

Ekaterina Golovko

Re-imagining Sahelian political space, a postcolonial perspective

Abstract: Sahelian borderlands and in particular the Liptako-Gourma region, a tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, in the last years have been the epicenter of violence and increasing militarization. This attracted much of academic, non-academic and journalistic attention. Liptako-Gourma is often described as a ‘peripheral and remote area’ are very often used to characterize the specificity of this territory. Instead, in this paper I would like to propose to re-imagine the Sahel as physical and conceptual space. I suggest to look at Liptako-Gourma as a center of ongoing political and social processes and transformations.

One of the practices widely involved in the securitization of the area, control of migration and transnational threats is border management, performed by panoply of actors, besides national authorities. Complex networks of these players include NGOs, military, security forces, local populations, criminals, smugglers and insurgents of different type. Border management practices, interplay of numerous actors, emerging conflicts and tensions are also relevant for the understanding of some existing patterns of the Sahelian statehood, power relations and new emerging forms of territorial legitimacy.

To analyze and re-imagine this space through a postcolonial lens I use Homi Bhabha's ‘hybridity’ and ‘mimicry’. Putting together political analysis and postcolonial theory could open up new avenues for transdisciplinary discussions on state, sovereignty and conflicts in the Sahel.

Keywords: Sahel; border management; postcolonial African state; hybridity; sovereignty; Liptako-Gourma

BIO: Ekaterina Golovko is an independent consultant and researcher working on migration and security in West Africa. She has previously worked for ISS Dakar, MMC West Africa, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, IFRC Sahel Cluster and other organizations. She has authored among others a research paper “[Navigating borderlands in the Sahel Border security governance and mixed migration in Liptako-Gourma](#)” (jointly with Luca Raineri) and a briefing paper “[Players of many parts: The evolving role of smugglers in West Africa’s migration economy](#)”.

I. Introduction.

On a gloomy February morning in 2019, I was heading to the Border Police office in Ouagadougou, accompanied by a colleague. I was supposed to interview a high-ranking police official, who was also a partner in the program my colleague was working on, for a research project on border security and management. Accessing the police station was easy: an open gate allowed a glimpse onto a calm courtyard. When we finally found our way to the office, it was clear that the appointment was scheduled on the officer’s agenda, his secretary was well aware of it and other members of his team were joining to assist. They were writing down both my questions and some of the answers of my interlocutor. During the meeting the atmosphere was quite tense also because a white woman was

asking questions to policemen who were rightly at the same time questioning my legitimacy to do so.

We discussed so-called ‘technical’ issues related to border management as well as the overall security situation, organized crime, and the terrorist threat impacting border areas of Burkina Faso. At some point, I asked the officer to identify the actors, besides the state, contributing to the securitization of the borders. His answer was firm: ‘There are none, Madame. You know that borders are a sovereign prerogative and it is the state that assures border securitization. No one else can do this aside from the Burkinabé state.’ The officer’s Westphalian idea of a nation-state left me wondering to what extent it corresponded with the Sahelian reality. These words spurred my curiosity towards specific practices of border management. The notion of a sovereign state with rigid borders was at odds with what I understood about the Sahelian context in general, and border management specifically, from both a political and technical perspective.

This text starts from Liptako-Gourma, a three-border area between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso where these specific border management initiatives are located. An analysis of two border management practices (capacity-building and creation of border surveillance committees) allows to situate them within Liptako-Gourma and within the postcolonial power regime. I use the ‘boundaries’ and ‘hybridity’ to connect the dots between Liptako-Gourma, border management programs, and the global power regime. The concepts of ‘hybridity’ and ‘boundary’ are in a symbolic and dialogic relationship with one another, ‘boundary’ being the metaphorical opposition of ‘hybridity’, showing that a small border post somewhere between Niger and Burkina Faso is an inextricable part of postcolonial modernity and its political order.¹ The main question I would like to address in this essay is: *How does the analysis of specific practices of border management contribute to our critical re-imagining of the Sahel?*

II. Re-imagining Liptako-Gourma as an epicentre of political processes²

My conversation with the Burkinabé border police officer, as well as the concept of border management needs to be located within the specific context of Liptako-Gourma, –an epicentre of violence and military operations that has attracted massive media attention in recent years. It includes Liptako, an area covering the Burkina Faso-Niger border where the Peul kingdom of Liptako was established in the nineteenth century, and

¹ See Annex I for a more detailed description of ‘hybridity’ and ‘boundaries’

² See Annex II for a description of multiplicity of actors in Liptako-Gourma.

