**Workshop**

Territoriality, Boundaries and Spatial Practices in “Berlin’s Africa”

8 May 2017

SFB 1199, Strohsackpassage
Nikolaistraße 6-10, Leipzig

**Organizers**

Geert Castryck (SFB 1199)
Adam Jones (SFB 1199)
Bas De Roo (SFB 1199)


**Overview**

Different conceptions of space, and of territoriality and boundaries in particular have played a decisive role in colonial history. A widespread reading of colonization posits that the European colonizers imposed arbitrary territorial borders and rigid ethnic areas upon Africa. Although not completely false, this is only one part of a far more complex story. In part, these borders were negotiated with local leaders and in relation to local conceptions of territory. Some imposed borders were locally re-signified, circumvented or exploited. In many cases, pre-existing territorialities and boundaries continued to exist despite colonial territorialization. And often, new spatial forms and practices emanated or evolved from the interplay between diverse conceptions of space.

In this workshop, we discuss processes of spatialization during the 19th and 20th centuries in East and Central Africa. By focusing on areas close to colonial or national borders we want to scrutinize historical processes of territorialization and border-making as well as spatial practices and relations that emerged in response to boundaries, frontiers or different significances of territoriality. We go beyond borderlands studies in the narrow sense by scrutinizing overlapping and interacting spatializations, of which the border-territory-borderland nexus is but one. We aim to bring together scholars working close to the boundaries between Belgian, British, French, German and Portuguese colonial territories, hence also between present-day African states, and to encourage trans-national and trans-imperial historical approaches.
Furthermore, we are interested in different temporal perspectives on space, border and territory making. We expect a fruitful exchange of ideas based on a combination of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial vantage points. This can include long term processes of negotiation, adaptation and signification of territories, boundaries and spatial connections, as well as examples where histories or memories of the making and meaning of boundaries and territories have a bearing on later events.

The workshop takes place in the context of research project B2: “African-European Entangled Histories and Spatial Orders in ‘Berlin’s Africa’” (SFB 1199). In this project, we empirically emphasize the historicity and contingency of spatial orders beyond the confines of separate world regions. The free trade zone agreed upon at the Berlin Africa Conference of 1884/5 serves as the starting-point for the analysis of a history of Afro-European entanglement. The project investigates conflict-ridden processes of spatialization that unfolded over several decades of high imperialism and modern colonialism in Africa and Europe. Its focus is on the analysis of political spaces and processes of territorialisation, religious networks and areas of influence, trade networks and transport connections, as well as on the entangled history of violence experienced in “Berlin's Africa”.

**Programme**

9:00 am–9:15 am **Registration**

9:15 am–9:30 am **Welcome / Opening Remarks**

*Adam Jones and Geert Castryck* (U Leipzig)

**I. constructing territoriality**

9:30 am–10:45 am

Chair: **Maximilian Georg** (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig)

*Henri Médard* (Aix-Marseille U / IMAf)

Lake People (*Basese*), Clan Protest and Colonial Territorial Rule in the Kingdom of Buganda (1886–1924)

*Bas De Roo* (U Leipzig)

The Making of a Territorial Order in the Belgian Congo: the Case of the M'Bomu Basin (1910–1932)

Discussant: **Dmitri van den Bersselaar** (U Leipzig)

Coffee Break

**II. political imaginations**

11:15 am–12:30 pm

Chair: **Anne-Kristin Hartmetz** (U Leipzig)
Aidan Russell (Graduate Institute Geneva / U Cambridge)
The Inevitable Borders: Rwanda, Burundi and the Political Imagination of Secession

Miles Larmer (U Oxford)
Nation-making at the Border: Zambian Diplomacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Discussant: Steffi Marung (U Leipzig)

Lunch

III. mobility and identity
1:30 pm–3:15 pm

Chair: Bas De Roo (U Leipzig)

David Maxwell (U Cambridge)
Free Slaves, Christian Modernity and Ethnic Imagination in Katanga, Belgian Congo

Geert Castryck (U Leipzig)
Bordering the Lake: Transcending Spatial Orders in Kigoma-Ujiji

Gillian Mathys (U Ghent)
Re(b)ordering Space: Fixing Mobility and the Territorialization of Identities in the Lake Kivu Region (19th–20th Century)

