

Transboundary Europe through a West African Looking Glass: Cross-Border Integration, »Colonial Difference« and the Chance for »Border Thinking«

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RESÜMEE

Aufbauend auf einer aktuellen epistemologischen Perspektive auf Grenzen schlägt dieser Beitrag eine Neuinterpretation gegenwärtiger Euro-Afrikanischer Grenzzonen vor: nämlich als Ausdruck von Dynamiken in der wechselseitigen historischen Konstruktion der europäischen Binnen- und Außengrenzen. Auf grundsätzlichere Überlegungen im Rahmen der postcolonial studies zurückgreifend setzen sich die Autoren insbesondere mit Walter Mignolos Begriff der »exteriority« des »modernen/ kolonialen Weltsystems« auseinander und argumentieren, dass dieser nicht ausreichend die geographischen Aspekte von Regionen in Betracht ziehe, die ihre eigenen, abgegrenzten Identitäten gegen das dunkle Erbe der europäischen imperialen Herrschaft aushandeln. Um dies zu veranschaulichen, zeigen die Autoren am Beispiel einer kürzlich entwickelten Initiative zur grenzüberschreitenden Kooperation in Westafrika – die West African Borders and Integration (WABI) – welchem Wandel die Afrikanisch-Europäische Grenze gegenwärtig unterworfen ist. Abschließend unterbreiten sie einen Vorschlag für ein präzisiertes »Denken der Grenze«, das es ermöglicht, die postkoloniale Wiederholung zu entschlüsseln, die dem westafrikanischen Festhalten an einer eigentümlichen »Idee eines grenzüberschreitenden Europas« innewohnt. Damit bildet dieser Aufsatz einen Beitrag zur wissenschaftlichen Diskussion über die »koloniale Differenz« in der Gestaltung des Euro-Afrikanischen Grenzlands.

Drawing »political« borders in the European sphere, which considered itself and attempted to appoint itself the center of the world, was also originally and principally a way to divide up the earth; thus, it was a way at once to organize the world's exploitation and to export the »border form« to the periphery, in an attempt to transform the whole universe into an extension of Europe, later into »another Europe«, built on the same political

*model. This process continued until decolonization and thus also until the construction of the current international order.*¹

Europe's Double-Boundary Problematic

We take it to be crucial to acknowledge that European borders and cross-border interactions demand to be re-situated within a more globally-oriented geopolitical narrative. Such a task calls on us to re-embed earlier rounds of European transboundary rule in their worldly contexts, while tracing their echoes and resonances in our day. This can be productively achieved, we suggest, by reconsidering the complex bordering and re-bordering processes at work during the period of high European imperial rule, whose multiple effects shaped the contours of anti-colonial struggle in the mid-20th century and whose legacies continue to inform oppositional struggles in our lived present. To fully capture the spatial extension of European boundary-making processes and their relational effects in this period, we need only to remember how during the era of 18th and 19th century colonial expansion the various European metropolises used an imperial border simultaneously to construct an internal metropolitan and external colonial boundary between Europe and Africa, whereby the former was granted the full attributes of civilizational positivity, sovereignty and metaphysical grounding to the degree that the latter was defined by its lack. This was a clear attempt to recreate within Europe an increasingly compartmentalized world of contending imperial spheres of interest.² The construction of national European borders was thus spatio-temporally coterminous with a multiply expanding imperial frontier.³

The tensions of empire between European imperial metropolises and their respective colonial spheres have of course been the subject of keen interest to postcolonial scholars for at least a decade now.⁴ More recent and less visible, however, have been attempts to frame this relationship in ways that foreground the material as well as symbolic dimensions of borders and bordering practices inherent to this colonial (as well as postcolonial) dynamic.⁵ Walter Mignolo's work, in particular, appears to have set a path-breaking agenda

1 É. Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Princeton 2004, p. 7.

2 J. Agnew, *The «Civilisational» Roots of European National Boundaries*, in: D.H. Kaplan / J. Haekli (eds), *Boundaries and Place: European Borderlands in Geographical Context*, New York 2002, pp. 18–33.

3 A. Albet-Mas, *Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space: Religious Justifications for Tolerance and Confrontation between Spain and Colonial Morocco During the Franco Era*, in: *Geopolitics*, 11 (2006) 4, pp. 580–600; H. Cairo, *«Portugal is not a Small Country»: Maps and Propaganda in the Salazar Regime*, in: *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) 3, pp. 367–395; C. S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*, Cambridge 2006.

4 F. Cooper / A. L. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley 1997; F. Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942*, Amsterdam 1995; B. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*, London 1998; H. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*, New York 2000.

5 É. Balibar, *The Borders of Europe*, in: P. Cheah / B. Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis 1998, pp. 216–229; W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs* (note 1); W. D. Mignolo, *The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference*, in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101 (2002) 1,

by inviting us to reconsider the traditional territorial as well as political-economic objects of modern world-systems theory in terms of a provocative double-boundary problematic, one focused on the effects of colonial mappings produced through the boundary demarcations of western rule. For Mignolo, the intellectual move from »modern world system« *à la* Wallerstein⁶ to »modern/colonial world system« entails a novel political project that locates itself at the borders of the contemporary geopolitical system.⁷

Thus, for Mignolo – drawing largely on scholarship emerging from the Latin American experience of Iberian conquest, enslavement and independence – both Marxist political-economic analysis as well as more culturally-attuned postcolonial discourses are inadequate for what he believes to be a necessary move towards an epistemological stance – a »decolonial strategy«. This is due to the fact that, following Mignolo, both Marxist and postcolonial narratives are still rooted within the epistemological horizon of modernity and therefore cannot speak from an »exteriority« that is the outcome as well as effect of previous rounds of colonial expansion and differentiating power. We consider that Mignolo's overarching conceptual framework constitutes a vigorous provocation for contemporary European border studies, as it invites border scholars of the EU prone to idiographic analysis to treat their object of study within a perspective which re-embeds European bordering practices in the course of a long historical period of extensive spatio-temporal linkages marked by the foundational experience of colonial modernity. What is more, such an account proposes a reckoning with the epistemic effects of such bordering practices as the basis for a potentially oppositional *politics*, an issue that has been largely untheorized in the border literature to date.⁸ As EU-enlargement has proceeded within what some have perceived to be a variable geometry of inferiorizing Otherness reminiscent of Orientalisms past⁹ and in the context of a more recent EU initiative which threatens to reduce the EU's immediate »near abroad« to its East and South to a docile »ring of friends« sharing in EU-Europe's values but not its institutions,¹⁰ the immediate significance of such a theorization should be clear.

pp. 57-96; W. D. Mignolo/M. V. Tlostanova, Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-politics of Knowledge, in: *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9 (2006) 2, pp. 205-221; O. Kramsch, Re-imagining the Scalar Topologies of Cross-border Governance: Eu(ro)regions in the Post-colonial Present, in: *Space and Polity* (Special Issue: J. Sidaway (ed), The Geopolitics of Cross-Border Cooperation in the European Union), 6 (2002) 2, pp. 169-196; O. Kramsch, Transboundary Governmentality on Europe's Postcolonial Edge: The Cypriot Green Line, in: *Journal of Comparative European Politics* (Special Issue: C. Rumford (ed), Rethinking European Spaces), 4 (2006) 2, pp. 289-307; O. Kramsch, Querying Cosmopolis at the Borders of Europe, in: *Environment and Planning A*, 39 (2007) 7, pp. 1582-1600.