Gourma designating the area along the right bank of the Niger River Loop in Mali. The core of Liptako-Gourma consists of the administrative regions of Ségou, Mopti, Tombouctou, Gao and Ménaka in Mali, Sahel in Burkina Faso, and Tillabéri in Niger. The name of the region was institutionalized with the creation of the *Autorité de développement intégré des Etats du Liptako-Gourma* (ALG) in Ouagadougou, in December 1970, focused on joint development and resource exploitation.³

While the co-existence of different actors may go from mutual ignoring to overt challenging of the sovereignty (ISWAP and JNIM), the multiple constellation of political networks that convey power in the borderlands are engaging in sovereign practices themselves (Korf and Raeymaekers, 2013, 20).⁴ The specific case of the limited state presence and the complexity of the situation that involves multiple actors contributing to the current security situation have brought some scholars to define it as ‘hybrid security order’ (Raineri & Strazzari, 2019 among others). Its main feature is that ‘the state does not have a privileged position as the political framework that provides security, welfare and representation’ (Boege, Brown, Clements, & Nolan, 2008, 10 in Strazzari and Raineri, 2019, 10-11). The power vacuum is filled by a variety of players who contribute to the emergence of different forms of territorial legitimacy and to the constant evolution of this hybrid political and security order. Thus, this so-called ‘remote’ area is actually an epicentre of negotiation of Sahelian power dynamics, the site of expression of existing tensions and political negotiations between ‘worlds’ metaphorically situated on the boundaries passing through Liptako-Gourma.

³ Since November 2011, ALG’s competencies have extended to cover the entire territories of the three countries.

⁴ For the specific case of the Labbezanga border post see Annex III.



Image 1. Souleymane Ag Anara. Courtesy of the photographer.

Thus, rather than describing Liptako-Gourma as a remote zone, it seems more productive to conceptualize it as a borderland, a space defined by the presence of physical and metaphorical boundaries that embody different fluid and intersecting forms of power negotiation among multiple actors. This conceives of borderlands also as spaces of multiple sovereignties, i.e. spaces where different power holders struggle over control and allegiance of scattered populations with far-reaching effects not only on the local level but also on national centres (Frowd, 2018, 64; Korf and Raeymaekers, 2013, 7). In a more abstract sense, Liptako-Gourma can be seen as a space of negotiation and change where borders assume metaphorical significance, embodying ideological boundaries of the postcolonial context, centres of power, ‘universal’ and ‘local’ ideas of statehood. In this case, the border is a starting point for the observation of processes at multiple scales—local, national and transnational—in contrast to the idea of a peripheral or remote space. The boundary signals encounters of (post)colonial legacies, international postcolonial and violent extremism as a violent form of opposition to the existing postcolonial regime, multiple political ideas and political sources, fluid forms of power, etc. This metaphoric interpretation of boundaries passing through Liptako-Gourma makes it a place of

liminality, translation and construction of new political object(s), ‘a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction’, defined by Bhabha as Third Space (Bhabha, 1994, 994, 37–38). Liptako-Gourma thus can be an example of new imagined geographies of power and state formations, all defined by boundaries and hybridity of political and security regimes.

III. Border management as practice

My question to the Burkinabé border official was not accidental. I was aware of numerous projects related to border management in Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Mauritania carried out by a panoply of external actors. The ongoing interventions are framed within a larger migration governance approach and are justified by donors such as the EU as a response to growing insecurity in the Sahel, the serious impact that ‘irregular’ migration has had on European political environments, and by the incapacity of the Sahelian states to control their borders. For these reasons, a greater control over the borders and an increased capacity of state officials to control them constitutes the core task of border management, while military operations address security threats such as non-state and jihadist armed groups. Border management has the containment prerogative, i.e. stopping transnational threats from spreading to neighbouring countries and to Europe, which explains the strong attention to border management on the part of EU partners (Andersson, 2019).

What is border management?