Discussant: Adam Jones (U Leipzig)

Coffee Break

IV. conceptualizing spatial experiences
3:45 pm–5:00 pm

Chair: Megan Maruschke (U Leipzig)

Margot Luyckfasseel (U Ghent)
The Road as Actant: A New Materialist Approach to Colonial Space

Achim von Oppen (U Bayreuth)
Moving Along, Moving Across, Moving in Time: Linear Geographies, Translocal Practices and the Making of the Zambia — Angola Border (c. 1890 to 1950)

Discussant: Bas De Roo (U Leipzig)

5:00 pm–6:00 pm Closing Summary / General Discussion
Geert Castryck (U Leipzig)

Abstracts
I. constructing territoriality

Henri Médard (Aix-Marseille U / IMAf)

Lake People (Basese), Clan Protest and Colonial Territorial Rule in the Kingdom of Buganda (1886-1924)

Oral history in Buganda is in total discrepancy with Ganda (and European) early 20th century written sources. The turning point was the 1924 Bataka land commission when this new oral narrative of Buganda history was first formulated. The Bataka land commission opposed so called “great territorial chiefs” to so called “clan chiefs” on the interpretation of the 1900 Uganda Agreement that formalized British rule in Buganda.

What appears among other things in the proceedings of the Commission is a protest against the colonial rule and its territorial dynamics. Clearly defined territorial district were extended or created to cover the whole of the kingdom. This had a huge impact on the Basese, the inhabitants of Lake Victoria’s shores and islands. They were mostly fishermen and sailors. They shared the same king as the Baganda but were ruled by clan leaders and gods rather than the king’s territorial chiefs and appointees. The British only recognized territorial chiefs and erased all the specificities of the Basese administrative system.

Two visions of the past of the kingdom of Buganda opposed each other during the hearings. I wish to argue that this debate goes beyond the replacing of an official history of precolonial origins by a new “invented” (anti)colonial history. The historical narrative found today in Uganda is mostly of Basese origin. Although the Basese disappeared with colonial rule, their ruling system was re-appropriated to oppose colonial rule, through an extreme and uniform interpretation of the past ganda territorial administrative system.

Bas De Roo (U Leipzig)

The making of a territorial order in the Belgian Congo: the case of the M’Bomu Basin (1910-1932)

This paper studies the making of a territorial order in the Congolese M’Bomu Basin. In 1932, the Belgian administration recreated the chiefdoms of the precolonial Abandia Kingdom to facilitate indirect rule. On first sight, the case of the M’Bomu Valley hence provides yet another example of how a European colonizer tried to make African societies more legible through the imposition of an imagined spatial framework. This paper however sheds a new light on the Belgian attempts to reorganize the communities that were under its control. First of all, I demonstrate that the imposition of a territorial order was not only negotiated with the African elite who sought to expand its power and the African subject who did not necessarily share the colonial conceptions of authority and territoriality. Within the colonial administration it is possible to discern between officials that were zealously devoted to the reconstitution of the customary chiefdom and more pragmatic agents that cared only about appointing capable chiefs and creating workable chefferies. Secondly, this paper argues that the Belgian administration did more than fix communities in an administrative grid. The state devoted great effort to connecting people and places to
the centers of colonial power. Inspection tours represented a fundamental aspect of Belgian rule. The development of a road network was to extend the reach of the state.

II. political imaginations

Aidan Russell (Graduate Institute Geneva / U Cambridge)

The Inevitable Borders: Rwanda, Burundi and the Political Imagination of Secession

Often noted as exceptions to the archetypal story of the supposedly “arbitrary” demarcation of territory in colonial Africa, Rwanda and Burundi’s borders have an unusual, if contested claim to precolonial heritage and continuity. A point of essential collaboration between colonial authorities and royal dynasties, this image of authenticity and inevitability gained powerful currency in the face of localised dissent in the early decades of the twentieth century, until the restoration of the border between the two countries became another ‘inevitable’ anomaly, running counter to the norms of independence across the continent. After independence, even as strong regional identities and historical memories of local distinction played central roles in the political struggles of either country, the integrity of the borders themselves seemed rarely under question.

