**Fluid Networks and Hegemonic Powers in the Western Indian Ocean**

(Papers from 2nd International Thematic Conference on Africa and the Indian Ocean ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon, 9-10 April 2015)

*Introduction*

The Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, with its extensive trade and circulation networks, has been characterized as one of the major “inter-regional arenas” within broader studies of processes of globalisation. These seafaring networks are some of the oldest in the world, and through the centuries persistent and resilient forms of transnational and transcultural communication have developed in the regions touched by it, interlinking the Horn of Africa, the African Indian Ocean islands and Eastern and Southern Africa to the Arabian Peninsula, the western parts of the Indian subcontinent and even meaningful parts of the Southern and Eastern Asian regions. It is also a particularly sensitive area in security terms, presently harbouring major naval and aerial surveillance capabilities of both intra- and extra-regional military and economic powers.

The western Indian Ocean has thus been both a fluid space of intense exchanges between various local communities and a much-coveted setting for successive projects of hegemonic appropriations of human and material resources. The substantial flow of goods and people across it has, from time immemorial, attracted predatory and clandestine activities, which are today the pretext for maintaining an impressive security presence by member countries of NATO and for a display of military-naval affirmation of emerging powers such as India and China.

A comprehensive understanding of the conditions and implications of this multiple presence requires a multidisciplinary effort that has to take into account the underlying, and generally silent, reality of the existence of family-based networks (African, Arab, Indian, Armenian, Iranian and South-east Asian) who, assuming an ancient heritage, have ensured the continuation of flows between the different countries connected by the Western Indian Ocean by resiliently adapting themselves to ever-changing balances of power, to the impositions of external interveners and to the bargaining vectors of local and regional predators.

The present book sets forth to analyse illustrative aspects of the deep-rooted immersion of the populations of the eastern coasts of Africa in the vast network of commercial, cultural and religious interactions that extend to the Middle-East and the Indian subcontinent, as well as the long-time involvement of various exogenous military, administrative and economic powers (Ottoman, Omani, Portuguese, Dutch, British, French and, more recently, European-Americans).

On the side-lines of an inward-looking vision of Africa shared by most African Union countries, which have only recently begun to develop a fledgling security policy and a strategy of development of the African coastline, various agents from East African countries have sought to manage and develop existing networks in a transnational logic supported by historical ties that come from the old triangular trade facilitated by the monsoon regime, linking these coastal regions to the Arabian Peninsula and South-east Asia.

The present book is an offshoot of the Second International Thematic Conference on Africa and the Indian Ocean, which took place in Lisbon, at ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon, on April, 9th-10th April 2015, convened by the Centre of International Studies, and organized by Iain Walker (Max Plank Institute), Manuel João Ramos (CEI-IUL), and Preben Kaarlshom (Roskilde University).

* Mention the CRG’s past and future activities

In her chapter, “The Coast of Sofala (Mozambique) in the 16th Century: Between the African trade routes and the Indian Ocean trade”, Ana Roque addresses the local and regional impact of the establishment of the Portuguese in Sofala (Mozambique) in the 16th century. Using the existent archival documentary sources on Sofala coast it is intended to underline the specificity of the interaction between the Portuguese and the local communities, the importance of the “non-official” strategies adopted by the Portuguese in order to be accepted by the local chieftaincies, the impact of their integration in the local and regional networks and how their attitude framed new geographies of power in the area, exposing political, economic, social, cultural and religious dichotomies. Focusing our attention on these aspects we expect to bring new contributions to the analysis of Sofala region during the 16th century in order to better understand its role in the African-Indian Ocean trading networks under the Portuguese empire, mostly based in an informal economic and political control and thus pretty close to the concept of "shadow empire".

Rafael Thiebaut (IMAF – University of Paris I), “The Role of “Brokers” in Securing the Dutch Slave Trade on Madagascar during the Eighteenth Century”

The European slave trade on Madagascar during the eighteenth century was the theater of an important clash of cultures where Malagasy brokers played an important role in guiding the commercial exchanges between the two parties. In this unpredictable environment, Dutch merchants and Malagasy sovereigns both relied on these intermediaries who did not only served as interpreters, but also as mediators in numerous conflicts that might exist during their stay. Over the years their position, though strongly linked with the political power of the Sakalava sovereign, proofed to be one of independence and personal benefit, while trying to satisfy both parties.

Elena Brugioni (University of Campinas – Unicamp), ““Behind so many names, the sea”. Mozambique and the Indian Ocean”

This chapter aims to propose a discussion, based on a critical intersection between Indian Ocean Studies and Cultural and Literary Studies within Portuguese-speaking contexts, by addressing the Indian Ocean as a critical framework to read literary and visual narratives from Mozambique. Its objective is to put forward a counterpoint between literary and visual representations and thereby address the Indian Ocean as an aesthetic and epistemological paradigm in order to (re)situate the Mozambican cultural imaginary, and thus, contribute to “new disciplinary developments” (Pearson, 2011) within the field of Indian Ocean Studies.

Daria Trentini (…….), “Spirit possession, history and belonging in Nampula city, northern Mozambique”

This article offers insights into how spirit possession (Majini) sheds light on local history and identity of Nampula city, northern Mozambique. Similar to other cases of spirit possession in East Africa, the local spirit world in Nampula is divided into two key dimensions: one comprises the Muslim spirits from the coast (Majini Maka), and the other the spirits from the mainland (Majini Makhuwa). Generally, studies about spirit representations and experiences in East Africa tend to present historical processes in the light of Islamic and coastal (Swahili) hegemony, within which African (mainland) spirits are depicted as marginal and inferior to those from the coast. The case of Nampula differs, however, from this regional trend for between an inland city, located geographically between the world of the coast and the world of the mainland. Given this geography, sprit possession frames a narrative which one the on hand reaffirms the centrality of Makhuwa “Traditionalism” and, on the other, “contains” Islam by revitalizing older strands, which in contrast to prevailing hegemonic discourses (Sufis and Reformist), became deeply entangled with the traditional cultures of the inland through rituals and healing practices. In the second part of the article, I discuss the use of this historical narrative in everyday Nampula. I show how a number of migrants (coming from the interior) drew on this discourse to reflect and re-define their identity according to new urban context during and after the civil war.