Border management comprises a set of interventions that envision improving the capacities of border officials, physical infrastructures and enhancing communication between different levels of beneficiaries. IOM defines its Integrated Border Management (IBM) program as a practice that assesses and enhances border management mechanisms: strengthening operational and strategic capacities to foster stronger connections between migration control and law enforcement systems among Sahelian states.⁵ In practice, this includes activities ranging from the purchasing and sharing of material support to the

⁵<https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/mauritania/IOM-Mauritania-Enhancing-Security-in-the-Sahel-Jan-2016.pdf>.

maintenance and monitoring of physical and technological infrastructures of the border as well as engagement and joint project implementation among a variety of border professionals, including security forces, migration specialists, humanitarian workers, and officers from international organizations (Raineri & Strazzari, 2019, 6). Therefore, border control becomes a set of existing practices applied to the control and management of borders by a growing number of personnel working in this area, as well as an area of expertise (Frowd, 2018; Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010).

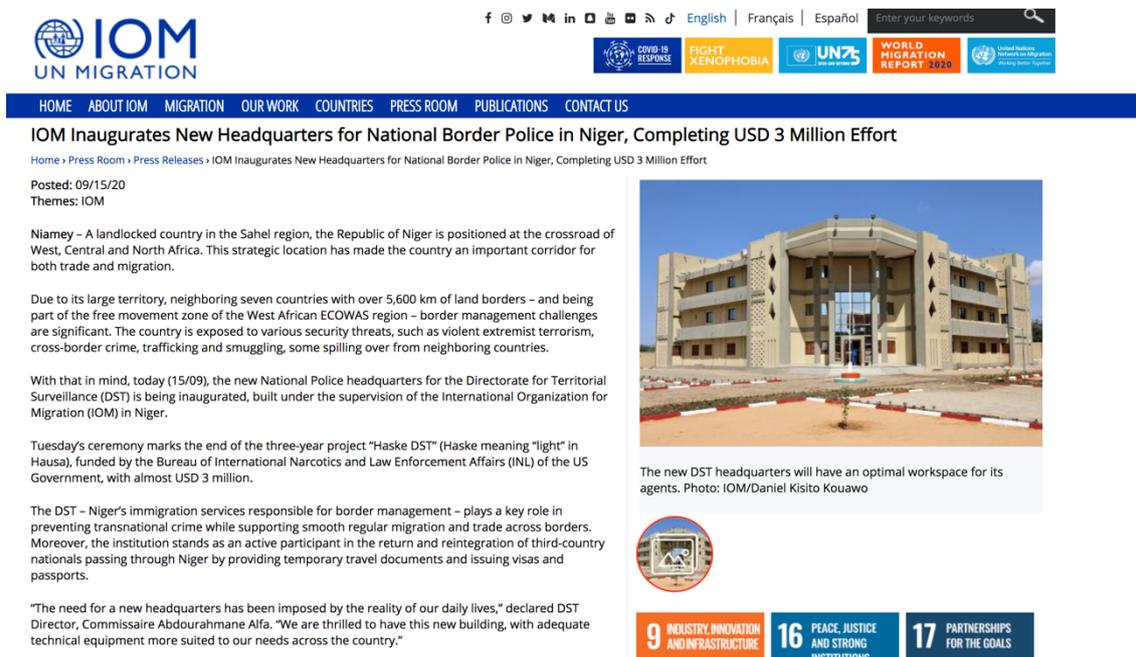


Image 2. New Headquarters for National Border Police in Niger, screenshot from the IOM website.

Border management is depicted as a set of technical norms, standards and regulations, where implementing actors have more of a managerial expertise than a political role. Thus, discursive separation between the political and the technical displaces border control to a conceptually-hybrid area of technical expertise on a political and sovereign domain. In fact, as reflected by the various projects currently implemented in Niger, aspects of infrastructure, techniques, training and efficiency of personnel take precedence over a discourse that would highlight the political and civic dimensions of the border (Boyer, 2018, pp. 174-175). This approach crucially depoliticizes the question of national security and the capacity of the state to control and protect its own borders, framing them as indicators or activities to be evaluated. Finally, borders require managers and managerial expertise, hence, there is an on-going shift in the nature of authority that

defines the way borders are governed. Arguably, this manner of governing borders is not coherent with what was described by the Burkinabé officer I initially interviewed.