- 6 I. Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, London 1983; I. Wallerstein/G. Arrighi / T. K. Hopkins, *Antisystemic Movements*, London 1989.
- 7 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs* (note 1).
- 8 O. Kramsch, *Transboundary Governmentality* (note 6).
- 9 J. Börcz/M. Kovács (eds), *Empires New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*, *Central Europe Review* online, 2001; S. Engel-Di Mauro (ed), *The European's Burden: Global Imperialism in EU Expansion*, Berlin 2006.
- 10 M. Emerson, *The Wider Europe as the European Union's Friendly Monroe Doctrine*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 27, October 2002, see: <http://www.ceps.be> (accessed 11 December 2003); J. W. Scott, *The EU and »Wider Europe«: Toward an Alternative Geopolitics of Regional Cooperation?*, in: *Geopolitics*, 10 (2005) 3, pp. 429-454.

In conceptualizing his notion of »exteriority«, Mignolo is prudent to avoid fetishizing a pure alterity of either national or religious origin »beyond« Europe. But as border scholars of the EU we are nevertheless concerned by a silent geography informing his argument, one which in a recurring fashion locates the »global designs« of western colonial/modernity in a space inhabited today by the European Union, and »local histories« of resistance in more spatially bounded arenas situated on Europe's colonial and post-colonial peripheries. This, we aver, replicates an inside/outside dichotomy for Europe, which, paradoxically, militates against Mignolo's wider project. Accordingly, the first section of the paper illustrates in greater detail the main strands of Mignolo's argument. Echoing concerns within the broader field of postcolonial studies regarding the proper localization of postcolonial subjectivity¹¹, it problematizes Mignolo's definition of an »exteriority« to the modern/colonial world system, arguing that it continues to locate the Eurocentric organization of knowledge in western Europe, a place now called the European Union, when actually the prefix »Euro-« of »Eurocentrism« is now at large and up for grabs worldwide.

To illustrate and elaborate on the latter insight, the next section considers a recently developed initiative for cross-border cooperation in West Africa¹² – *West African Borders and Integration* (WABI). We bring to light the material as well as discursive structures of WABI, focusing on the ways in which it mobilizes a highly partial and selective reading of the history and experience of European transboundary integration in the service of goals that would be quite remote to the early founders of the European Economic Community. In so doing, we sketch the conditions which we believe gesture towards an alternative imaginary for re-thinking the perpetuation of the »colonial difference« in West-African borderlands, one which avoids a binary spatial logic that places Eurocentric knowledge in »Europe« while charging a putative »outside« to Europe with exclusive emancipatory agency. We suggest the entanglements of Europe with its multiply constituted outsides are more complex and fraught. Following this, we finally propose to reconceptualize the epistemological stakes in Mignolo's *œuvre* so as to acknowledge the existence of multiple »European« modernities operating in the world today from the vantage point of a more satisfying sphere of »pluriversal« relations.

11 A. D. King, *Actually Existing Postcolonialisms: Colonial Urbanism and Architecture After the Postcolonial Turn*, in: R. Bishop/J. Phillips/W.-W. Yeo (eds), *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, New York and London 2003, pp. 167–183; D. Scott, *Colonial Governmentality*, in: J. X. Inda (ed), *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, Oxford 2005, pp. 23–49.

12 West Africa is defined here as the westernmost region of the African continent. The region is composed of 17 countries extending from Cape Verde in the west to Chad in the east (Cape Verde, Mauritania, Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Niger, Chad). Among these countries, fifteen of them – with the exception of Mauritania and Chad – are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Despite its peripheral geographical location, Cameroon is also taken into consideration due to its important role in the lake Chad Basin. The West African region – a complex area with a great range of geography, bioregions, and cultures – covers a surface area of 7,800,000 km², equivalent to 2.5 times that of the European Union.

From »Modern World System« to »Modern / Colonial World System«: »Exteriority« and »Border Thinking«

As European-based border scholars normally pre-occupied with the more incremental and ordinary practices of transboundary co-operation and governance within the European Union, we come up to the imaginative and ambitious canvas of Mignolo's *oeuvre* with an admiration propelled in no small part by a sense of stumbling upon a major theoretical intervention whose long-term implications hold a direct and urgent bearing upon our craft. We may indeed be somewhat puzzled and irritated by the rather casual and undisciplined manner with which Mignolo draws upon terms at the core of our professional identity (»border«, »boundary«, »border thinking«, etc.). And we may also be prone to raising our eyebrows at his adherence to Latin American postcolonial theory, while persistently refusing to glance at the long 20th-century European philosophical as well as social scientific tradition of reflection on borders and spatial bordering practices – from the micro-physics of Erving Goffman¹³ and Norbert Elias¹⁴ to the carceral dividing practices of Foucault¹⁵ to the baroque and nomadic flights of Gilles Deleuze¹⁶ – not to mention that corpus of work produced by a more recent generation of border scholars attempting to reflect on Europe's boundaries in ways that apparently share much with his project.¹⁷

However, Mignolo's writing has the immediate and salutary effect to blast us out of a certain Euro-complacency, one which has for the most part until now, even in its more self-consciously postmodern registers, assumed that the project of European boundary construction is essentially internal to the dynamic of EU member states, involving the production and reproduction of bordered identities that serve to re-inscribe national narratives of territorialized home and belonging. To the extent that the outside world is considered relevant in these bordering and re-bordering processes, as in the cases of EU enlargement and »Wider Europe – European Neighbourhood Policy« (ENP), the idea of transboundary Europe is primarily understood as a model or template of timeless best practices, to be projected onto other macro-regions of the globe eager to adopt EU methods of »good governance«, »democracy«, »liberal markets« and cross-border »freedom of movement«. In his work Mignolo takes a sledgehammer to these internalist and presentist pieties, offering us a thought space to re-conceptualize European bordering practices within more worldly (and decidedly more earthly) practices involving the

13 E. Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*, New York 1971.

14 N. Elias, *Etablierte Außenseiter*, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

15 M. Foucault, *Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la Folie a l'Age Classique*, Paris 1961.

16 G. Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*, Paris 1988.

17 U. H. Meinhof (ed), *Living (with) Borders: Identity Discourses on East-West Borders in Europe*, Aldershot, 2002; O. Kramsch/B. Hooper (eds), *Cross-Border Governance in the European Union*, London 2004; H. Van Houtum/O. Kramsch/W. Zierhofer (eds), *B/Ordering Space*, Aldershot 2005; J. W. Scott, *EU Enlargement, Region Building and Shifting Borders of Inclusion and Exclusion*, Aldershot 2006.

exercise of knowledge, power and their material effects within as well as »beyond« the European Union's current borders.

