Session Abstract: “Migration and Mobility: Africans in the Context of Diasporas in Europe and Elsewhere”

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Mobility and migration have become central issues for contemporary societies worldwide. In particular the number of African migrants has increased drastically in the last decades. African immigration to Europe (as well as in many areas in Africa) is often perceived as a danger to the stability of local societies. But contributions to this panel should step beyond these articulations of populist (and sometimes xenophobic) politics. Migrants possess a quite different perception of their own mobility and of their status abroad. It is not sufficient to look at migration only in terms of their potential impact on the established social structures in the host societies. We rather need an approach that takes into account the self-perception of migrants. Understanding migration from the migrants’ point of view requires a closer investigation into the identities of migrants and the cultural contexts which they inhabit and construct. Migrants often create diasporic communities in European cities and they maintain strong links to their respective societies of origin. Migrant identities may also give rise to distinct “cultures,” that differ from that of their societies of origin as well as from the cultures of host societies. The concept of transnationalism has been used to describe the fields of activities of migrants connecting their original homelands and host societies. But identities of migrants abroad go beyond these “fields of action.” They also must be understood in terms of changing social structures, diverse regional histories, and varying conditions for political engagement across boundaries.

The papers of this panel will focus on the social identities of African Diasporas in Europe and in Africa – as well as with the expectations of future migrants and experiences of Africans returning from Europe.