

Summary of ABORNE workshop held at Durham University: Sudanese Borderlands, 18-20 April 2011

This three day workshop, organized by Durham University in collaboration with the London School of Economics and the Leiden African Studies Centre, brought together a targeted multidisciplinary group of junior and senior scholars and policy practitioners from Africa and Europe working on the various internal and external borders of Sudan. The aim was to make a theoretically informed academic contribution to current, urgent discussions about Sudanese borderlands and boundaries. Papers presented came in four clusters: 1) State-building in Sudanese borderlands, 2) Historical perspectives on Sudanese borders, 3) North-South borderlands, 4) Pastoralists and borders: uncertain and alternative citizenships.

Scientific content and discussion

The workshop opened with a theoretically informed discussion of the current state of African border studies and what the South Sudan case, under discussion at this workshop, might contribute to this rapidly evolving field. Cherry Leonardi and Wolfgang Zeller both laid emphasis on the intimate relationship between the creation of national territorial boundaries and the construction of a new state in South Sudan. This is true both in the context of explicit contests over territory, but also in the everyday practices of border regulation which are manifested (and also often contested) at borders. The recent move towards 'bringing the state back in' to borderland studies reflects the facts that borders are not merely 'marginal' spaces but also zones where people experience the state in particularly overt, extractive and performative ways, and of course where state citizenship may be quite starkly defined. More broadly, it is increasingly recognised that states are formed to a significant degree at their peripheries or margins. South Sudan is of particular interest in this regard, because a region previously seen as a periphery is now becoming a new centre of state power with its own peripheries and boundaries.

The first substantial panel of papers focussed explicitly on these issues of state building in South Sudan's borderlands. Anne Walraet focussed particularly on the Sudan-Kenya border area, and the creation of a thriving cross-border trade network in this zone. Her paper considered how non-'indigenous' IDPs and refugees, without access to land went about using social networks to build up economic livelihoods in the urban settings of Kapoeta and Narus. Walraet emphasised that the Sudan-Kenyan borderland now holds the promise of becoming a major gate for trade between Sudan and Kenya and even for linking Southern Sudan with Ethiopia. The border towns of Kapoeta and Narus are therefore no longer war-time islands of security in a peripheral borderland, but strategic trade hubs in a emerging Sudan-Kenyan complex. With regard to border regulation Walraet observed a trend towards more formality and regulation since 2009: notably an attempt to distinguish more clearly between military and civil operating staff and to mix ethnicities. She noted that until recently border officials were military and predominantly Dinka Bor, this having often been seen as an important facilitating element in the Dinka business and cross-border trade. More recently, civil and non-Dinka staff have been brought in. Yet Walraet also observes that this transition is partial and hesitant, and that ethnic boundaries have indeed hardened in recent years in this area, partly in response to the intentions of GoSS for increased decentralization of power within more ethnically homogenous counties,

itself an attempt to accommodate local ambitions and struggles over power and resources which are articulated along ethnic lines. Aleksis Yloenen reported more explicitly on rhetoric which is heightening tensions between 'Dinka' and 'Equatorians' in South Sudan. Lotje de Vries examined the behaviour of state agents at particular border posts in Morobo County, which borders both Uganda and Congo. She focused on the villages of Kaya and Bazi, and the conflicts between state actors situated at differing points of the administrative hierarchies, noting that the performance of legal-bureaucratic 'stateness' by state agents masks a constantly negotiated, highly personalized reality of state power in Southern Sudan, particularly visible at these border posts.

