



Program Point Sud 2015

Crossing boundaries. An interdisciplinary conference on the challenges and chances of research on the “Indian Ocean”-“Africa”-connection 9th-11th August 2015 – STIAS Stellenbosch Report



1 Organisers

Dr. Franz Kogelmann (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

Prof. Dr. Louis Paul Randriamarolaza (University of Antananarivo, Madagascar)

Prof. Dr. Eva Spies (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

2 Themes and Objectives

The recent increase in Area Studies resulted in a new debate on the suitability of a research approach driven by geographically defined regions. Some critics voiced the concern that research concentrating on areas tends to reify imagined regions and their borders. Others see boundaries of academic disciplines severely challenged whenever regions are at the centre of research designs rather than theoretical questions or critical disciplinary discourses and methods.

Thinking about Africa's transnational connections in the context of area studies, the notion of the Indian Ocean has developed into a central concept over the past decade. Although different disciplines operate with a variety of conceptions of the Indian Ocean World the Indian Ocean-Africa-connection can be seen as central on two levels of discussion:

- It is relevant for discussions initiated by empirical studies exploring the manner in which people, goods and ideas move or are exchanged, and to grasp how mobility impacts on issues like identity, interconnectedness and imaginaries of borders and localities.
- For theory driven debates on travelling academic concepts such as "area" and "border" being highly relevant in discussions on global history, translocality or (religious) transnationalism the "Indian Ocean"- "Africa"-connection is currently gaining momentum. Thus, it becomes significant in debates on the dynamics of academic exchange across (imagined) boundaries, and for a critical reflection on the academic production of knowledge on the north-south and south-south frontiers.

Based on these observations, the conference aimed to promote a new south-south perspective on the connections between the "Indian Ocean" and "Africa". To achieve this objective the conference provided a forum to re-think conceptual and disciplinary boundary-making and -crossing while discussing empirical case studies with foci on religious and/or economic interactions between "Africa" and the "Indian Ocean". By discussing empirical data as well as the translation and application of an area-approach, we invited scholars to re-think not only the empirical data but also the epistemological basis of research on areas, borders and connections. Thus, the conference aimed to foster the re-location and re-evaluation of knowledge and academic knowledge-production and the discussion of southern perspectives on the "areas" in question.

3 Methodology and Results

To achieve the objectives of their endeavors the conveners opted for the format of an international and interdisciplinary conference. In the long-run the conveners aim to contribute to the formation of post-colonial research designs that transcend national and disciplinary boundaries and allow for an ongoing exchange between academics from the “global South” and the “global North”. The long-term objective of the conference is to contribute to the recognition of ‘theories from the South’ (Comaroff & Comaroff) and to stimulate prolific collaborations in research and teaching. To reach this objective the conference was a first step to initialize an enduring cross-fertilization process between the participants and their institutions.

Thus, scholars have been invited to explore these different levels of knowledge production and the pluralities of knowledge produced, taking into account processes of translation, definition as well as the relations of power involved. The participants from different countries and disciplines have been encouraged to discuss empirical case studies on historic and contemporary inter-regional religious and economic connections. To facilitate an exchange of perspectives it was a matter of particular concern to the conveners to invite scholars from the regions in question, i.e. Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, and India etc.

After three days of intensive discussions the participants were invited to do an extra exercise of lived and historical border crossing. To put flesh on the debates of high theoretical levels, an excursion to two famous Karamats – shrines of Sufi-saints exiled by the Dutch East India Company from nowadays Indonesia to the Cape in the 17th century – in Constantia has been organized.

Program:

9th August 2015:

9:00-9:30	Registration
9:30 - 11:00	Welcome note: Louis Paul Randriamarolaza / Eva Spies / Mamadou Diawara Introduction: Eva Spies: Crossing, shifting and blurring boundaries while doing areas Louis Paul Randriamarolaza: The Southern Way: Africa-Madagascar connections
11:15 - 12:45	Anne K. Bang Keynote 1: Shooting stars. Living connectivity in early 20th century coastal East Africa (and tracing it 100 years later)
13:45-15:15	Jan Beek: Cybercrime between Africa and India: doing area and maintaining national borders online Johann Salazar: Steam ships and ‘Shippies’: individual and family memories of the Indian Ocean Goolam Vahed: Discussant
15:30 -16:30	Get-together

10th August 2015:

- 9:00 – 10:30 **Preben Kaarsholm** Keynote 2: Transnational localities: perspectives of interaction for Sufi Islamic networks between Mozambique and South Africa since the late 19th century
- 11:00-12:30 **Mamie N.A. Ratsaramiafara**: Possession cults, a bridge between Africa and the Indian Ocean
Baholy M.R. Andrianasolo: African ethnic minorities and Anglo-Norwegian Christian minorities: between missionary action and sociopolitical revolt?
Shahid Vawda: Discussant
- 14:00-15:30 **Pratap Kumar**: Politics of Discipline Boundaries: Are we in our disciplines by training and choice, or?
Markus Coester: Culture / area concepts and the anthropological dilemma of (imagined) boundaries: a popular music / culture approach
Zoly Rakotoniera: Discussant
- 16:00 -17:30 **Scarlett Cornelissen, Renu Modi, Paul Nugent, Louis Paul Randriamarolaza** Roundtable: Phantom borders? Area studies and disciplinary boundaries

11th August 2015

- 9:00-10:30: **Jeremy Presthold**: Locating the Indian Ocean: Notes on the Postcolonial Reconstitution of Space
Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing: Insular Africa or Indian Ocean islands?
Scarlett Cornelissen: Discussant
- 11:00 -12:30 **Martinho Pedro**: Eccentricity and hybrid practices in Western Austral Indian Region
Fidelis Nkomazana: Crossing boundaries: Pentecostal Asia- Africa networks in the context of Botswana
Renu Modi: Discussant
- 14:00 -15:00 Final discussion
- 15:15 – 18:00 **Franz Kogelmann**: Cape-Karamats – Excursion to Sufi shrines in Constantia

The main questions and objectives treated during the conference were centered upon two distinct but intertwined levels: On the one hand we dealt with the vast field of empirical studies about mobility and the impact of religious and economic exchange on issues like the construction of identities, the constitution of authority, the (un)making of difference, and on imaginaries of regions, borders and localities. On the other hand we discussed academic notions of area, boundary, encounter, identity and difference, and connected this conceptual

level to questions of knowledge production in the field. How do concepts (of scholars and local actors) influence the researcher's knowledge production on areas?

