

Call for papers

International Conference:

“Transit” Migration in Africa: Local and Global Dynamics, Politics and Experiences

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10-12 December 2009
Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis

This conference is organised as a closing event to MITRANS, a French National Research Agency (2006-2009) funded research programme devoted to the analysis of mobility within and from the African continent in the context of a hardening of Europe's external border control.

This conference will mainly seek to develop a vocabulary to make sense of new forms of mobility and chart an agenda for their study. Often labelled as “**transit migration**”, new forms of multi-directional and flexible mobility reflect **inherent tensions between movement and containment**. In some instances, such movements are shaped by longstanding labour migration patterns towards Europe but are not determined by them. Elsewhere, migrants are marooned for years where their journeys are interrupted and reshaped through their interactions with transnational traders, political exiles, migrant workers, and students.

Those new trends foster new notions and categories that challenge traditional divisions between temporary economic migrants, refugees, permanent immigrants, and even domestic migrants. What binds these together is their extended and often extenuated journeys. In this way, transit takes on at least three meanings.

- A **bureaucratic category**, allowing for the understanding, narratives and legitimacy of political and institutional practices (of assistance, repression, control...) towards migrant populations or international agreements (conditionality, externalisation of control) with countries those populations travel across (Focus area 1);
- Or a **specific form of spatial transformation** combining a sometimes durable embeddedness in the local (the transit city) and the fact of being available to mobility thanks to sustained transnational networks (Focus area 2);
- Or a **specific experience**, which becomes a source of existential and symbolic commitment associated with the experience of “adventure” and of the journey itself (Focus area 3).

The aim of this conference is to consider the results of research undertaken by members of the MITRANS research programme on those different aspects and confront these with the results of other researchers working on similar themes in Africa and elsewhere (the Americas in particular). Beyond the plurality of contexts and conditions, the conference hopes **to identify theoretical convergence and divergence and methodological innovations**.

To achieve these ends, papers are welcome on the following **themes**:

- **1. Transit migration as a discursive object and a sector of public policy:** how and to what extent do legal categories and public policy frameworks capture, shape and adapt to those new patterns of migration?
- **2. Migrant trajectories and urban settings:** how do these new patterns of migration transform the spatial organisation of cities they travel across and how do different urban contexts informed by contrasted governance patterns of mobility impact on migrants' plans to move on?
- **3. Journeys as a source of categorisation, values and new identities:** Do these new forms of mobility foster unprecedented socio-anthropological patterns of individual and collective identities and social mobilisation?

Potential panelists are requested to **avoid two recurrent pitfalls on migration in Africa**. The first is an excessively miserabilist viewpoint, leading to picture migrants under the sole aspect of their victimisation. The other is an approach easily prone to give a romantic picture of these new migrants, celebrating their nomadism and their entrepreneurial initiatives way beyond their actual achievements. Rather, the emphasis should be on new empirical material and its theoretical and scholarly importance.

In developing a **new way of studying African migration**, this conference hopes to move beyond classical migration models and the transnationalist analysis. On one hand, African migration routes, networks and opportunities partly reproduce centuries-old migratory schemes, and sometimes, by renewing them, are in line with forms of traditional mobility (seasonal Senegalese migrations in the peanut area, initiation trips for brotherhood members, long distance inter-African trade, labour migration of the River people to France or on the continent etc.). On the other hand, this concept unduly privileges relationships between senders and receivers. Yet, for an increasing number of individuals leaving Sub-Saharan African countries, migration no longer consists simply in moving between one point and another. Instead, movement often becomes a semi-permanent condition: a state of permanent transit produced by a combination of institutional constraints and migrant aspirations. This state is an inherent facet of contemporary globalisation which helps generate the need, desire, and means to move while states and others continue to generate new obstacles to the circulation of people. But while we know it exists, there production of illegality and protection of migrants' rights and of asylum) or clash? What are the effects of the European Union's externalisation policy of border control on the production of parallel normative orders (economies of passage)?

How do institutional categories effect the relative position of actors—both state officials and beneficiaries of these policies (the socialisation processes taking place among actors within institutions, ownership and reinterpretation of official discourses depending on political games and contexts)? What do we know about the respective migration policy-making processes in African states and of internal and international policy transfers: the emergence of national policy frameworks, normative repertoires (migratory policies, sea law, asylum law), bilateral cooperation (police training), specific role of the EU, consultative fora? How is "migratory governance" elaborated between official reference frameworks and on the ground practices? The existing tension between the policy convergence thrust encouraged by the EU in the management of these flows and often diverging approaches in terms of national policies and local orders will occupy centre-stage here. remains a need to understand the interactions of migrants who are faced with the persistent difficulty of accomplishing their initial project and their resulting strategies for doing so.