Starting from the premises of world-system analysis as originally conceived by Immanuel Wallerstein¹⁸ and further extended by Eric Wolf,¹⁹ Janet J. Abu-Lughod²⁰ and Giovanni Arrighi,²¹ Mignolo works towards a perspective he specifies as »modern / colonial world systems analysis«, a standpoint where the subaltern voice is »articulated on the basis of memories and legacies of the colonial experience, that is, the colonial experiences in their historical diversity«. ²² In justifying this move, Mignolo argues that Wallerstein's modern world-system, though compelling analytically, excluded from its imaginary constructed by world system analysis the idea of a »colonial difference« that is rather central to Mignolo's conceptual shift. ²³ Against this conceptual backdrop, Mignolo defines the »colonial difference« as:

*[T]he classification of the planet in the modern / colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values.*²⁴

Drawing explicitly on the work of the Peruvian anthropologist Aníbal Quijano, Mignolo further argues that the colonial difference has historically been operationalized through »coloniality of power« (*colonialidad del poder*), in the service of:

1. The classification and reclassification of the planet population – the concept of »culture« becomes crucial in this task.
2. An institutional structure functional to articulate and manage such classifications (state apparatus, universities, church, etc.).
3. The definition of spaces appropriate to such goals.
4. An epistemological perspective from which to articulate the meaning and profile of the new matrix of power and from which the new production of knowledge could be channeled.²⁵

Through these myriad operations in the wider colonial theatre, European local knowledges and histories are viewed as having been projected to the scale of global designs under the broad rubric of Eurocentrism and Occidentalism. In Mignolo's view, modernity and coloniality are thus two sides of the same coin in world-systems analysis:

[I]ntroducing parallel expressions such as modernity/coloniality, modern/colonial world system, coloniality at large I intend to stress that there is no modernity without coloniality, that the coloniality of power underlines nation building in both local histories of nations

18 I. Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (note 7).

19 E. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley 1982.

20 J. J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: the World System A.D. 1250–1350*, New York 1989.

21 G. Arrighi, *Capitalism and the Modern World-System: Rethinking the Nondebates of the 1970s*, in: *Review* 21 (1998) 1, pp. 113–139.

22 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, p. 37 (note 1).

23 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

25 A. Quijano, cited in: W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (note 1); A. Quijano, *Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina*, in: *Anuario Mariateguano*, 9 (1997) 9, pp. 113–121.

*that devised and enacted global designs as well as in those local histories of nations that had to accommodate themselves to global designs devised with them in mind but without their direct participation.*²⁶

Within this framework, what is worth considering is Mignolo's attempt to rethink the modern world system from a colonial perspective by focusing on the complex and diverse interrelations that occur between »subaltern knowledges« and universalizing colonial discourses at different stages of the modern/colonial world system. As Mignolo himself observes, the overarching historical frame for understanding the rise of Eurocentrism and Occidentalism – widening Wallerstein's »world system analysis« – is the imaginary of the »modern/colonial world system«, lasting from the 15th century Spanish conquest of the New World and the formation of an Atlantic commercial circuit, to the end of the 20th century and its reconfiguration in the discourse of neo-liberalism as a new civilizing project driven by the market and transnational corporations. Indeed for Mignolo, the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system as the overarching discourse of Occidentalism includes tension and conflict with forces of subalternity extending from the early responses of Amerindian and African slaves to current social movements searching for new democratic futures.²⁷

From this perspective, rather than conceiving the modern world system in terms of cores and centres, semi-peripheries and peripheries *à la* Wallerstein, the modern/colonial world system is crucially configured in terms of borders. In this vision »internal and external borders are not discrete entities but rather moments of a continuum in colonial expansion and in changes of national imperial hegemonies.«²⁸ Borders introduce in the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system »an other logic«, one that must be grasped not only in territorial but epistemic terms:

*What I needed to argue for was a way of thinking in and from the borders of the colonial differences in the modern/colonial world: the borders between enacting and desiring global designs; the borders between transforming received global designs into local projects; the borders between subaltern and hegemonic knowledges rearticulated from the perspective of the subalterns.*²⁹

For postcolonial Latin American scholars such as Quijano and Mignolo, recognition of the »colonial difference« from a subaltern perspective demands »border thinking«, an epistemological practice that attempts to identify particular moments of tension in the conflict between two local histories and knowledges, one that is global in design, the other forced to accommodate to such new realities.³⁰ In this perspective »border thinking is a logical consequence of the colonial difference« and it can be traced back to the very

26 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (note 1), p. 43.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 327.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

moment of the modern / colonial world system's formation when Spanish colonialism reached the Andes and Mesoamerica.³¹ Awareness of a corresponding »geopolitics of knowledge« – the politics of »thinking from« Spanish America and the Caribbean – purportedly produces not only stories from inside the modern world but from its borders; they are not only counter or different stories but forgotten narratives that bring forward a new epistemological dimension: an epistemology of and from the borders of the modern / colonial world system.

*Border thinking [...] consist[s] in the incorporation of Western contributions in different domains of life and knowledge into an epistemic and political project that affirms the difference, colonial and/or imperial to which most of the population of the world has been subjected throughout the five hundred years of economic, religious, epistemic imperial expansion and its consequences in the form of split subjectivities.*³²

But reading Mignolo with the more pressing and troubled politics of EU enlargement and »neighbourhood« still very much occupying our short- as well as long-term research agendas, what remains for us as an urgent task is the need to clarify more precisely the geography of Mignolo's epistemological »beyond Europe«. For us the fuzziness of the concept is linked first and foremost to the choice of the word »exteriority«. Although Mignolo makes a clear effort to distinguish what he refers to as »exteriority« from a pure »outside« untainted by either colonial or capitalist social relations, the location of the former term remains frustratingly vague, with the latter meaning of pure alterity prevailing in Mignolo's texts. In this sense, Mignolo would seem to suggest that Occidentalism is still located in western Europe and »exteriority« is somehow *beyond* the geography of western Europe:

*Border thinking is the epistemology of exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project.*³³

Despite the irresistibly utopian momentum underlying its design, inspired as it is by a powerful nostalgia for mid-20th-century Latin American and African anti-colonial struggles and liberation movements, Mignolo's »exteriority« appears on closer scrutiny to be a static construct, still firmly embedded within an inside / outside dichotomy that places acts of resistance to more globally-oriented discourses and norms within locally historicized settings bereft of the transnational and universalizing energies transmitted by the purportedly Eurocentric hegemonic powers. This we find politically problematic, peculiarly unsuitable for a 21st-century anti-colonial praxis, as it underplays the extent to which creative acts of »border thinking« can jump beyond local cross-border arenas and engage with transnational actors and subjects on their own terms. Accordingly, we believe the question of the »where« of Mignolo's »exteriority« is left undertheorized³⁴, and

31 Ibid., p. X.

32 W. D. Mignolo/M. V. Tlostanova, *Theorizing from the Borders* (note 6), p. 212.

33 Ibid., p. 206.

34 Mignolo's stance on this issue remains unclear. In his volume (*W. D. Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs*,

so we set out to find out some valid arguments to understand from where an alternative geopolitics of knowledge might actually speak.

Thus, we believe, critical reflection on the meaning of the »where« of Mignolo's analytics allows us to relocate his implied geograph(ies) into a more satisfying epistemological context for understanding the complexity of the present world. In what follows, we propose that in reflecting and building upon the highly productive notion of »border thinking« as »the epistemology of the future, without which another world will be impossible«,³⁵ we scramble Mignolo's implicitly dualistic geographies by considering the uses to which the very idea of »transboundary Europe« has been mobilized in the »local« postcolonial setting of West Africa.