The discussed case studies clearly showed that the mobility of religious and / or economic actors, ideas, objects and goods is a reality since centuries. How this mobility is perceived changes through time and cultural context but it is usually taken as a given, as a human constant. However, the participants of the conference did not forget that there is not only voluntary mobility of business people, traders or heads of religious groups but also slave trade and forced migration of religious and political leaders driven into exile by imperial powers. Further issues discussed along the case studies were broader methodological questions on how to embed individual migration trajectories into wider perspectives of imperial histories, transnational economic developments or nationalism, i.e. how to link a biographical or ethnographic approach with questions of power, knowledge production, the authorization of meaning and with lived connectivity across areas. Discussions on the concept of area studies verified that it is not uniform. Whereas the post WW II US American model of Area Studies tended to essentialize territory and reify "cultural traits", the current and much debated wave of area studies is more inspired by a social constructivist stance, highlighting the fluidity of boundaries, as well as their efficacy as powerful social spaces. The conference participants emphasized the processuality of areas, that is, the emergent character of areas, boundaries, connections as well as power structures. Discussing the notion of "doing area" and the processes of constructing de- or reconstructing of new spaces raised the question of new boundaries that are created along with it: New political, economic or religious spheres might evolve, as well as new definitions of center and periphery in the production of knowledge. Examples of crossing, shifting, blurring or transgressing boundaries have been debated and lead to the conclusion that borders matter just as spaces do. In the field of the production of knowledge it seems that knowledge is as well local as portable: it moves with people or objects, it is adapted, appropriated and put into use as in the example of the imaginaries of Africa used by scammers' to convince their Asian victims. With regard to academic knowledge production the conference participants argued for and against disciplinary boundaries but agreed that area studies open up a space to connect, exchange and to develop new perspectives.

4 Sustainability of the Event

This conference on challenges and chances of research on the "Indian Ocean" – "Africa" connection shed light on a desideratum in the field of interdisciplinary empirical research in this field on the one hand and in the epistemological groundings of research on issues related to areas, borders and connectivities on the other hand. To overcome this research gap the conference offered an open forum for those working in these fields and developed into an important event in cross-disciplinary network building. Malagasy researchers and colleagues from "African-Indian-Ocean" islands were exposed to inputs from the global North and from the global South as well and vice versa. It is expected that certain foci such as the Makau

movements, identities and diasporas will develop into future joint research projects and follow-up workshops.

5 Participants

1. Baholy Malala Ravonison Andrianasolo, anthropologist, post-doc at University of Antananarivo, Madagascar;
2. Anne K. Bang, associate professor of history at Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion University of Bergen, Norway;
3. Jan Beek, anthropologist, post-doc at Africa's Asian Options (AFRASO), Goethe University Frankfurt/Main, Germany;
4. Scarlett Cornelissen, political scientist, professor at Department of Political Science at University of Stellenbosch, South Africa;
5. Markus Coester, anthropologist, post-doc at University of Bayreuth, Germany;
6. Patrik Desplat, anthropologist, senior researcher at the University of Cologne, Germany;
7. Mamadou Diawara, professor at Goethe University Frankfurt/Main, Germany, founding director of Point Sud;
8. Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, professor at University of Mauritius, Mauritius;
9. Preben Kaarsholm, professor with special responsibilities in Global Studies and International Development at Department of Society and Globalisation Roskilde University, Denmark;
10. Franz Kogelmann, Islamic studies, academic co-ordinator of the Institute of African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany;
11. Renu Modi, professor at Center for African Studies, University of Mumbai, India;
12. Martinho Pedro, sociologist, Universidade Pedagógica Ciências Sociais, Moçambique;
13. Jeremy Prestholdt, associate professor at the Department of History, University of California, San Diego, USA;
14. Pratap Kumar, professor emeritus of xx at School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa;
15. Mamie Nuccia Albertine Ratsaramiafara, anthropologist, PhD candidate at University of Antananarivo, Madagascar;
16. Paul Nugent, professor at the Center of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK;
17. Fidelis Nkomazana, faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana, Gaborone;

18. Zoly Rakotoniera, director of the Department of Anglophone Studies, anglicist and gender studies, University of Antananarivo & representative of the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Madagascar;
19. Louis Paul Randriamarolaza, professor at University of Antananarivo, Madagascar;
20. Fernando Rosa Ribeiro, research fellow at the English Department Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, and at the Institute of Asia and Pacific-Studies, Nottingham, Malaysia;
21. Johann Salazar, historian, PhD candidate at the University of Mumbai, India;
22. Eva Spies, professor at the Department for the Study of Religion, University of Bayreuth, Germany;
23. Goolam Vahed, professor at Department of History, Society & Social Change, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa;
24. Shahid Vawda, professor and Head of School of Social-Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa;
25. Marko Scholze, anthropologist, coordinator Point Sud, Goethe University Frankfurt/Main;
26. Issa Fofana, anthropologist, Point Sud Bamako, Mali.