Yet within these national contests, the image and discourse of secession emerged and re-emerged with surprising frequency. Tenuous proposals for the delineation of enclaves, accusations of conspiracies to secede, demands for or depictions of ethnic and other exclusive territories that violated national landscapes pepper the political language of the region. These spatial discourses, sublimated from the dominant narratives of political contestation or sidelined as isolated absurdities, hint at a powerful register of political expression. In ambiguous tension with political acts and spatial practices, a peripheral language of provocation and claim was shared across the region. Exploring the images and conceptions of wholeness, integrity and violation that coloured political accusation and proposition across the twentieth century, of future and past geographies overlaid on the present, this paper explores the political imagination of secession as an informative and provocative perspective on the social and political history of the Great Lakes.

Miles Larmer (U Oxford)

Nation-making at the Border: Zambian Diplomacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo

How were new African national identities made in the decolonisation moment? In what spaces and places can we usefully observe the process of nation-making? These questions were briefly the subject of contemporaneous analysis in Africa’s independence moment in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but have been surprisingly neglected ever since. Focussing on the periphery rather than the centre provides an important framework for addressing such questions: African borders are stereotypically artificial and weak, cutting through pre-existing societies and interacting uneasily with them. Imposing national identity in border regions with mixed and mobile populations, dynamic migrant flows and cross-border linkages was a task fraught with contradiction.

This paper does not seek to assess how effective such efforts were in asserting or imposing national identity, but rather what these efforts reveal about the ideas and
values that informed one set of state elites’ assertions of what national identity meant and its relationship to history, local identities and moral codes regarding, among other things, customary authority and appropriate gendered behaviour. In this I draw upon Bourdieu’s insight that the state’s involvement in the codification and legalisation of national identity involved not only state sovereignty over fixed territorial space but also the assertion of symbolic power, the right to classify and the moral and political notions that underlay ostensibly bureaucratic, disinterested state structures. By observing and analysing the attempts of officials of Zambia’s new ruling party and state administrators to establish and assert their notion of Zambian-ness, the paper demonstrates both the fragility of new national identities and the extent to which elites sought to underpin these identities by the assertion of moral certainties.

III. mobility and identity

David Maxwell (U Cambridge)

*Free Slaves, Christian Modernity and Ethnic Imagination in Katanga, Belgian Congo*

Caught between the expanding frontiers of the Swahili slave trade from the east and Afro-Portuguese slavers from West late nineteenth century, Katanga was a site of great social flux. Longstanding identities were broken and remade or profoundly challenged by the appearance of new polities such as those of Tippu Tip, Msiri or the Batetela. The paper examines the role of returned ex-slave diaspora in formation of Christian and ethnic identities amongst the Luba speaking peoples of Katanga. Taken from their homes by Ovimbundu slavers 1870-1900s these Luba returnees were Christianised by while laboring on plantations in Bié, Angola. They travelled home in the 1910s, seeing themselves as missionaries of a Christian modernity. Spreading a fixed and expanded Luba identity by means of literacy, schooling and new vernacular scriptures, they also acted as ethnic enthusiasts.

The paper examines how the experience of dislocation and expanded horizons provided the vital backdrop the Luba slaves’ conversion. It explores how they made sense of their experience in terms of the narratives of exodus, exile and return in the Hebrew Scriptures and how the notion of a chosen people formed the basis of a supra-local vision upon which a Luba ethnic consciousness would be founded.

Geert Castryck (U Leipzig)

*Bordering the Lake: Transcending Spatial Orders in Kigoma-Ujiji*

Towards the end of the 19th century, different spatial orders came into being, clashed and coalesced in the Lake Tanganyika region. The frontier character of the lake at ecological and economic crossroads got overshadowed by the westward moving frontier of an expanding global market, which was in turn overrun by European colonization and the drawing of territorial borders.

Kigoma-Ujiji was both marginal and central to all of these spatial orders. In this paper, I make sense of this urban area as a liminal town or a place of transition and transformation across spatial orders. I first illustrate how different spatial orders as well as their demise led to concomitant waves of migration. Throughout the 20th century, the urban population had to cope with divisions, which can be traced back to the
different spatial orders that framed settlement in town. More recently, a shared
exposure to exclusion within a contemporary national-territorial spatial order
strengthened group identifications, despite historically and spatially different migration
experiences and identities. I argue that the urbanity of Kigoma-Ujiji is characterized by
this historical-spatial combination of internal division and cohesion, which I interpret as
a way of coping with the contradictory challenges of “global” integration.