The second panel took a historical approach to Sudanese borderlands. Wendy James's paper focused on the Blue Nile borderlands with Ethiopia and Eritrea. This region has a deep history of being a borderland, and James's paper focused on the remarkable survival of 'minority' languages in this area over the *longue duree*, focusing particularly on the strategic use of these languages by borderland populations. James emphasised the connections of these 'peripheral' regions to the centres of state power to the east and west, but also (with reference to Jedrej) how centres of power and commercial networks themselves helped shape the culture of those 'isolated tribes' defining their borders. Equally, the persistence of distinctive languages in these 'peripheries' for James reflected the strategic effectiveness of such languages as people move between the demands of overarching economic and political structures and agencies and their home communities. Chris Vaughan focussed in detail on the relations between Malual and Rizeigat along the north-south border in an area used by both peoples for grazing and watering of their herds during the colonial period. His paper argued that the colonial state, though sometimes imagined to be a rational legal-bureaucratic state, was heavily personalised and fragmented at the local level. Malual and Rizeigat elites, living on either side of a major administrative division in the colonial state, were able to exploit this dividing line to their advantage, enlisting the support of District Commissioners from either side to support their claims to grazing in this contested borderland. This was not exactly a level playing field: the Rizeigat had a particularly strong relationship with the colonial administration in Darfur. Yet despite the administration's efforts to impose a 'legible' solution on Rizeigat-Malual grazing rights, state power remained limited in its capacity to regulate movements on the ground. Local chiefs continued to make more flexible arrangements with one another, often without the involvement of the state. This internal border zone therefore, Vaughan argued, was characterised by multiple layers of both 'formal' and 'informal' regulation, which co-existed, interacted and sometimes conflicted. The interaction between local state agents and 'traditional' leaders in creating this regulatory pluralism also has relevance in the current day where local commissioners pursue policies in co-operation with local leaders and without the authorisation of central state actors with regard to this grazing zone. Finally, Eddie Thomas's paper dealt with the colonial history of the north-south border just to the west of Vaughan's case study. Here, the colonial state of the 1930s attempted to enforce a much firmer and coercively imposed line of division between northerners and southerners than in the Malual-Dinka case. However Binga and Kara peoples persistently resisted British efforts to confine them in the Western Bahr-el-Ghazal: in Darfur, as some British officials noticed, taxation and labour demands were considerably more than those on the south side of the border. Thomas also noted of the contemporary situation that economic incentives and political instability in Darfur had begun to reverse the

historic pattern of northward labour movement (going back to the period of the slave trade). Thomas therefore also traces a long history of cross-border movement in this region, based on people's economic and political calculations as well as on violence and coercion. Interaction across this border zone has also produced affiliations which are not simply characterised by a 'north-south' division.

The third panel focused on the current tensions on the North-South border, about to be transformed from an internal boundary to an international border between two independent states. Guma Kunda Komey discussed the implications of this internationalization along the contested South Kordofan and Nuba Mountains border. Komey reminded us that these areas were active social spaces with interwoven and symbiotic economic, social, political and ecological relations among and between the neighbouring local communities. Consequently the border requires a soft management approach: which Komey sees as unlikely given the ongoing militarization of the region. Oystein Rolandsen provided an overview of the reasons why the north-south border was an area with a high risk of localised conflict.

The final substantive session of papers focussed on pastoralists and borders: pastoralists are often assumed to have an inherently problematic relationship with territorial state boundaries which constrain their mobility and therefore their livelihoods. However, Dereje Feyissa presented a paper which demonstrated how the Nuer on the Sudan-Ethiopia border had, over time, tried to make the best out of the border's existence. In the context of fluctuating opportunity structures the Nuer have experienced the border by alternating citizenship between Ethiopia and Sudan. At different times there have been greater or lesser benefits to being either, for instance, an Ethiopian citizen or a southern Sudanese refugee: the Nuer then alternate between these identities according to circumstances. In this context it is clear that the Nuer recognize state borders, but borders for the Nuer are not zones of separation but rather a field of opportunities when they are crossed. And as a result, the Nuer call consistently for the border to be flexibly managed, in accordance with their interests and indeed their own cultural constructions of what state borders mean. Mareike Schomerus drew attention to the marginal position of the Ambororo in South Sudan, and the ways in which the Ambororo are positioned as potential or real enemies of the southern Sudanese state, and their citizenship brought into question. Immo Eulenberger's paper on the Toposa people in south-eastern Sudan pointed out that while pastoralists are perfectly capable of making instrumental use of state discourses of borders for their own purposes, they are remain far from obedient to the territorial logics of states. Yet the paper also disputed the notion that pastoralist peoples have no sense of territoriality or borders: while clear-cut boundaries of territory are often missing, there are notions of belonging and ownership of certain key resources, such as waterholes, clusters of nutritive plants and stretches of land, although claims on them are often multiple and disputed. In a detailed discussion of the Nadapal border crisis of 2009, Eulenberger showed how local recourse conflicts and political rivalries in border regions become entangled with international state politics and consequently can rapidly flare up into significant international tension. Eulenberger also noted that pastoralists in this region (because of their border location, as well as the recent history of the region) now clearly identify themselves with their nation, demand help from 'their governments' and perceive the other side of the border as part of a foreign entity that gives the issue of state borders a particular importance, as they are supposed to coincide with territory the pastoralist citizens could rightfully claim as

theirs. Recent tribal expansions into neighbouring territories have also been legitimated by NGO development efforts, which have assisted in making permanent these shifts in political and territorial fortunes. In a review of the history of the area, Eulenberger also suggested that while British colonial rule froze (and to a considerable extent created) ethno-territorial boundaries, and successfully limited inter-group raiding, they failed to effectively restrict pastoralist mobility: a finding which was echoed in Vaughan's paper. Eulenberger's paper also drew attention, rather similarly to Dereje Feyissa, to the 'double citizenship' of the Nyangatom who choose to identify with Ethiopia or Sudan according to whichever state provides them with better economic opportunities or education and health services.

