

African Borderlands – Regional Integration from Above and Below

**ABORNE Annual Conference within CAS@50
University of Edinburgh 6-9 June 2012**

1. Whose Integration?

Ideas to foster cross-continental cooperation as a counter-measure to redress the balkanization of Africa during the colonial period have been around for decades, and were one of the key motivations behind the creation of the OAU. Pan-Africanism and other grand ideas of continental unity have arguably made little difference to the lives of ordinary Africans over the years, while their leadership settled into, and often became entrenched in the relative comfort zones provided by recognized territorial sovereignty. Instead, more modest and often hands-on projects by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like SADC, ECOWAS and EAC have in recent years forged ahead with their own protocols. With the official and highly marketable purpose to foster more liberal movement of people, goods and finances, they have brokered significant investments in infrastructure and policy reforms. Also the AU treats regional integration initiatives as an important step on the route towards continental unity. It sees itself as playing a bridging role between the RECs, whose memberships overlap in many cases. Despite these ground-breaking developments, two critiques of the integration agenda have come to the fore.

The first argues that it is embedded in a neo-liberal project with overwhelming emphasis on the promotion of capital investment and global commercial flows. This bias is reflected in the sub-contracting of substantial border functions to private companies and the creation of 'frictionless' cross-border 'transport corridors' managed by public-private joint ventures. Borderlands are often construed as peripheral spaces through which these flows take place, while their inhabitants and institutions are not consulted or play an active role in their own right.

The second and closely related critique argues that the integration agenda is typically conceived of, and acted upon, in a top-down manner by national governments, RECs and the AU itself, and with extensive intellectual and financial input from agencies and consultants in aid donor countries. Local initiatives and existing, sometimes century-old regional socio-political networks which transcend national boundaries are seldomly taken into account and may even be frowned upon where they are perceived to infringe upon national sovereignty and big business interests.

The overall question this conference will address is therefore:

What evidence emerges from research and policy-making experience in African borderlands, past and present, of regional integration in Africa as something other than a top-down and externally driven process?

Additional questions we seek to address are:

- How exactly does African integration from below arise from, and play itself out in borderlands?
- What are the specific contexts and arenas where these processes are negotiated?
- What concrete links can we observe between formal integration initiatives on the one hand and the ways in which borderlanders themselves build new and maintain existing links across Africa's borders on the other.
- Are the top-down and bottom-up agendas at all compatible or do they by definition pull in different directions?
- Is there anything that Africa could learn from the European experience of bottom-up integration, or indeed the mistakes of its northern neighbour's own top-down approach?

2. Themes and Panels:

The organizers hope to create a platform for exchange and dialogue across two (imaginary) lines of separation:

1. Between conceptual, historical and large-scale investigations of the theme of African regional and cross-border integration on the one side, and close-up and empirically more detailed studies of specific aspects, instances and policy initiatives of integration from above and/or below on the other.

2. Between those more firmly rooted in the academic investigation of the conference topic on the one side, and those working predominantly with a policy- making approach and background on the other.

Colleagues are encouraged to submit panel proposals (either with complete or incomplete lists of contributions), but the organisers will also consider individual paper proposals if these speak clearly to the overall conference theme. Panel sessions will last 90 minutes and can accommodate up to 3 papers. Panels can be organized as single or double panels.

Below is an indicative list of panel topics. While some panels are already at an advanced stage of planning, other topics are yet to be taken up. The organizers can be approached for advice and with requests to facilitate the consolidation or formation of panels.

- Revisiting the African Frontier – Scott and Kopytoff in Zomia
- Regional integration in Africa – its track record and future
- The African Union Border Programme and bottom-up integration
- Smuggling as integration from below
- Mineral extraction in borderlands
- Chiefs and cross-border governance – past and present
- Bureaucracy and border management
- Crime and borderland policing
- Peace-building and war-making in conflictual borderlands

3. Practicalities

ABORNE's 2012 annual conference will take place in tandem with the 50th anniversary conference of the Centre of African Studies (CAS) of the University of Edinburgh. The ABORNE meeting will consist of an integrated stream of conference panels, built by its own members around specific ABORNE topics and using our own core funding from the European Science Foundation (ESF). In this way, we expect to be part of something larger and to reach out to the wider Africanist audience present, while preserving the distinct ABORNE identity the network members have collectively created over the past years. The annual management meeting of the ABORNE steering committee will take place before the start of the conference, which will be accompanied by a rich cultural program in the world-class setting of the Scottish capital. We will mark the AU's African Borders Day on June 7th and for those who can stay an extra day the conference will end with a breath of fresh air - an optional excursion to the nearby Scottish-English borderland.

Financial support (all expenses for travel and accommodation) is available for a limited number of participants. To comply with ESF rules, speakers based in countries financing the networking programme have to be given preference in funding. These are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Additional funding for Africa-based scholars will be sought through various programs and African colleagues are strongly encouraged to submit abstracts for papers directly contributing to the conference theme.

Abstracts are due by **September 30th, 2011**. Please send the following information to wolfgang.zeller@ed.ac.uk:

For panels: A panel abstract (max. 500 words), compiled individual paper abstracts (max. 200 words per paper) and list of participants with names, institutional affiliations and positions, contact details (email and phone).

For individual papers: A paper abstracts (max. 200 words), name, institutional affiliation and position, contact details (email and phone).

The organisers will send selection results to the applicants by **October 31, 2011**. Full papers are due on **May 7, 2011** and funding can only be granted to those participants submitting a paper.

For further information, please write to wolfgang.zeller@ed.ac.uk or visit www.aborne.org.