Gillian Mathys (U Ghent)

Re(b)ordering space: Fixing mobility and the territorialization of identities in the Lake
Kivu region (19th-20th century)

The mobile nature of African societies has since long been acknowledged by scholars
(see e.g. Kopytoff 1987, De Bruijn et al. 2001). In this paper I illustrate the centrality of
mobility to African societies in the region around Lake Kivu in the nineteenth century. I
argue that territory in this region that I characterize as a Kopytoffian “frontier” was
itinerant, in the sense that both territorial control and social activities in this region were
not stable, but constantly changing and often contested. The reason why territorial
control was not stable was precisely because the frontier provided opportunities to
escape the power of political authorities. Moreover, within this frontier, switching back
and forth between cultures and cultural identities often was the norm rather than the
exception – cause and consequence of the itinerant nature of the frontier.

Much changed during colonialism. Although colonial administrations tried to fix the
mobility of the African population, they never entirely managed to do so, and older
spatial constellations continued to bear importance. Yet, changes in the administrative
structures, that were never just colonial impositions as Africans actively negotiated
newly introduced forms of rule and of ordering space, did put an end to these itinerant
territorialities. This in turn had an impact on relationships between territory, identity and
authority in this region which became much more rigid. It is this process that has led to
a “territorialization of identities”. This “territorialization of identities” continues to have
an impact on power dynamics and struggles at the local level in the eastern DRC. The
second part of this paper focuses on how and why identities became increasingly
territorialized.

IV. conceptualizing spatial experiences

Margot Luyckfasseel (U Ghent)

The Road as Actant: A New Materialist Approach to Colonial Space

New materialism, an upcoming current within philosophy and political sciences,
“expresses a certain fatigue and dissatisfaction with the inherent limits of theory
dominated by the cultural or linguistic turn” (Jones 2016: 8). Instead of focusing on
discursive constructions of the human environment, new materialist thinkers, such as
Jane Bennett and Bruno Latour, reclaim attention for its material reality. This results in
a thorough reorientation of the agency concept: new materialists argue that not only
humans, but also objects can be containers of agency.

When dealing with the relation between space and colonial power constellations, this
broader conceptualization of agency can lead to a refreshing innovation of what
Cooper (1994: 1517) has called the constraining dichotomy between dominance of the colonizer and resistance of the colonized. In this paper, I will present a case study of colonial road construction and spatial politics in the Ubangi district of the Belgian Congo through this new materialist perspective on agency. By including the spatial environment into the network of “agency of assemblages” (Bennett 2010), we may come to a better understanding of the lived experience of the colonial encounter. Through this analysis I will arrive at an assessment of the novelty and the validity of new materialism from an Africanist point of view.

Achim von Oppen (U Bayreuth)

Moving along, moving across, moving in time. Linear geographies, translocal practices and the making of the Zambia - Angola border (c. 1890 to 1950)

This contribution is about popular ways of conceptualizing space in the modern history of the upper reaches of the Zambezi river, an area which is now situated around the border between Angola and Zambia. It is an area in which due to the scarcity of population and the abundance of modestly fertile land, movement rather than boundary-making are the main practices in which the inhabitants structure their everyday geographies. According to their “mental maps”, settlements and communications, social ties and political relations were and to some extent still are structured in linear, partly in concentric, but hardly in territorial terms. Watercourses, today also roads, provide the most important axes that provide orientation and define proximity and distance in both spatial and socio-political terms. The paper will first present a reconstruction of these popular geographies for the late pre-colonial period, based on an analysis of locational terminology, written and oral narratives, field observations and early cartography. It will then go on to explore the clashes and interactions of these conceptualizations of space with the heavy-handed but often illusionary attempts by the colonial state, mainly using evidence from the British side, to impose a territorial order of things from the “international” down to the very local level. What will emerge is a history not only of mutual subversion of spatial concepts but also of mutual appropriation. This tendency was facilitated by the utterly peripheral position of this “fim do mundo” vis-a-vis the new central states on both sides, while hardly impeding mobility in the region.