Papers that engage with and address one or more of the following questions are welcome:

Focus Area 1. Transit migration as a discursive object and a sector of public policy.

Papers in this theme will explore various repertoires structuring the representations of these new forms of mobility and their actors as found in the discursive productions of political elites, experts' circles and the media. The dual representations of migrants as either victims or delinquents set out and justify the nature of relationships between state officials and non-governmental national and supra-national coalitions of actors (European institutions and lobbies, churches, NGOs, international organisations).

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To what extent do the cognitive and intervention frameworks of these different institutional actors overlap (ODA conditionality based on repression against clandestine immigration,

Focus area 2. Migrant trajectories and urban settings.

Geographers working on trans-Saharan journeys highlight the multiplication of transit, shelter, dead-end or cross-roads spaces structuring trans-border trade mobility. These are approached here primarily as spaces towards which different categories of actors converge and which therefore produce transit as a category of praxis: migrants' specific practices and forms of organisation, such as peripheral campsites or "ghettos" resulting from passage or refoulement; economic or land exploitation practices connected to migrants' presence and possibly leading to their segregation or to their insertion into local or translocal economic niches in which their entrepreneurship skills are crucial; the development of productive, commercial, cultural or religious activities deriving from the presence of these travellers, either in response to a new demand for service in connection with border-passing, or as a result of the opportunities created by the abundance and constant renewal of cheap labour flows.

There is ample comparative ground around the way in which transit and installation combine depending on the specificities of the urban local contexts: how does the migrants' presence fit into the socio-spatial patterns of the cities they travel through? To what extent does their presence strain the solidarity ties and local rules of hospitality or does it reactivate fault lines and power relations? How do local governments and residents treat those migrants? To what degree are they victims of racism and xenophobia, or on the contrary, can they rely on local inhabitants' compassion and solidarity? What are the resources offered by urban contexts, depending on their geographical position and their specific history of urban transformation, to migrants in order to connect themselves to local networks or other migration patterns such as trade or entrepreneurship?

Focus Area 3. Journeys as a source of categorisation, values and new identities.

Transit is considered here as a social condition reflecting the experience of passage or liminality (Turner 1990). For present purposes, it is understood as the more or less prolonged situation of migrants maintained in spatial-temporal margins between parting (not so much from a place or a group but from a socially and culturally recognised position) and aggregating (with a new stable position, into the condition of an immigrant in Europe or through settlement in one of the local societies that have been travelled through). In this approach, transit migrants are considered as "people on the threshold", as people in waiting, not only because of containment but also because of the relatively undetermined nature of the migration project, of the individual character of the journey, without a pre-determined itinerary and not relying on established migration networks. The notion of "adventure" speaks to that experience. It is often one of loneliness, the downside of the individualisation of migration that both fosters specific social ties as well as relies on other migration patterns, trade ones in particular. Do the companionship ties forged through the social experience of "adventure" present in transit migration result in a relative breakdown of social, ethnic and age distinctions? To what extent do they lead to emerging forms of social mobilisation? The experience is also that of the journey itself, which implies various forms of socialisation and learning ("socialisation through the road", "*la socialisation par la route*"), among which the specific use of new

technologies. Finally, the ways out of transit will be explored, either upwardly (thanks to a successful crossing of the border ending in a “classic” immigrant trajectory, career change for trade or entrepreneurship) or downwardly (return, refoulement).

Abstracts written in **French or English** of approximately one page should be sent by email to streiff@unice.fr and Aurelia.Wakabwe@wits.ac.za by 1st June 2009. Notifications of acceptance will be sent following review by the scientific committee in early July. Acceptance is subject to confirmation after receiving the final text, of a maximum size of 60 000, characters before 1 November 2009. Page | 4

The conference working languages will be French and English.

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Confirmed keynote speakers & chairs:

- Virginie Guiraudon (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Administratives, Politiques et Sociales, CNRS, Université Lille 2)
- Laurent Fourchard (CEAN, FNSP, Bordeaux)
- Fariba Adelkhal (CERI, CNRS, Paris)
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