

Final Report - ABORNE Exchange Visit Grant

To the European Science Foundation,

This is the final report of the activities developed on behalf of the ABORNE Exchange Visit Grant, due to which I worked in the Centre of African Studies (CAS) of Edinburgh during eight weeks.

Purpose of the visit

My stay in Edinburgh was from the 22nd April 2012 to 17th June 2012 and the main purpose of the visit, as stated in the grant proposal letter, was to foster my PhD research by working directly with some of the most prominent researchers in contemporary African Studies; by having access to the immense written resources available in the prestigious University's library; and by attending the CAS 50th Anniversary Conference and the 6th Annual Conference of ABORNE.

Description of the work carried out during the visit

In my first day of work at CAS, I was given a desk and a computer in an office as well as the keys of that office. Although this may seem trivial, it actually gave me full autonomy to set my own work timetables and I wasn't dependent on anyone's schedule, which allowed me to do long writings and online researches. As I come from a different country and from a university in which post-graduate students can't easily have an office to work, this was a very positive feature of my visit. I was also given a visitor card which granted me full access to the library and to the printer/copy machines. This allowed me to loan books and to print scientific articles, most of which aren't available in Portugal, making the research easier and more pleasant. With all this initial working conditions, I could draw more specifically some weekly goals I intended to accomplish (such as reading a certain number of books or articles per week and summarize them).

My work in Edinburgh consisted mainly of reading and writing, considering that I'm finishing my first year as a PhD candidate and that in this phase all the research questions, hypothesis and methodology issues must be clearly defined and justified. So I spent my time in these eight weeks between the office at CAS and the University's library re-reading and re-writing my PhD dissertation project accordingly to new ideas and perspectives I found in books and scientific articles. I read books and articles on

Africa borders and borders in general, on African traditional authorities and state-building, on Anthropology and Political Science and on broadly disciplinary debates.

I benefited enormously from working closely with some of the most prominent researchers in African Studies at CAS, which were all very friendly and welcoming, and always find time to meet with me, to show their work and to share research advices.

The PhD students that were at CAS during my visit (most of them unfortunately were off for fieldwork or holidays) were very welcoming as well and invited me to join them in the reading and discussion groups they organized. Since the regular PhD activities had already ended by the time I arrived in Edinburgh, this was a good opportunity to get in touch with new colleagues, to exchange ideas and bibliography and to find out what other subjects are being researched by other students in African Studies.

During my visit a delegation from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also visited CAS on 9th and 10th May with the purpose to learn from the European experience of regional integration. I was invited by Paul Nugent (CAS Director) to join the meeting, in which also participated Wolfgang Zeller (ABORNE), Charles White (International Relations Office at the European Commission) and Martin Guillermo Ramirez (Secretary-General of the Association of European Border Regions [AEBR]). Although my research focus is Southern Africa, it was very fruitful to debate works in progress and understand what has already been accomplished in regional integration on other regions of Africa, and also the most recent findings of the ABORNE scholars and how their work can be helpful in policy-making.

From 5th to 8th June 2012 I attended the CAS 50th anniversary Conference and the 6th Annual Conference of ABORNE (that run as a linked conference within CAS 50th). Both took place at the John McIntyre Conference Centre in Edinburgh and gathered hundreds of worldwide African scholars in panels, roundtables and keynote speeches, all of them of extreme interest. As my own research is focused on borderlands, I ended up listening more panels from the ABORNE Conference, which allowed me to follow up the work of the network since the last Conference in Lisbon and to understand the progresses made in researching matters such as migration, politics, trade/smuggling and environment.

Initially I thought the Organizing Committee of both Conferences might need an extra help from me and that would also be part of my work in Edinburgh. But when I arrived everything was already settled between the Organizing Committee and volunteers, that's why I didn't take part in any of the organizing/management tasks.

Description of the main results obtained

This grant was for a work in social sciences and so it's not very easy to measure my final results or having them in numbers, since I wasn't conducting interviews or questionnaires. Anyway, this eight weeks work results are mainly due to a hard reading work and will be seen in the long-term, as I'll write my dissertation chapters.

This grant allowed me to meet in person and have the opportunity to discuss ideas with some of the most important researchers in African Studies, particularly those engaged in the same subjects I am working on (namely Paul Nugent and Wolfgang Zeller), who were always friendly and helpful.

Wolfgang Zeller, who was also supervising my work, kindly analyzed some of my writings and gave me important feedback on how to make some improvements in my research project and how to better prepare future fieldwork.

All the readings I made helped me to upgrade my literature review, especially those books that can't be find in Portugal and which added a huge value to my project.

Talking with other PhD students and listening other scholars and their presentations in both CAS Conference and ABORNE Conference also highlighted what are the most relevant topics in African Studies nowadays and which are the main debates – all this is very helpful when we're working on an interdisciplinary field and we want our thesis to contribute to social sciences development, so it's very important to be aware of the theoretical, empirical and methodological debates.

Being in Edinburgh for eight weeks was an important chance to use English as single work language during an intensive period of time, and this helped me strengthening my language skills and enhanced my proficiency in reading and writing in English. As a result, I decided to write my PhD dissertation in English – to reach a wider audience and to publish it in articles afterwards.

Due to these eight weeks work some papers I already presented in past Conferences are being reformulated and turned into articles for possible publication during next year.

Other comments

I would like to present my most sincere thanks to the European Science Foundation for granting me this Short Exchange Visit Grant. From all I mentioned above, and from the privilege of working in such a prestigious institution as CAS and University of Edinburgh, I consider I profit enormously from this eight weeks visit.

Yours sincerely,

Lisbon, July 3, 2012

Marta Patrício