Challenging the doxa on African boundaries

The contemporary experience of cross-border integration in western Africa can be a good place, we suggest, to start thinking through the geographical implications of Mignolo's notion of »colonial difference«, »coloniality of power« and the epistemological potential of »border thinking« from the »exteriority« of western modernity.

As J. Andrew Grant and Fredrik Söderbaum brilliantly argue in the introduction to the book they edited in 2003 – »The New Regionalism in Africa« – African traditional state-led regionalism is living a deep crisis as it is clearly shown by the depressing outcomes of regional programs such as the *Economic Community of West Africa States* (ECOWAS), the *Southern African Development Community* (SADC) and even the *African Union* (AU).³⁶ By contrast, informal processes of regionalization – the Authors precisely mention the illicit traffic in »blood« diamonds as well as in arms and other commodities involved in the illegal trade networks characterizing war zones in Africa – overpower state-led regional initiatives across the continent.³⁷ Drawing on these reflections, we cannot but agree with them that the development of informal networks challenges the reigning *doxa* of African boundaries »which tends to stress how these delineate and separate arbitrarily communities, without acknowledging that the very imposition of boundary lines also meant new »opportunities« for transactions«. ³⁸ This issue has been widely addressed by the Nigerian historian Anthony Asiwaju who edited with Paul Nugent a book eloquent-

note 1), Mignolo's position is not consistently articulated, as he appears to totter between opposing arguments without finding a satisfying answer. In particular, Mignolo's tendency to suggest that Occidentalism is still located in western Europe only confuses his position on this point. If you assert, indeed, that »Occident« is the overarching metaphor of the modern/colonial world imaginary, »you are somewhat asserting that »Occident« defines the interior while you are also presupposing that there is an exterior whatever that exterior may be«, see: W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (note 1), pp. 327–328.

35 W. D. Mignolo / M. V. Tlostanova, *Theorizing from the Borders* (note 6), p. 207.

36 A. Grant / F. Söderbaum (eds), *The New Regionalism in Africa*, Aldershot 2003.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

38 D. Bach, *New Regionalism as an Alias: Regionalization Through Trans-State Network*, in: A. Grant / F. Söderbaum (eds), *The New Regionalism in Africa*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 21–30.

ly titled »African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities«,³⁹ in which the attention is shifted from the widespread as well as banal consideration of the arbitrary and artificial nature of boundaries in Africa to their role as »motors« for new opportunities. These opportunities concern mainly the more informal processes of region building and stem from a set of pre-colonial networks that legitimate and favour the growth of trans-boundary linkages between African states.⁴⁰ Accordingly, these forms of informal trans-boundary regional processes cannot simply be considered as something in opposition to the existing boundaries. By contrast, they play an active role in preserving the formal boundary grid dividing up the African continent. Indeed, as Daniel C. Bach well points out:

*Trans-state regional lobbies share a strong interest in the preservation of good relations between neighboring states; but they have proved equally active in preventing the implementation of sub-regional programmes towards the liberalization of customs and tariff barriers since these would erode the rent-seeking opportunities associated with the preservation of barriers. Africa's so-called »failing-states« enhance and stimulate the »dark side« of regionalization.*⁴¹

From this perspective, what emerges is that the neat divide – defined for long by traditional regionalist approaches in Africa – between those we can call respectively »formal« actors and »informal« actors is a totally artificial rhetoric construction African as well as European political languages still depend on.⁴² This point has been highlighted by »the new regionalism approach« (acronym NRA) which, despite its big potentialities is still underestimated by both African and European political as well as economical debates. These potentialities are clearly enucleated in the mentioned book edited by Grant and Söderbaum⁴³ that collects texts by the most well-recognized academics and researchers reflecting on the topic and contributing to move towards the consideration of the importance of this new approach for a sustainable development of African regional initiatives. Based on this, it is argued that the main contemporary task for regionalist strategies in Africa would be to recognize at the formal level the existence of the informal level and move towards the elaboration of a new political economic language which would be able to fully consider how interwoven these two levels are.⁴⁴ In this way, in addition to states and regional elites, the people of the borderlands are recognized as playing an active role.⁴⁵

39 P. Nugent/A. Asiwaju (eds), *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, London 1996.

40 D. Bach, *New Regionalism* (note 39).

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

42 J.-F. Bayart/B. Hibou/S. Ellis, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, London 1999.

43 A. Grant/F. Söderbaum (eds), *The New Regionalism* (note 37).

44 D. Bach, *Regionalisation in Africa: Integration & Disintegration*, London 1999; A. Grant/F. Söderbaum (eds), *The New Regionalism* (note 37), pp. 4–5.

45 M. Baud/W. van Schendel, *Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands*, in: *Journal of World History*, 8 (1997) 2, pp. 211–242.

At this point in our discourse describing the developmental geometries impeding and enabling effective integration in West Africa's borderlands, we must assert that in its broad outlines the New Regionalist discourse does not diverge substantially from the Mignoloan perception of local cross-border actors as primary agents in the transformation of more abstract and »global« planning principles – in this case notably those of their respective states – into local »histories« emerging from putatively more authentic and democratic experiences of cross-border interaction. What we observe in this New Regionalist approach, however, is that it fails to indicate the ways in which so-called »local« transboundary actors mobilize a variety of discourses that are far from being merely localized affairs.⁴⁶ Indeed, we suggest that what distinguishes African cross-border developmental initiatives today from those of their 20th century socialist or pan-African predecessors⁴⁷ is the degree to which they grasp a certain view of Europe as a successful model of transfrontier regionalism, one from which we have much to learn regarding the risks of locating a putative postcolonial agency »outside« or »beyond« the geographical remit of the European Union today.

Towards »Euro-African Dialogue«? The WABI initiative and »border thinking«

In what follows we are interested in examining how a particular »idea of transboundary Europe« is mobilized and works its way through distinct geopolitical locations beyond the geographies of the EU project itself.⁴⁸ Towards this aim, we are keen to emphasize here the operative phrase »work through«, for we are convinced that, as with earlier rounds of European imperial boundary-making and marking, the geopolitical »idea of Europe« does not travel intact to distant locales but is selectively appropriated, translated, and re-grounded to suit more local constituencies and exigencies. The contradictions and dilemmas of such transpositions can be usefully illustrated by training critical attention on attempts at transborder regional integration carried out by the *West African Borders and Integration* project (WABI). This initiative started in 2003 with the purpose of developing a broad variety of local cross-border initiatives across West Africa. It was inaugurated by three founding members: a state organization – the Malian *Direction Nationale des Frontières* (DNF); an NGO – the Senegal-based *Enda/Diapol*; and an international organization – *Sahel and West Africa Club* (SWAC).⁴⁹

46 See also: A. Mbembe, *At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa*, in: *Public Culture*, 12 (2000) 1, pp. 259–284.

47 F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York 1969; A. Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, New York 1972.

48 J. Agnew, *How Many Europes? The European Union, Eastward Enlargement and Uneven Development*, in: *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 8 (2001) 1, pp. 29–38.