Capacity-building

In the Sahel, state and border authorities are often considered as not meeting international standards in terms of adequate training, equipment and remuneration. This is believed to be an additional cause for poor border management. For this reason, increasing the capacity of border officials is considered crucial, inclusive of trainings that seek to increase the knowledge, abilities, skills, resources, structures, and processes of relevant government authorities or non-governmental actors with direct forms of collaboration, such as joint patrols and surveillance (Bergmann et al., 2017, 8). The format of these trainings is presented as knowledge sharing and best practices in accordance with partnership framing, the definition of needs, priorities and types of interventions proposed and shaped by the external partners as a sort of help to improve the domestic situation (Andrihasevic and Walters, 989).

Through these cooperation initiatives,⁶ a plethora of actors provide remedial intervention to assure the capacity of states to perform their sovereign duties. As a consequence, numerous conceptual problems originate from this technical approach to border management. On the one hand, it evacuates the problem of the nature of the state and how the state should be organized, how it should operate, depriving the governments of their own agency and ability to question existing norms. On the other, it raises the question of the roles that external actors play, increasing the capacities of beneficiary-states. The aim of capacity building clashes with the means that are used: donors and partner states help beneficiary states reinforce their sovereignty, but at the same time, they bring in their agendas as well as values and norms (often defined as universal or shared).

This inconsistency can be explained by the essential characteristic of capacity building as the understanding of a temporal or developmental gap between interveners and assisted states, meaning that each state, after undertaking some steps, can/should reach the existing model of Westphalian statehood. The ‘temporal’ and ‘developmental’ distance between donors and recipient states justifies Western donor guidance of their African partners. The process of movement towards Westphalian statehood is nothing else than a

⁶ For a description of capacity building initiatives in the Sahel see Annex IV.

process of *mimicking* a Westphalian state.⁷ Looking at capacity building as a form of mimicry, it becomes clear that this is a major form of control of domestic policies by external actors. At the same time, Western states have minimal if any responsibility for the success of proposed programs. Capacity building tied to development aid and debt relief has become a ‘relationship of government: a set of technologies having the power to reorder the relationship between people and things to achieve desired aims’ (Duffield, 2003, 292) or at least experimenting with them (Venturi, 2017).

Border surveillance committees

Currently in Liptako-Gourma, border populations have a privileged position in their knowledge of border areas and local conflicts at the micro-level. Due to expanding insecurity and limited access and capacities of security forces to control the borders, border populations are frequently included in border management portfolios.⁸ Border communities are involved in establishing dialogue with security forces and are also supposed to participate in border surveillance and information sharing with security forces. Local communities are expected to organize security watches and report any suspicious movements to the security forces (Boas et al., 2018, 22). These projects, often carried out by non-governmental organizations, see border communities not exclusively as beneficiaries but also as actors involved in border surveillance activities. In order to do so, members of border monitoring committees are provided with mobile phones to warn the authorities of cases they could define as ‘suspicious movements’ (Boyer, 2018, 175). These committees are imagined to surveil the border with the aim of informing ‘authorities’ or security forces and thus shifting the burden from those entitled to do so (but apparently incapable) onto those who should be protected. The implementation of these activities is exacerbated by a well-acknowledged reluctance of border communities to collaborate with security forces and authorities, both out of mistrust to security forces but also out of fear of revenge by non-state armed actors. Local communities may reportedly collaborate with Islamic State affiliates to provide intelligence on the movements and strategies of the state and its proxies (Crisis Group, 2020, 6). For instance, very often the cell phones distributed to inform security forces remain silent.⁹ Building

⁷ For a more detailed discussion of ‘mimicry’ see Annex V.

⁸ For example, in IOM’s IBM program that introduced ‘community border monitoring committees’.

