international cooperation as well as for the externalization of borders and policing at a distance.

Such a view raises as well the question which *resources* are to be found to challenge these powerful historical configurations. Circulation and mobility as well as notions of multiplicity might be useful tools to come to terms with these questions. Closely related to this, and

2. Encompassing various theoretical approaches - such as Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon or Walter D. Mignolo -, the critical scrutiny of the Westphalian template or “grammar” (Sheila Benhabib) has been a central topic of the workshop.

The conflation of identity-nation/citizenship and bounded territory, in short: the hegemonic model of the European Nation-State as a site of citizenship and the political which has to be contained and secured by borders can be considered a common feature of current postcolonial situations. Such configurations keep people in place – or, on the contrary, allow for the porosity of borders - and shape new forms of (immaterial) *governance*. As an integral part of current modes of governance and its policies, the current *security dispositif* has to be taken into account as it constructs and represents mobile people as threat

disseminating either terrorism and/or disease. At the same time, the social imagination, the “Theater of Violence” in the Mediterranean and the “discursive production of the African irregular migrant maps onto the figure of the laboring subject that once marked the hallmark of the colonial order in Africa” (H. Sabea).

3. The role of constructed, enacted, performed, symbolized, mediatized *identities* emerging from such historical colonialities and post-colonialities have been addressed. The focus was on the dynamics of ‘culture’. Next to different *cultures of (gendered) mobility*, the roles of (internal) ‘cultural frontiers’ and post-colonial encounters have been envisaged. The question was how the establishment of borders in colonial times and regional history, which still can be traced in property rights, land tenure, law and social stigma, are related to contemporary mobilities both within Africa and to Europe. Historical trade and enslavement lead to historical stigma and trauma as well as to pertinent forms of resilience.
4. The relation between mobilities and mobilization has been addressed with regard to the Tunisian revolution. After the fall of the regime, questions of identity and racism have been discussed in Tunisian civil society. In Tunisia the presence of the French diaspora is quite consistent (it amounts to 10% of the population). Therefore, experiences of racism and exclusion in European countries led to a vivid public debate about Tunisian identity, the strengthening of rights and asylum for mobile people from sub-Saharan countries as well as for refugees from Libya after the fall of the regime.

The workshop allowed for a critical engagement with common perspectives and “master-narratives” that see mobility basically as a problem, are to legitimize current governance, and policies designed to prevent and/or contain mobility. It challenged as well perspectives that conceptualize mobility as rooted exclusively in economic imbalances and the aspirations of the *homo oeconomicus*.

## **Documentation**

The workshop has been documented by video (responsible J. Albrecht). The aim was to record discussion and academic exchange in order to develop and offer participants a shared ‘digital archive of mobility’. The material has been digitally processed and will be available to participants on a digital platform provided by the *University of Technology Chemnitz/Chair of Intercultural Communication*.

## **4. Sustainability of the Event**

The workshop achieved its central goal to foster exchange and to open a space for transdisciplinary engagement with current mobilities and the historical complexities of various post-colonial entanglements and border-regimes in Europe/the Mediterranean and African countries. Additionally, all participants agreed on the need to continue such an exchange and emphasized that the workshop in Dakar served as well as a platform for the intensification of ‘intra-African’ dialogue which should be continued in the future.

One main outcome of the kick-off meeting was the commitment to closer collaboration. Such a future cooperation will be pursued in two ways:

- a) the organization of a follow-up workshop. The meeting should focus on the political dimensions of mobilities. Such an analytical focus aims to re-think notions and

concepts of ‘the political’ from a perspective that decenters Europe (D. Chakrabarty) and

b) a subsequent publication of selected papers from the workshops in a peer-reviewed international journal (such as the *European Journal for Social Theory*).

The Chair of Intercultural Communication/Chemnitz will contribute to the follow-up meeting and will engage in common efforts to attract possible sponsors and third-party funding.

Next to that, personal support with regard to the promotion of colleagues at an early stage of their career could be arranged and institutional exchange of students between the Chair of Intercultural Communication/TUC and the École Normale Supérieure de Maroua (Cameroun) has been discussed and is envisaged for the future.

## 5. Participants

- 1 Ouba Abdoul-Bâgui, Chargé de Cours, Histoire des relations internationales, École Normale Supérieure de Maroua (Cameroun).
- 2 Mouctar Diallo, PhD, The American University in Cairo (AUC)
- 3 Aymen Chafei Hamidi, activist, Tunisia.
- 4 Alioum Idrissou, Professor Centre d'Études et de Recherches Pluridisciplinaires sur l'Esclavage et la Traite en Afrique (CERPETA), Yaoundé (Kamerun), Centre Africain de Recherches sur les Traites et l'Esclavage (CARTE), Dakar Sénégal.
- 5 Oumarou Kologo, Doctorant de Sociologie, Département de Sociologie, Université de Ouagadougou.
- 6 K. A. Kyeremeh, Department of History, University of Ghana – Legon.
- 7 Alkassoum Maiga, Sociology, Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
- 8 Busani Mpofo, Archie Mafeje Research Institute (AMRI), University of South Africa (UNISA).
- 9 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Professor, Department of Development, University of Pretoria (South Africa).
- 10 Henrietta Nyamnjoh, PhD candidate, African Studies Centre, Leiden University (via skype).
- 11 Akosua Adoma Perbi, Professor Department of History, University of Ghana – Legon.
- 12 Stéphanie Pouessel, Jean Monnet Fellow, European University Institute (EUI), Florence and [Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain](#).
- 13 Hanan Sabea, Associate Professor, The American University in Cairo (AUC).

- 14** Aly Tandian, Professeur de Sociologie, Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Migrations, Université Gaston Berger de Saint- Louis, Sénégal.
- 15** Ibrahima Thiaw, Ph.D., Laboratoire d'Archéologie, IFAN-Université Cheikh A. Diop.