49 WABI was officially launched at a regional workshop held in Ouagadougou (2–3 July 2003), organized by the Direction Nationale des Frontières of Mali and the Sahel and West Africa Club (www.oecd.org/swac; accessed 30 August 2007) with the collaboration of the NGO Enda/Diapol (<http://www.endadiapol.org/>; accessed 30 August 2007). The main goals of the workshop were: 1) to share ideas on cross-border cooperation presented

The main ambition of WABI is to promote reflection on West African regional integration »as a combining process of juridical harmonizing (through community treaties) and reinforced cooperation between public and private actors«. ⁵⁰ Transboundary regional integration is perceived here as driven primarily by popular imagination, multilateral and bilateral state projects and decentralized cooperation. ⁵¹ Within such a perspective, WABI seeks to achieve poverty reduction at a regional level by reviving local cross-border economies, territorial planning and peace keeping. In so doing, regional integration is introduced back into official planning doctrines as actions and discussions of a cross-border cooperative nature. An important concept for WABI within this framework is the notion of »pays-frontière« (i. e. »border country«), one which – following the suggestion of Anthony Asiwaju ⁵² – favors a transboundary perspective in which the region straddling both sides of a state border is taken as the basic unit of analysis. ⁵³ This approach takes into account the paradoxical nature of borderlands: borders generate political, social and cultural distinctions, but they involve at the same time the presence of economic, social and cultural networks that cross them. ⁵⁴ In other words, it is worth considering the existence of a border just as a starting point from which to shift our attention to the social linkages that spread across that border, supporting a form of bottom-up regional integration.

Particularly interesting are the strategies that WABI adopts to promote information exchange and the sharing of experiences among all relevant actors regarding trans-border co-operation and regional integration. Indeed, the initiative is capable of constructing what we could call a »multi-narrative«, that is, a storyline composed of a number of different and interconnected discursive structures, producing a general frame of reference underlying arguments for cross-border co-operation and regionalization in West Africa. In this context, it is worth considering how the narrative on WABI's website mobilizes a variety of texts – working papers, maps, field reports, scientific articles and the review »Les Chroniques Frontalières« edited by the *Compagnie du Sénégal et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* – with the intention of proposing cross-border co-operation as the core element

by participating regional institutions, West-African governments and other organizations with regional interests; 2) to offer and discuss field experiences and ongoing cross-border initiatives; and 3) to define elements of a common West-African action program for cross-border cooperation in the service of regional integration and peace (L'initiative WABI: <http://www.afriquefrontieres.org/>; accessed 30 August 2007). What emerges from this is that West African States are not directly involved in the WABI initiative; only Mali is formally represented by a Government organization, the Direction Nationale des Frontières.

50 <http://www.afriquefrontieres.org/>; accessed 1 March 2007; see also WABI, Regional Workshop on Cross-Border Cooperation in West Africa: Summary Record. WABI Working Paper DT/03/03, Ouagadougou July 2–3 2003, pp. 1–61; WABI, Second Network Workshop: West African Borders and Integration: Summary Record. WABI Working Paper DT/26/05, Abuja October 27–29 2003, pp. 1–28.

51 Ibid.

52 A. Asiwaju, Borderlands in Africa: a Comparative Research Perspective with Particular Reference to Western Europe, in: *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 8 (1993) 2, pp. 1–12.

53 The concept of »pays-frontière« was first introduced during the seminar organized by Direction Nationale des Frontières (DNF) in Sikasso (Mali), 4–7 March 2002.

54 C. Brambilla, »Bordering, Ordering, Othering: L'invenzione della frontiera Angola/Namibia e l'identità Kwanyama, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bergamo 2007.

in promoting regional integration, development and peace. In sifting through the varied texts, what strikes the reader in particular are recurring references to the European experience of regional cross-border integration as an appropriate context for transborder co-operation in West Africa. WABI's homepage confidently states:

*We are convinced that cross-border cooperation can help. That is why the Sahel and West Africa Club, assisted by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), will in 2007 organize an Africa-Europe Conference, the main objectives of which are to mobilize the international community around a cross-border cooperation programme in West Africa, define the position of West Africa in EPA [Economic Partnership Agreements] implementation, reflect on financing and functioning mechanisms, and propose mechanisms of cooperation between European and West African regions.*⁵⁵

To strengthen the notion of the potential reciprocity of ideas and possibilities for what is presumed to be mutual learning between Europe and Africa,⁵⁶ in a working paper completed for WABI entitled «Coopération transfrontalière: vers un dialogue euro-africain»,⁵⁷ Karim Dahou, researcher for the Secretariat of the *Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)* outlines the necessity for West African governments to establish a «Euro-African Dialogue» with the European Union on transfrontier co-operation.⁵⁸

As a first observation, from our critical reading of Dahou's text we would characterize the scope and nature of this dialogue with a notion that might be labeled West Afri-

55 <http://www.afriquefrontieres.org/~homepage>; accessed 1 March 2007.

56 Although WABI is promoted as a West African initiative for cross-border cooperation and regionalization, in light of its proclaimed goal to «earn from Europe» it may be worth considering the role played by EU(ropean)-related institutions such as AEBR (Association of European Border Regions) and OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in the development of such a «West African network». The issue is crucial, indeed, to better comprehend the peculiar shape and direction taken by the Euro-African dialogue on transfrontier co-operation. This dialogue is not constructed on the basis of direct links between the aforementioned European institutions and the Governments of West African States, but is mediated by the activities of those actors who founded and support the WABI initiative. In particular, we make reference to the central role played by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) that is attached to the OECD and is among the founders of WABI as well. What is even more interesting from our viewpoint is that SWAC plays a bridging role between West African actors and OECD countries working in close collaboration with EU(ropean) institutions in the identification of strategic questions concerning the development of the West African region. Specifically regarding cross-border cooperation issues, the most important regional partner of SWAC in OECD member countries is AEBR, an organization described as an association that has closely followed the development of cross-border cooperation in West Africa over the past few years and has expressed a desire to encourage exchanges between European and African experiences. In this context, exchanges are largely based on adapting EU narratives of cross-border cooperation to «local» postcolonial West African settings. In this very process, development aid surely plays a relevant role as it can clearly be understood from the Sahel and West Africa Club's four areas of concentration: medium- and long-term development perspectives; rural transformation and sustainable development; local development and the process of regional integration; governance, conflict dynamics, peace and security. See: SWAC, How to Unlock Integration. Cross-Border Diaries, May 1 2005, pp. 1–30; SWAC, Security and Cross Border Co-operation. Cross-Border Diaries, February 3 2006, pp. 1–22; SWAC, Cross Border Networks. Cross Border Diaries, June 6 2007, pp. 1–53.