⁹ Interview with a security expert, Ouagadougou, 2019. Similar information can be found in the Crisis Group report: ‘When Abou Walid’s men come through our area, we do not alert security forces for two

trust between communities and the ‘state’ turns out to be a much more complicated task than just the provision of goods or development assistance.¹⁰

This turn in the control techniques actually corresponds to what Achille Mbembe discusses in the paper ‘Bodies and Borders’ (2019). Mbembe talks about the transformation of borders from a clear-cut boundary into a division between civilians and security forces or a particular point in space into a moving body of the undesired masses of population, into a *hybrid construction of power*. Using the perspective of border monitoring committees, borders can be framed as bodies; bodies that surveil and bodies that move. This transformation of the border impacts, thus, not only the policing principles used by the states but also intends to create a divide among border dwellers. What arises from this process is a hybrid security order where the state delegates its duties to civilians and non-state actors while still trying to demonstrate its symbolic presence at the borders. In this modality the state is actually left out of an ever-changing construction of power relations where non-state actors interact directly with the populations, trying to bridge the gap with the state. Border monitoring committees seen from this perspective represent an example of the creation of local hybrid security and political orders, the blurring of boundaries between security forces, state authorities and population. Such mechanisms illustrate the way different actors, operating from below (civil society organizations and NGOs) and from above (IOs), take advantage of the hybrid Sahelian context.

IV. Border management’s repercussions on the political space in the Sahel

The term ‘transnational governmentality’ represents relations between ‘states and a range of contemporary supranational and transnational organizations that significantly overlap their traditional functions, i.e. the complex inter-linkage between domestic and external actors leading to the so-called de-statisation, (Ferguson and Gupta, 989) or retreat of the state, but also the transfer of operations of government to non-state entities. This can be related to the autonomisation of entities of government from the state and empowerment of non-state actors such as NGOs etc. The creation of local border surveillance committees and capacity building are examples of networked and capillary power dispersed through the social body in Liptako-Gourma. For example, the merging of local

reasons,’ a tribal chief from the border area said. ‘First, we think the army will not act. Second, we are afraid. Those bandits will kill us if they find out we ratted on them,’ (2020, 6).

¹⁰ Interview with an expert on civil-military cooperation, Bamako, 2019.

and international and also the hybridization of different categories that are often used as the basis for analysis, as in the case of capacity building and the creation of border surveillance communities within border management programs. This analysis depicts global governance as a complex of schemes which govern through the elicitation of state agency and the regulated enhancement and deployment of state capacity (Andrijasevic and Walters, 1980). The complexity of the situation in Liptako-Gourma is found by blurring the boundaries between standard dichotomies ‘international’ and ‘local,’ ‘state’ and ‘non-state’– giving rise to hybrid categories and unintended outcomes characteristic of postcolonial African settings and African states (Jabri, 2013, 15).

In order to look more closely at transformations of sovereignty –also in relation to specific practices of border management–, the relationship between multiple actors and emerging political orders can be revealing. On the one hand, normative, idealized spatial and scalar representations of the state through verticality and encompassment can be used as a reference point for state sovereignty in Liptako-Gourma (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). ‘Verticality’ refers to a state’s central and pervasive position as an institution somehow ‘above’ civil society, community and family; and ‘encompassment’ refers to the idea of the state (conceptually fused with the nation) that is located within an ever widening series of circles that begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states’ (2002, 982). For instance, capacity building is a governmentality technique that alters the same idea of state verticality. As discussed above, capacity building brings in different agendas that adhere to the remit of governing: the functioning coherent state, the definition of functionality in terms of modern, rational institutions, the importance of planning and co-ordination, the calculation of need, the pedagogical orientation of training programs, including initiatives targeted at women or youth (Jabri, 2013, 13). The state as a central player that theoretically should occupy the highest position in the verticality, is superseded by international or regional organizations (EU or IOM for instance) who ‘train’ the capacity of the state to perform its duties. These actions blur the boundaries between international agenda and sovereign agenda, those who set the agenda and those who can influence internal politics. The involvement of local populations in border management is an example of addressing failing state verticality and encompassment in Liptako-Gourma. The state is superseded by the multiplicity of non-state external actors (both governmental and non-governmental) operating at the local level and establishing direct relations with border populations. They directly work with them, by establishing trust towards security forces through the organization of dialogues

and sessions. Border surveillance committees are instead thought to address a state's lack of encompassment caused by a growing gap between the state presence over the territory, inability to surveil state borders, fuelled by the emergence of new forms of authority and overt contestation of the state presence in the areas mostly affected by violence. Despite the assistance of foreign and regional military forces, domestic security forces lose control over these areas, conceding them to non-state armed actors. By blending in these activities, transnational actors challenge and undermine state verticality 'by a transnationalised 'local' that fuses the grassroots and the global in ways that make a hash of the vertical topography of power on which the legitimation of nation-states has so long depended' (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002. 995). The central feature of the current transnational political order 'is not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure states' abilities to spatialise their authority and to stake their claims to superior generality and universality' (996).