Manuel João Ramos (CEI-IUL), “‘Sponsorshiped’: Reflections on female temporary migration from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf and Lebanon”

Female migratory flows from the Horn of Africa are mainly directed to Arabic countries and tend to take the form of legal temporary migration. As their Asian counterparts, these girls and women are subject to various degrees of trafficking and even enslavement, working mainly as in-house maids in affluent Arab households, where tend to be denied free and fair labour rights, under a harsh interpretation of the *kafala*, or "sponsorship" system, prevalent in Arabic countries. Although there are signs of improved legal protection in accord with international labour rules, the system in place, and the culture that supports it, imposes a tense situation where maids are subject to a reality of everyday “structural violence” and employers have to bear an unwonted responsibility. The psychological, social and economic costs of this migration are well documented but there's still a lack of understanding of the trends of female agency that emerges as direct reflection from the hardships of such forms of migration. The chapter reflects on the ways this situation is understood and managed in the hosting countries.

Aleksi Ylönen (CEI-IUL), “Confronting the “Arab North”: Interpretations of Slavery and Religion in Southern Sudanese Separatist Resistance”

For centuries, the greater Horn of Africa has been exposed to actors and influences crossing the Red Sea and navigating the Indian Ocean. The extension of these forces has had a profound effect in shaping contemporary societies and states in the sub-region over time. Contemporary Sudan is a fascinating example on how the extension of Islam and the elites-led emphasis on Arab identity has led to a society embracing Arab and Muslim culture. These characteristics in the territories that became the heartland of the contemporary Sudanese state translated into the formation of nationalist governing elite promoting a particular form of Arab culture and interpretation of Islam as the main pillars of national identity for the Sudan as a whole. However, the vast territories of contemporary Sudan are culturally highly heterogeneous. This contrasts starkly with the northern political elite’ s nation- and statebuilding project since decolonization, seeking to homogenize society through forced cultural assimilation. Since Sudan’ s independence, the state elite imposing Arab culture and Islam has led to varying degrees of direct confrontation with groups that oppose such forced cultural and religious transformation. As part of the Sudanese state until 2011, southern Sudan experienced protracted war and political violence from decolonization onwards. In order to understand the causes of intractable armed conflict in southern Sudan, it is important to recognize the local perceptions and interpretations on the legacy of slavery and forced cultural assimilation imposed through state project of extending Islam and Arab culture. In this context, scholars have pointed to the importance of the role of slavery as means of subjugation and marginalization, but religion has been generally dismissed as a factor motivating rebellion. Yet, closer examination reveals that the overall situation during the wars was complex and changing, and that interpretations of the legacy of slavery and religion were often used to justify armed opposition against the “Arab north”. This chapter reflects on the role of interpretations of slavery and religion in armed opposition and its aftermath in southern Sudan. It points to the use of particular views of slavery and religion in the two main insurgencies in 1955-1972 and 1983-2005, and reflects on their representations in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005). The chapter argues that these interpretations are related to the Orientalist image of Sudan that connects with the aspirations of southern Sudan’ s self-determination, independence, and drift towards East African socio-cultural and Indian Ocean economic space.

Denis Venter (University of Johannesburg), “India and Africa: Maritime Security and India’ s Strategic Interests in the Western Indian Ocean”

In the 2010s, in conjunction with an expansion of India’ s naval capabilities, there has been a significant extension of India’ s maritime security relationships throughout the Indian Ocean region. Much of the emphasis has been in developing relationships with small states (Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Oman) at, or near, the key points of entry into the Western Indian Ocean. Arguably, the extreme asymmetries in size have made the development of such relationships relatively easy: there is no question of competition or rivalry. Some of these states have long seen India as a benign security provider and have maritime policing needs that India can usefully fulfil. In some cases, India may effectively act as a security guarantor, as is arguably the case with Mauritius and the Maldives. But gaps inevitably remain in India’ s strategic posture and New Delhi needs to strengthen further its hand in coastal Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula. Also, littoral states on the African seaboard look towards regional power centres for assistance in maintaining maritime order and addressing security challenges. Countries with enhanced maritime capabilities like India, South Africa, Australia, and the US could assist by not only co-operating amongst themselves, but also by taking other littoral states on board as part of multilateral efforts towards the maintenance of maritime order. A challenge for New Delhi is to maintain perceptions of India as a benign and non-hegemonic power in the Indian Ocean region as it moves towards achieving great power status.

Megna Singh (University of Cape Town), “A Notice to Motion: Exploring states of stillness through the event of waiting on the arrested vessel WBI Trinity at the port of Cape Town”

The chapter focuses on the notion of suspended mobility or ‘arrest’ within the maritime world and the effect this has on lives of men who are caught within this space. It illustrates the overlapping complexities of maritime law intertwined with the economy and movement of international labour. It does this by presenting the case of WBI Trinity, a supply ship, arrested to foreclose a mortgage, at the port of Cape Town, during its voyage from Nigeria to Dubai. Focusing on a ‘dialectic of stasis and movement’ (Bissell and Fuller) and using moments of waiting and bodily stillness as a trope, the research questions the valorization of flows of trade, which dominate the global cultural discourse today.