The final day saw non-scientific contributions from policy participants who reminded those giving papers of the challenges and opportunities associated with attempts to communicate research findings to a wider audience beyond the academy. Finally, Douglas Johnson and John Ryle provided final discussions for the workshop. Johnson in particular urged a more detailed historicisation of the north-south border, and suggested a re-evaluation of British colonial 'Southern Policy' was well overdue: an analysis of exactly how the policy worked in different localities, and as applied to different categories of person at different times, would have considerable value for how we understand the connected and interactive histories of cross-border communities. He emphasized the need to move past the image of South Sudan's historical 'isolation' which remains embedded in popular and some scholarly discourse. Border studies can contribute to this, by uncovering histories of inter-marriage and shared resources, and lend support to 'soft border' agendas, which participants at the meeting seemed to agree was a broadly desirable outcome of current border creation policy.

Results and impact on the field

The workshop was very successful in focusing discussion across a broad range of Sudanese border case studies, and in linking these to larger theoretical questions and the current political context of South Sudan's independence. There are several major points which can be drawn out from the workshop.

Several papers presented emphasized the complexity of the 'state-building' process at borders, and the lack of a clear division between the personalized and private, and the bureaucratic and public (de Vries, Walraet, Vaughan) in regulatory practices at the border. These points very much connect with border research in other African regions, and indeed on research on African states more generally. An important point in Walraet's paper was the idea that state agents can gain from transgressing or crossing the border that they claim to be enforcing as a line of separation. In the contemporary context, the complex links between state, military and business show the border (as a focus of trade as well as regulation), to be a site whose socio-political meaning is determined by a range of actors, who often in the course of their own activities blur the line between the formal and informal, the public and private. And in this sense, there may be less of a gap between local, instrumental approaches to the border (demonstrated by Feyissa and Eulenberger) and the attitudes of state actors themselves than has often been assumed to be the case. The creation of South Sudan's borders, now coming into being, is not simply a process determined by state agents asserting sovereignty from a new centre into a new periphery, but a contested,

negotiated process in which state and non-state actors do not line up in simple opposition and alignment, but shift their position with regard to the meaning of the border according to interest and circumstance. What is perhaps particularly notable about these points, made about borders which are now in the unusually explicit process of being created by a new state, is their relative analytical familiarity from studies of other African borderlands. This familiarity ultimately reinforces wider arguments made in the field that borders and states are always works-in-progress, always coming into being, and continually re—negotiated and re-constructed in the course of daily ground level interactions. South Sudan's borders will not be created as fixed entities in the months and years ahead: rather what we are currently observing is one episode in an endless process of negotiation and contest, which in many cases overlaps to some extent with deep local histories. The familiarity of much of the border story in South Sudan does not make the story uninteresting: indeed we can see these processes of negotiation in a relatively open and explicit light in the current political context.

There is also perhaps particular value in pointing out that points made in several papers suggest that a revision of many of the commonly held assumptions about the relationships between pastoralist peoples and territorial boundaries, and indeed the state more generally, is necessary. In existing scholarship, much stress has been laid on the opposition between fixed territorial boundaries and the mobile pastoralist lifestyle which knows no boundaries. Particularly influential research on the Kenyan case has also linked this opposition to a particular history of pastoralist dispossession by white colonial settlers. The absence of a settler economy in Condominium Sudan means the history of pastoralist engagement with borders and the state is somewhat different: Feyissa, Eulenberger and Vaughan all emphasized the extent to which pastoralists see borders and governments as resources as well as impositions, often to be used to support local interests against neighbouring populations on the other side of the border. In other cases the border can be a line to cross in order to make differing claims on state protection or resources at different times. This is not to deny the impact of territorial boundaries on pastoralist livelihoods, but it does suggest that a more political and multi-sided analysis of the relationship between pastoralists and boundaries would be of scientific importance and practical relevance.