57 K. Dahou, Coopération transfrontalière: vers un dialogue euro-africain. WABI Working Paper DT/15/04, 2004, pp. 1–57.

58 See also: SWAC, How to Unlock Integration (note 57); SWAC, Security (note 57); SWAC, Cross-Border Networks (note 57).

can »Euro-optimism of the will«. For Dahou the history and experience of formalized transboundary co-operation is anchored firmly in the West, grounded in the »history of European construction whose goal is to transcend national sovereignties«. ⁵⁹ Drawing largely from documentation available through the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), notably the *Guide Pratique de la Coopération Transfrontalière Européenne*, the author asserts:

[I]t is true that the diversity of administrative systems and jurisdictions in Europe could have constituted an important obstacle [to transfrontier co-operation]; [these] obstacles [have been] overcome through the elaboration of variable and flexible dynamics of cross-border co-operation, extending from ad hoc collaborations to the establishment of permanent structures of associations built on either side of the border once transfrontier agreements based on private-law had been concluded. ⁶⁰

Relying on generic and unspecified cases of cross-border co-operation culled from the AEBR's *Guide Pratique* standing in for the complex, messy and often fraught attempts at EU transboundary rule has the effect of producing a utopic narrative of Europe, one which ignores the by now burgeoning academic literature from border scholars of the European Union documenting the significant and unresolved obstacles to effective economic, political and cultural transborder integration across the face of the continent. ⁶¹ By contrast, the WABI report seems to imply that the occasional road bumps towards effective European cross-border co-operation are more than compensated for by far-sighted, patient and judicious administrators steeped in the spirit of Jean Monnet and Alfred Schuman:

The founding fathers of Europe could not have imagined the role cross-border co-operation would play in the construction of Europe. The passing of time, on the contrary, has allowed the preparation of new candidate member states through an actively supportive policy of transboundary co-operation along all the eastern borders of the EU. Why not take advantage of this experience in order to accompany the transitions in which several regional blocs in different parts of the world are engaged? [...] If it is true that European transfrontier co-operation has allowed for the achievement of regional integration in the most difficult places of the sub-continent, why not discuss [these achievements] with another regional bloc, preoccupied with reducing its own social, economic and territorial

59 K. Dahou, *Coopération* (note 58), p. 7; trans. from French by authors.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 7; trans. from French by authors.

61 M. Perkmann, Building Governance Structures across European Borders, in: *Regional Studies*, 33 (1999) 7, pp. 657–667; A. Church/P. Reid, Cross-border Cooperation, Institutionalization and Political Space Across the English Channel, in: *Regional Studies*, 33 (1999) 7, pp. 643–655; M. van der Velde/M. and H. van Houtum (eds), *Borders, Border regions and People*, London 2000; M. Sparke, Chunnel Visions: Unpacking the Anticipatory Geographies of an Anglo-European Borderland, in: *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 15 (2000) 1, pp. 187–219; J. D. Sidaway, Rebuilding Bridges: a Critical Geopolitics of Iberian Transfrontier Cooperation in a European Context, in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19 (2001) 6, pp. 743–778; O. Kramsch/B. Hooper (eds), *Cross-border Governance* (note 18); J. Hakli, Governing the Mountains: Cross-border Regionalization in Catalonia, in: O. Kramsch/B. Hooper (eds), *Cross-border Governance in the European Union*, London 2004, pp. 54–69.

fractures? [Such a dialogue] would be all the more justified as the re-establishment, if not the creation of a continual link between the peoples and economies of West Africa appears to condition the integration of the region into a globalized world. In this context, the idea of a Euro-African dialogue on cross-border co-operation and regional integration would confirm this hypothesis on which the Cotonou⁶² accords are based.⁶³

In this rhetorical move, Europe's experience of transboundary integration is not only unproblematically characterized as an unqualified success, its achievement is further attributed to a »continual link between the peoples and economies« which defines a purportedly shared logic of integration operating in both sub-regional theaters. As a consequence, the very asymmetrical terms of trade between Europe and West Africa – we might say the »relational geographies« of Cotonou – that triggered the need for the Agreement in the first place, are pushed from sight. This point deserves further critical scrutiny, since it represents in our view a strategic blindness to a »colonial difference« whose legacy still structures the ongoing relationship between Europe and West Africa. By obscuring this difference, a selective abstraction of the actually-existing European Union is proposed and assimilated by state as well as regional and sub-national non-state actors in the wider context of West African regionalization.⁶⁴ The ground for this de-contextualizing maneuver, we suggest, is prepared and legitimized through a series of *equivalences* – cartographic, procedural, linguistic and temporal – which offer up the illusion of West Africa and the European Union as separate but ultimately homologous policy-making arenas.

1. The illusion of cartographic sameness

The WABI report suggests that West African states can benefit from a knowledge of the postwar experience of European transfrontier co-operation with the help of a set of maps which render the geopolitical space of West Africa essentially homologous with that of western Europe. According to this spatial imaginary, a printed map of the African

62 In June 2000, the European Union signed in Cotonou (Benin) a new Partnership Agreement with 77 African, Caribbean and Asian Pacific (ACP) countries. Lasting 20 years (2000–2020), it replaces all former Lomé Convention agreements (1975). The Cotonou Agreement entered into force in 2002 and is the latest agreement in the history of ACP-EU development co-operation. In short, the Agreement aims to set out a future framework of co-operation, trade and political dialogue between the European Union and ACP states, see: G. Forwood, The Road to Cotonou: Negotiating a Successor to Lomé, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 39 (2001) 3, pp. 423–442.

63 K. Dahou, *Coopération* (note 58), p. 9; trans. from Frech by authors.

64 We make reference here to the actors that are in different ways involved in the WABI initiative. However, it is worth considering also the case of another actor that officially is not part of WABI but assimilates the selective abstraction of the actually-existing European Union we are describing: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This is a regional organization of 15 West African countries formed in 1975 (i.e., Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo). In the past, the main objective of ECOWAS was to achieve economic integration and shared development so as to form a unified economic zone in West Africa. Presently, their scope of action also includes socio-political interaction and mutual development in related spheres (<http://www.ecowas.info/>; accessed August 30, 2007).

states visualizing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appears against the same grey color scheme as a printout of the original 15 states of the European Union presented by the author in the same report. Boundary lines are drawn to similar scale, and countries are similarly shaded depending upon the level of integration within their respective territorial communities (see Figures 1 and 2). In this way, Guinea is placed ingeniously on par with its ex-colonial ruler, Portugal; Ghana and Nigeria are cartographic equals with their former imperial master, Britain; and Mali shares more in common with Poland than with its Mauritanian neighbor. In so doing, we suggest WABI comes tantalizingly close to a form of cartographic imagery familiar to mid-20th century colonial school atlases, textbooks which linked disparate world-regions – Alentejo and Goa, Limburg and Aceh – in similarly provocative juxtapositions implying the coterminous imbrication of nation and overseas empire.⁶⁵

2. Similitude of procedural planning forms and scalar dynamics

The overall effect of these maps, we argue, is to produce an illusion of sameness between the EU and West Africa that spills over into the discourse of procedural initiatives and their attendant scales of intervention. This can be clearly illustrated by, for instance, an observation of the report that a general characteristic of European efforts at transfrontier co-operation is that they:

*[...] derive from punctual activities, private initiatives and the creation of networks. On this score, there is hardly any difference between Europe and Africa [...] In the domain of transports, European cross-border flows indicate the necessity [...] of complementing the well-developed North-South links, but to enhance the great East-West transport corridors as well; this being done initially by improving existing frontier points of passage. All things being equal, the situation of secondary cities of the Sudanese-Sahelian belt of West Africa is comparable enough. The transport infrastructures [there] represent a first stage which conditions the expansion of these cooperative domains between border regions.*⁶⁶

