

# **Scientific Report on the Exchange Visit (1/08 – 1/10 2011) at the Centro de Estudos Africanos, ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon**

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## **1. Purpose of the Visit**

The purpose of my exchange visit at the Centro de Estudos Africanos at the ISCTE-IUL in Lisbon was twofold:

- a) To refine analytically and theoretically my analysis of the migration-borderland nexus with reference of the Soninke communities located in the border area between Upper River Gambia and southern Senegal.
- b) To contribute scientifically to the Fifth Annual Conference of ABORNE (African Borderlands Research Network), held in Lisbon on 21-23 September 2011. Specifically I aimed to organize two panels: Panel 4 (with Stephan Dunwald) “Forced migration and the role of borders” and Panel 6 “Border regimes and migrant practices: citizenship, belonging and the making of migrant subjectivities”.

As regards point a), the result I projected to achieve in the grant period was to finalize an article by the title “Travelling Borders: Migrant Experiences, Transnationality and Borderliness in the Upper Gambia River Valley”. However, during the EVG period, this objective was revised and broadened. In the process of working on theoretical and empirical content of the article, ongoing data and theoretical analysis directed me to break down the text into two complementary papers: one dealing with the socio-cultural nature of Soninke (im)mobility, the other with impact of border regimes on the existence and subjectivity of aspiring migrants.

## **2. Description of the work carried out during the visit**

In pursuit of Objective a), I undertook bibliographic research on Migration and Border theory at ISCTE, the institution housing the Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA). This groundwork has led me

to engage critically with the literature on the Mobility Turn (inspired by the work of Urry, Cresswell, Adey, Tropey, and others) in the analysis of contemporary forms of migration and mobility. This literature still pays scanty attention to the transformation of Borders in current times. By comparing, contrasting and cross-fertilizing these two strands of social theory I have further nuanced the empirical analysis of previously collected ethnographic data on the migrant-sending Soninke communities in the Upper River Gambia Valley.

This work provided the framework for analyzing the impact of border regimes on Soninke mobility and immobility, and prompted me to revise my original aim of my exploration – which was to concentrate on the local border between Senegal and Gambia. A closer look at the field material I had gathered during previous field trips highlighted the relevance of other, delocalized borders (Embassies, visa applications, EU-Africa border, etc.) in their (non)migratory lives. In this respect, recent scholarship on the delocalization of borders and migration policies (in particular the work of, among others, Bigo, van Houtum, Salters, Walters, Mountz, Vaughan-Williams) proved essential to understand how aspiring migrants' social lives can be linked to borders that are geographically far but socially and (bio)politically close to them.

My exploration of forced (im)mobility, border regimes and subjectivities was subsequently linked in a substantive and comparative manner to the ABORNE conference. Both Panel 4 and 6 did in fact explore pertinent questions in my work. The organization of these panels implied reading and commenting the papers submitted by the panellists (8 papers and 4 papers respectively), besides taking charge of the actual realization of the panels and of some of scientific discussion of the papers therein. Preparing the discussion of the panels (session 2 of Panel 4 [3 papers], and Panel 6), implied extra bibliographic research so as to competently assess the scientific contribution of the panellists to the debate in their respective fields of inquiry.

In addition to the organization of the Panels, I offered my scientific and organizational advise to the local organizing committee of the Conference. I also took charge of introducing the Film Screening on September 23, where the filmmakers Werner and Manuela Zips presented their written and filmic work.

### **3. Description of the main results obtained**

The theoretical and empirical analysis of Soninke (im)mobility led the completion of an article called “Cultivating Travellers: the agrarian ethos of Soninke (im)mobility”, in which I explore the nature of sedentarity and migration in the Soninke milieu. By challenging widely held assumptions about the causes of migration and the failure of agriculture, the article explores the ways in which young men (the potential migrants) are trained to both mobile and immobile livelihoods.

Having clarified the nature of Soninke (im)mobility, I drafted a paper called “Immobility in Everyday Life: Chronotopes of entrapement in rural Gambia”, which explores the existential, social and cultural implications of ‘bordering’ in the formation of Soninke young men’s subjectivity.

With respect to the ABORNE, both Panel 4 and 6 were successfully carried out and attended, and discussions in all sessions gave rise to lively scientific debate among the panellists and between the panellists and the audience.

### **4. Future collaboration with host institution**

Strong scientific ties were established with CEA during the visit. Privileged interlocutors in CEA were Cristina Rodrigues (ABORNE representative and organizer of the conference) and Stephan Dunwald, with whom I organized Panel 4. In the course of the Grant period, I also learned that I was awarded a post-doc fellowship by Portugal’s Fundação de Ciencia e Tecnologia (FCT) to be carried out at CEA. Although this is unrelated to the EVG, the grant period has enabled me to consolidate my position and work relations in view of the post-doc. This will, no doubt, reinforce future cooperation on ABORNE-related activities.

### **5. Projected publications / articles resulting or to result from the grant**

The article “Cultivating Travellers: the agrarian ethos of Soninke (im)mobility” will be shortly submitted to the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, a leading peer-reviewed journal in migration studies, for a Special Issue called “Mobilities Across the Globe” guest edited by Nina Glick-Schiller and Noel Salazar. The article is presently under review by the guest editors prior to being submitted to the journal editors.

Upon completion (by the end of the year), the article “Immobility in Everyday Life: Chronotopes of entrapment in rural Gambia” will be submitted to a peer-reviewed international journal.

With regard to Panel 4 and 6 of the ABORNE conference, I am in the process of selecting papers from both panels and evaluating possible outlets for a publication project (either an edited volume or a special issue in an academic journal), on “Border Regimes, (Im)mobility and Subjectivity”.