V. Connecting the dots

Re-imagining Sahelian political space means, first of all, adopting postcolonial perspective. It allows to decentre the centrality of the state and re-imagine space not based on borders of the nation states but as a more fluid borderland. Neat physical and conceptual borders need to be substituted to a more in-depth look at blurring boundaries between Eurocentric categories such as security forces, populations, state and external actors. As a consequence, postcolonial sovereignty can be seen as polymorphous and vital. More generally, the state-centric system should re-imagined as a hybrid system challenging state's encompassment and verticality. Capacity building can be seen both as making the state officials more qualified and more able to carry out their work according to international standards, as well as a practice of agency deprivation and imposition of external agendas instead of empowerment. Involvement of local populations in border management suggests that border communities become their partial security providers. These dynamics are more evident in Liptako-Gourma, a transitional space of material and metaphorical boundaries.

As affirmed by the Burkinabé official, those physically located on the borders are exclusively national border officials. Everything around them is a product of postcolonial hybridity where relations and interactions of multiple actors extend in capillary ways. The

post located in Makalondi, on the border between Burkina Faso and Niger is a factual illustration of hybridity of the sovereign regimes in the Sahelian states, their situatedness in the realm of postcolony. This border post in Liptako-Gourma cannot be understood as separate from the global power regime and the postcolonial political and international context that mutually constitute one another. No place is 'remote', at least not anymore.

References

- AfricaNews. 2019. 'Malian soldiers withdraw from isolated positions following attacks', 10 November 2019, <https://www.africanews.com/2019/11/10/malian-soldiers-withdraw-from-isolated-positions-following-attacks/>
- Andrijasevic, R., & Walters, W. (2010). *The International Organization for Migration and the International Government of Borders. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(6), 977–999.
- Andersson, Ruben. 2019. *No Go World: How Fear Is Redrawing Our Maps and Infecting Our Politics*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Bamada. 2020. 'Ansongo: Les FAMA de retour à Labbezanga', 18 May 2020, <http://bamada.net/ansongo-les-fama-de-retour-a-labbezanga>
- Bergmann, Jonas, Julian Lehmann, Thomas Munsch and William Powell. 2017. *Protection Fallout. How Increasing Capacity for Border Management Affects Migrants' Vulnerabilities in Niger and Mali*. GPPI and RMMS, November 2017.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1984. *Of mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*. October 28, 125-133.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1990. *Nation and narration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bøås, Morten, Abdoul Wahab Cissé, Aboubacar Diallo, Bård Drange, Frida Kvamme and Stambøl, Eva. 2018. *The EU, security sector reform and border management in Mali*. EUNPACK Paper.
- Bodian, Mamadou, Aurélien Tobien, and Myriam Marending. 2020. *The Challenges of governance, development and security in the central regions of Mali*. SIPRI, Background Paper N2020/4.
- Boege, Volker, Anne Brown, Kevin Clements, and Anna Nolan. 2008. *On hybrid political orders and emerging states: State formation in the context of 'fragility'*. Berghof handbook for conflict transformation.
- Boyer, Florence. 2019. 'Sécurité, développement, protection. Le triptyque de l'externalisation des politiques migratoires au Niger'. *Herodote* 172: 171–191.
- Crisis Group. 2020a. 'Behind the Jihadist Attack in Niger's Inates', Q&A Africa, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/behind-jihadist-attack-inates>
- Crisis Group. 2020b. 'Sidelineing the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery', Africa Report N°289, 3 June 2020: 6.
- Danish Demining Group (DDG). 2019. Programme Gestion et sécurité aux frontières dans le Liptako-Gourma. Rapport Annuel 2018.
- Duffield, Mark. 2003. 'Social Reconstruction and the Radicalisation of Development: Aid as a Relation of Global Liberal Governance', in *State Failure, Collapse and Reconstruction*, 291–312, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Frowd, Philippe. 2018. *Security at the Borders: Transnational Practices and Technologies in West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, James and Akhil Gupta. 2002. 'Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality.' *American Ethnologist* 29: 981-1002.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). 2020. 'Burkina Faso: Security Forces Allegedly Execute 31 Detainees Impartially Investigate Apparent War Crime in Djibo',

- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/20/burkina-faso-security-forces-allegedly-execute-31-detainees>
- Institute for Security Studies (ISS). 2017. ‘*Liptako-Gourma: epicentre of the Sahel crisis?*’ Situation Analysis. Peace and Security Council Report, Issue 93.
- Jabri, Vivienne. 2013a. ‘Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or a postcolonial rationality?’ *Peacebuilding* 1:1, 3-16.
- Jabri, Vivienne. 2013b. *The Postcolonial Subject: Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Korf, Benedikt and Timothy Raeymaekers (eds). 2013. *Violence on the margins: states, conflict, and borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mac Guinty, Roger. 2011. *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Mann, Gregory. 2014. *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2019. Bodies as borders. *From the European South* 4, 5-18.
- Raineri, Luca and Francesco Strazzari. 2019. ‘(B)ordering Hybrid Security? EU Stabilisation Practices in the Sahara-Sahel Region’, *Ethnopolitics* 18 (5), 544-559.
- Tobie, Aurélien and Boukary Sangaré. 2019. ‘*The Impact of armed groups on the populations of Central and Northern Mali. Necessary Adaptations of the Strategies for Re-establishing Peace.*’ SIPRI.
- Venturi, Bernardo. 2017. ‘*The EU and the Sahel: A Laboratory of Experimentation for the Security–Migration–Development Nexus*’. IAI Working Papers 17/38, December 2017.

Annex I

Hybridity and boundaries

Hybridity and boundaries are used herein to as cross categorical and symbolic concepts. Metaphorically, a boundary separates two distinct entities; hybridity instead designates something that arises as a result of mixture, blurring and the effacing of boundaries. Hybridity' is a fundamental analytical concept for the understanding of current political order and power techniques. In fact, Homi Bhabha compares hybridity to any particular political process, where 'new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively.'¹¹ In contrast to the notion of 'boundary', hybridity helps to approach the complexity of political and security regimes and better understand the interaction between a variety of internal and external actors that produces the fusion peace (Mac Guinty, 2011, 70). These two concepts also serve to bridge the thematic focus of this essay on border management with the transnational space of Liptako-Gourma, as well as transnational order in the postcolonial international domain. Clear-cut divisions and essentialising categories produced by boundaries are challenged by the conceptualization of an interstitial space with blurred boundaries and reference to non-spatially bound processes of globalization. Hybridity gives rise to a new element, new reality, new entity that we need to embrace as such.¹²

In this case, boundaries are not understood as terminal barriers between places and communities but as social sites where phenomena in fact 'begin their presencing' (Bhabha, 1994, 5, 219).

Annex II

Liptako-Gourma overview

From an economic, demographic and environmental perspective, Liptako-Gourma is an integrated zone, with intense cross-border movement and longstanding inter-community coexistence. This complex interplay of networks of interaction is often explained by intermarriage, commerce, and reliance on agreed practices associated with the management of natural resources (DDG, 2017, 2). Different groups, including nomadic

¹¹ Homi Bhabha interview by Jonathan Rutherford, p. 147

¹² I refer to 'hybridity' as used initially by Homi Bhabha (1994).