The telling phrase, »All things being equal«, does not even try to hide the remarkable developmental gaps in transport infrastructure between the North-South paired cities of Bruxelles-Paris, say, and Bamako-Abidjan. But such is the procedural and scalar optimism of the report that, once again, we are reminded of postcolonial parallels with mid-20th century figures such as Léopold Senghor, who at the time of decolonization attempted to persuade the French Assembly that Senegal, as a still vibrant *département* of the Republic, could still play as important a role as Alsace-Lorraine in agricultural production, notably wine.⁶⁷

65 O. Kramersch, Re-imagining the Scalar Topologies (note 6); C. Brambilla, Confini, cartografia e identità: l'esempio della frontiera coloniale tra Ghana e Togo, in: Bollettino della Associazione Italiana di Cartografia, (2005) 124/125, pp. 285–296; H. Cairo, »Portugal is not a Small Country« (note 4).

66 K. Dahou, Coopération (note 58), p. 7, 9; trans. from French by authors, emphasis added.

67 L. Senghor, On African Socialism, New York/London 1964.

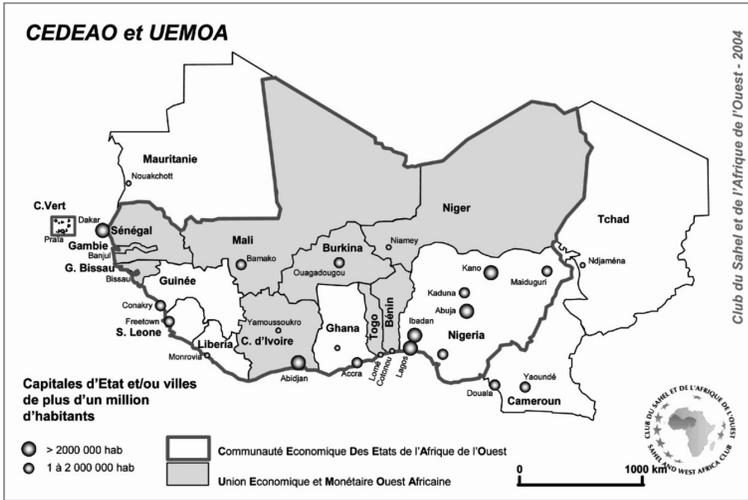


Figure 1: Map of West African CEDEAO and UEMOA (Source: K. Dahou, *Coopération transfrontalière: vers un dialogue euro-africain*, WABI Working Paper DT/15/04, 2004, p. 10).



Figure 2: Map of European Union (Source: K. Dahou, *Coopération transfrontalière: vers un dialogue euro-africain*, WABI Working Paper DT/15/04, 2004, p. 13).

3. A flattened temporal horizon (or escape from postcolonial history)

The WABI report is haunted in other ways by a denial of its colonial past. In its representation of the European experience of transboundary co-operation, the historically co-constitutive relationship between Europe's internal metropolitan and external colonial boundaries is entirely absent. Rather, Europe's experiment in cross-border governance is proposed as an entirely *sui generis* experiment, product of mid-20th century wartime trauma in which the fraught process of colonization, decolonization and (ongoing) subaltern dependency is occluded. Dahou writes:

Grasped at the community and intergovernmental level, the processes unfolding within the framework of the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA) and the Economic Community of West African States (CEDEAO) are not easily comparable [with those of the European Union]. But these important differences are largely justified by:

- *The historicity of West African states, who are obliged to affirm sovereignties that are relatively younger than those of European countries;*
- *The fact that West Africa has not been subject to a trauma such as WWII, [the latter] a strong impulse and no less forceful motor of European integration.*⁶⁸

The reasons why the »sovereignties« of West African states might be »younger« than those of their European counterparts, though patently clear to any historically knowledgeable observer of decolonization, are left conveniently outside the textual frame. And the quip that West Africa has not suffered the same traumas as Europe as a result of World War II simply beggars the reader's imagination given the history of West African nations' exploitation, enforced slavery and direct participation in both of Europe's 20th century world wars.

Making sense of »Euro-Africa Dialogue« from the shores of West Africa: »colonial difference« and »border thinking« as pluriversality

What emerges from the WABI narratives proposed in the foregoing is an absence of any geo-historical bonds linking Europe and Africa in a relation of exploitation, dependence and inequality. The presumed solidarities which exist on the European continent driving the EU integration project are abstracted, indeed, from these wider geopolitical relations of inequality, and embraced as a guiding template to be pursued in West Africa.

As a single-authored text, the WABI document certainly cannot claim to represent the views of all its participating member states.⁶⁹ We believe it nevertheless sheds crucial

68 K. Dahou, *Coopération* (note 58), p. 12; trans. from French by authors.

69 Apart from the WABI working paper by Karim Dahou there are a number of other WABI documents that support the analytical frame we are proposing. In particular, see: »Regional Workshop on Cross-Border Cooperation in West Africa. Summary Record«, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), 2–3 July, 2003, WABI Working Paper DT/03/03, pp. 21–28 and pp. 50–54; »Second Network Workshop: West African Borders and Integration. Summary Record«,

light on the inner workings of the wider organization, one that can be captured as a peculiar »unbearable lightness of being« which cannot be captured solely in terms of a universal and unidirectional projection of neoliberal norms and forms of governance from a putative center (Europe) to that of a passive periphery (West Africa). Such narratives, though often compelling, underplay the degree of inventiveness, ruse and *bricolage* on the part of postcolonial subjects in making selective use of experiential as well as conceptual resources provided by the West. Indeed, it might be more productive to grasp the particular »idea of transboundary Europe« being mobilized on the shores of the West African continent as one which exists as an open and provocative counterfactual to the actually-existing transboundary Europe we border scholars of Europe make our primary object of study.

This has important implications for the analysis of Euro-African dialogue. »Border thinking« changes our attitude in examining African border regimes in the current and future conjuncture of Euro-African cross-border relations. What thus becomes clear is that African states do not receive European models on transboundary cooperation passively, but are selectively re-working and re-narrating the European experience of cross-border cooperation in order to legitimate local needs and exigencies. These needs are thus not always de-territorializing in nature, but often imply the paradoxical re-territorialization of autocratic state structures. But in this vision the histories and geographies of African border regimes are not »merely local« affairs; since decolonization they have always been informed and criss-crossed by narratives originating outside the continent. Just as after decolonization African states had to develop models of national liberation from within state-centric structures and boundaries inherited from the major European colonial powers, so today they use the European cross-border framework to adapt their own transboundary development strategies. In so doing, the »idea of trans-boundary Europe«⁷⁰ is no longer confined to the space of the European Union, but is now informing regional integration projects in West Africa and around the world (MERCOSUR, ASEAN).⁷¹ But how can we make sense of these uncanny postcolonial »European« *outré-mers* sprouting before our eyes today from the perspective of Europe's enduring double-boundary

Abuja (Nigeria), 27–29 October, 2004, WABI Working Paper DT/26/05, pp. 15–20 and pp. 27–28. See also the Cross-Border Diaries' series that is produced with the editorial and financial support of the Sahel and West Africa Club and the contribution of various local partners of the WABI network. Within the series, see in particular: Issue 06, June 2007 »Cross Border Networks«; Issue 03, February 2006 »Security and Cross Border Co-operation«; Issue 01, May 2005 »How to Unlock Integration«.