The historical papers, together with the historicized approaches taken by Feyissa and Eulenberger, also demonstrated the value of a *longue duree* approach to borders which are sometimes assumed to be recent or artificial creations: deeper historical approaches can show the long-term dynamics of regions that have often long been 'in-between' neighbouring, rival states, and the strategies employed by borderlanders to maximize the opportunities and minimize the constraints that arise from this position. Douglas Johnson offered a future research agenda for scholars to follow: to trace the history of communities on the north-south border of Sudan more carefully than has yet been done, to reveal deeper histories of interaction as well as conflict. African borderland studies more generally is still rather dominated by anthropological approaches: several of the papers presented here demonstrated the value in taking a more explicitly historical approach.

We intend to publish the papers presented here as a contribution to African borderland studies, in the ABORNE-Palgrave series, several of them providing a unique view into the processes of state formation at the border in the context of the creation of the

state of South Sudan. Several papers also touched on the tensions involved in that specific state-building process: the controversial relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, the uncertainties of citizenship for marginal populations in the south, and the limited administrative capacity of the South Sudan state at the present moment. This book will therefore be of interest for those working in the field of borderland studies generally, but also for area specialists in Sudan, especially South Sudan. A book proposal will be circulated among participants in the next month and will then be submitted to ABORNE for consideration.



Sudanese Borderlands Workshop Programme Durham University 18-20 April 2011

Monday 18th April

1 - 2: Lunch

2 – 3.30 : Introductory session

Discussion of workshop agenda by the convenors

* Wolfgang Zeller (ABORNE and Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh),
'Borderlands - Zones of Protracted Conflict or Sites of Emerging Sovereignities?'

3.30 – 4: Coffee/tea

4 – 6: State formation in borderlands

* Anne Walraet (Conflict Research Group, University of Ghent), 'Making a life and a living in the Sudanese-Kenyan border area: the rise of a thriving cross-border trade network'

* Aleksi Ylonen (Anthropology, Bayreuth University), 'Challenges to Consolidation of Centralized Authority in Borderlands: Equatorial Responses to the SPLM/A Orchestrated Statebuilding in Southern Sudan'

* Lotje de Vries (Sociology, African Studies Centre, Leiden), 'Pulling the ropes; Negotiations of power through the conduct of the state at the Southern Sudanese borders in Kaya and Bazi'

Evening meal at Oldfields restaurant in Durham

Tuesday 19th April

9 – 11: Historical perspectives on imperial frontiers and state borders

* Wendy James (Anthropology, Oxford University): 'Minority languages as a strategic resource? Rethinking the *longue durée* in the Blue Nile Borderlands'

* Chris Vaughan (History, Durham University), 'State regulation and local accommodations: Rizeigat and Malual on the Darfur/Northern Bahr el Ghazal border in the Condominium period'

* Eddie Thomas (Historian), 'Cross-border connections in Western Bahr el Ghazal'

11 – 11.30: Coffee/tea

11.30 – 1.30: North-South borderlands and border-crossings

* Guma Kunda Komey (Geography, Juba University and Halle-Wittenberg), 'The Implication of Internationalizing the North-South Boundary along the Contested Border Region of the Nuba Mountains '

* Oystein Rolandsen: 'An exploration of governance and conflict in the Sudan's north/south border'

1.30 – 2.30: Lunch

2.30 – 4.00: Pastoralists and borders: uncertain and alternative citizenships

* Dereje Feyissa (Anthropology, Max Planck Institute) 'Alternative citizenship: The Nuer between Ethiopia and the Sudan'

* Mareike Schomerus (Development Studies, LSE), 'Borderlanders and the uncertainties of citizenship: the Ambororo'

* Immo Eulenberger (Anthropology, Max Planck Institute), 'Sudan's Southeastern Frontier: The Toposa and their neighbours'

4.00-4.45 – Tea/coffee, informal talk by Dr Matt Greenhall on local history: the Anglo-Scottish borderlands

5 – depending on individual preferences either a) visit to Durham cathedral or b) free time.

6.00 – drinks reception and tour of Durham Castle

Evening meal in Senate Suite, Castle

Wednesday 20th April

9-10.30: Policy participants responses to the workshop

* Brian Jones (FCO), Chris Milner (Concordis International), Wafula Okuma (AUBP)

10.30 – 10.45: tea/coffee

10.45-1.15 Panel remarks and plenary discussion: conclusions and directions

Douglas Johnson, John Ryle

Including discussion of publication plans led by Wolfgang Zeller (ABORNE)

1.15 Lunch and close

ABORNE is an interdisciplinary network of researchers interested in all aspects of international borders and trans-boundary 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 and social processes that may be located at some distance from the geographical border. ABORNE is primarily a forum for academic researchers aiming for a better understanding of African borderlands, but it also welcomes individual members and institutions whose work is of a more applied nature. www.esf.org/index.php?id=5794