70 J. Agnew, How Many Europes? (note 49).

71 Mercosur or Mercosul (Spanish: Mercado Común del Sur, Portuguese: Mercado Comum do Sul, English: Southern Common Market) is a customs union between Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela, founded in 1991 by the Treaty of Asunción, which was later amended and updated by the 1994 Treaty of Ouro Preto. Its purpose is to promote free trade and the free movement of goods, peoples, and currency [<http://www.mercosur.int/msweb/>; accessed 1 March 2007]. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic organization of countries located in Southeast Asia. ASEAN was formed on August 8, 1967 by the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, as a display of solidarity against Communist expansion in Vietnam and insurgency within their own borders. Following the Bali Summit of 1976, the organization embarked on a programme of economic cooperation, which floundered in the mid-1980s only to be revived around a 1991 Thai proposal for a regional »free trade area« (<http://www.aseansec.org/>; accessed 1 March 2007).

problematic, »colonial difference« and »border thinking« from the »exteriority« of the West? We might start by observing the fact that WABI still operates within an overarching set of colonial boundary constraints and imperial cognitive mappings established at the outset of 19th century European rule. These constraints are codified in sets of treaties and legal rules which continue to anchor West African states within a firmly bounded inter-national system, and associated political-economic logics. This continues to subordinate West African productive capacities to the imperatives of European as well as wider global markets despite arrangements such as Cotonou.⁷² However, what seems to emerge from the WABI document on »Euro-African dialogue« is a shift in the *epistemic effects* of such differentiating logics within the wider African postcolonial sphere.⁷³ Yet, the nature and direction of thinking at/from the borders of the modern/colonial world-system cannot so easily be mapped onto the revolutionary or progressive energies of mid- to late-20th century anti- and post-colonial movements, whose goal *was* to create a viable space outside capitalism. WABI, as we have seen, clearly holds no such pretensions, but precisely for this reason the political potential inherent in its vision of a trans-Mediterranean dialogue is no less interesting and urgent.

In astutely selecting and appropriating the decades-long experiment in European transboundary governance, WABI has made a Faustian bargain with the border communities of the West African sub-continent. As a part of this deal with the devil, West Africa »forgets« the recent postcolonial past in exchange for a brand new purchase on the present, free of the legacies which still informs West African transboundary relations. Since the abstraction »Europe« figures prominently in this move, we cannot agree with Mignolo that the terms »Eurocentrism« or »Occidentalism« can be reduced to that geopolitical reality called »western Europe«. In a merely geopolitical sense, we can therefore no longer affirm the existence of a pure »outside« or »exterior« from which to reflect on the modern/colonial world system in its current late capitalist expression. Indeed, if one of the defining features of the »exteriority« of »border thinking« is that it is produced through the tensions between »local histories« and »global designs«, such an epistemological perspective, we reason, could equally take place within the urban heartlands of Europe as well as its territorial peripheries. Thus, for us the key enabling condition for »border thinking« is as much epistemological as it is geopolitical, requiring a »thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies«.⁷⁴

Such a formulation requires us not only to ask the question »What is a border?« – the traditional anxiety of border studies, in both its modernist and so-called postmodern

72 S. Engel-Di Mauro (ed), *The European's Burden* (note 10).

73 We may still claim with Mignolo that »border thinking« arises as a response to epistemological frontiers set in place by the »theo- and ego-politics of knowledge« expelled to the outside by epistemic colonial differences. In his most recent work with Madina Tlostanova, Mignolo argues, indeed, for the need to shift to a »geo- and body-politics of knowledge«, see: W. D. Mignolo/M. V. Tlostanova, *Theorizing from the Borders* (note 6), p. 206. The former terms are territorial and imperial; they have shaped western imperial expansion for five centuries (ibid.). For Mignolo and Tlostanova the shift to a geo- and body-political epistemology is heralded as a »de-colonial« move (ibid., p. 210).

74 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (note 1), p. 85.

variants – but, more fundamentally now, »*What does it mean to be a border?*«.75 Following this pressing and still yet to be developed research frontier of border knowledge (a true *savoir frontalier*?), its conditions of emergence and modalities of expression, we invite the reader to consider our analysis of the WABI initiative and working paper as a form of »border thinking« in its own right. This is so because in the weave of our text we search for thinking from a space that undulates at the border of variously territorialized abstractions – »Europe«, the European Union, West Africa – without seeking to confer *a priori* epistemological priority to one or another configuration. In this sense, we share Mignolo's project to examine the »space of tension« between two histories and knowledges, »one that is global in design, the other forced to accommodate to such new realities«.76 However, we are equally attentive to the often unpredictable outcomes of such projections, showing that the degrees of freedom available on the postcolonial frontier to negotiate and recast Eurocentric legacies are always highly contingent affairs.

The type of »border thinking« we propose for European border scholarship has, then, affinities with W.E.B. du Bois' notion of »double consciousness«.77 In fact we believe this double consciousness lies at the very foundation of »border thinking«: It is a kind of »double vision« that allows us to grasp the plural ideas of Europe being constructed around the European Union project, and emerges from the fate of being classified by the national-imperial gaze. But moving away from the context for du Bois' thinking articulated by the archetypical American duality of Black / White relations, we suggest that in thinking through the fundamental problem of coherence / diversity characterizing the European Union project today in relation to its non-European outsiders, a more appropriate metaphor might be one which breaks away from the idea of »social totality« and embraces rather the idea of networks whose articulation will require other epistemological principles, »another logic«, *une pensée autre*. In such a manner, the world, and Europe's role in it, is reconceived as »pluriversal«:

A world in which many worlds will co-exist cannot be imagined and predicated on the basis of the »good abstract universal valid for all« but, instead, on pluri-versality as a universal project. Critical border thinking and the de-colonial shift are on the road toward that possible future.

Accordingly, to fully come to terms with transboundary Europe through a West African looking glass, we need to reconceive »border thinking« as a »pluriversality« of Europes under construction around the EU project. By framing a key configuration of »border thinking« as pluriversality, we conceptualize the world as »pluri-versal«, overcoming the »fragility« of Mignolo's geographical imagination(s) and moving towards a re-conceptualization of »border thinking« aimed at considering the complex and mobile locations of epistemological »exteriority«. This is to view Europe not as a western project but as a

75 See also: C. Rumford, *Theorizing borders*, in: *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2006) 9, pp. 155–169.

76 W. D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs* (note 1), p. 17.

77 W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York 1995 (first published 1903); see also: P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge 1993.

necessarily global one. If we can still refer to the »meaning of Europe« without blushing, it would then be as a maximally open set of postcolonial future(s) whose ultimate shape we cannot yet imagine. In sum, we are dealing with the endless generosity of the world. In moving from »universality« to »pluriversality« we should not fear it. Let us embrace this »other chance«.

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