(transhumant pastoralists) and sedentary communities (involved in vegetable farming), traditional hunters and fishing communities inhabit this area and their coexistence is built on cross-border interdependence, intense mobility, uneven sovereignties and cultural interaction (MMC, 2019, 11; Mann, 2015, 7). Lifestyles and everyday practices are very much related to different types of mobility and enshrined in resilience strategies necessary for survival in the context of harsh climatic conditions and with the poor services available to the population (ISS, 2017). Internal mobility is not limited to movement between local centres and peripheries, though exchange between bordering regions is often stronger than between the respective capitals.¹³ In recent years, growing insecurity has had a significant impact on the economy and the lives of people, interfering with their economic activities (mostly agriculture and trade), disrupting access to services and mobility (Sipri, 2020, 11). Many had to reduce the intensity of travel and change travel patterns (Sipri, 2020, 13). Regional instability predates the 2012 multidimensional crisis, to the prolonged periods of droughts and famines that took place in the Sahel in the past, enhanced by the intensification of land use, increasingly violent political confrontations between disgruntled populations and their respective governments, a rise in illicit weapons circulation and of armed groups, transformations of existing religious practices, as well as trafficking of goods and people, and the actions of African and Western military forces (DDG, 2017, 2). Currently there is a wide range of initiatives being carried out by NGOs, multilateral and bilateral assistance agencies supporting national stabilization strategies, as well as actors involved in international and sub-regional military operations (the French-led Operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force) and the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA). Never directly substituting national armed security forces in the domain of border control activities, as will be later discussed, external agents assist national security actors in various ways.

The multiplicity of armed actors cannot be understood without taking into consideration a plethora of non-state armed actors active in Liptako-Gourma, including gangs, members of cross-border crime organizations, community-based self-defence groups, political groups operating in Azawad, and violent extremist groups operating in Mali (North, Centre), in Burkina Faso (Sahel and North), in Niger (in the North of the Tillabéri region) (DDG, 2019). The growing number of non-state actors cannot be disentangled from local recruitments affecting border communities, concerning both men and women for a variety

¹³ For example, it is common for children from Burkina's Sahel region to go to Mopti or Timbuktu for religious education. Interview with an aid worker in Burkina Faso.

of roles (ISS, 2018, Abatan, 2018). As a consequence, border communities in Liptako-Gourma are under increasing pressure in terms of armed violence, resource scarcity and inter-communal conflict. Local populations and armed actors establish various forms of relations, ranging from predatory exploitation, intimidation, targeted assassinations of leaders or authorities, reprisal attacks on villages and camps suspected of hostility or ‘betrayal’, inter-community confrontations between self-defence groups (DDG, 2019) to different forms of alliances and protection (ISS 2018). Armed non-state actors try to exploit gaps in state presence in order to obtain greater control over populations and territories. These factors undermine social cohesion in these areas typically experiencing poor access to essential services. In this context of state impunity, the difference between state and non-state armed actor actions becomes blurred, stressing some populations’ coping techniques.¹⁴ Allegedly, two major reactions to violence are displacement (mostly internal but also cross-border) and collaboration with non-state armed groups (as a form of seeking protection, as a coping technique, as the acceptance of a new offer of governance).¹⁵ The constant presence of armed actors contributes to their image as more effective than the police, army or gendarmerie (SIPRI, 2020, 11).

Annex III

Very often Liptako-Gourma has been framed as a ‘remote’ area in policy and academic papers because of the limited state presence as service and security provider and as border enforcer. Firstly, this may be understood as the assumed viewpoint that should be re-negotiated. The example of the Labbezanga border post between Mali and Niger on the Gao-Niamey road axis is evocative. As a consequence of the 2012 multidimensional crisis and the incapacity of the Malian state to control large parts of the country’s north, the Malian armed forces abandoned this border post. After the signing of the Peace Accord and some relative stabilization of the security situation, it was re-opened. In November 2019, a deadly attack by affiliates of the Islamic State pushed the Malian army further away from the border, from Labbezanga to Ansongo, from Indelimane and Anderamboukane to Ménaka (AfricaNews, 2019). Once again, these border posts were abandoned, demonstrating that the border area between Mali and Niger is hardly

¹⁴ Concerning authorities’ executions see among others HRW (2020).

¹⁵ In central Mali, for instance, non-state armed actors try to fill the void created by the weakness or absence of state authority with all the consequences that this implies in terms of confrontations between different militias, extrajudicial executions or disregard for human rights (Sipri, 2020, 15 and SIPRI, 2019).

governable, at least for the Malian state (Crisis Group, 2020a). In May 2020, Malian Armed Forces returned to Labbezanga (Bamada, 2020).

Annex IV

The two major initiatives are funded and organized by the EU: the European Union's Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) and the European Union's Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel) in Mali and Niger. EUTM's mandate is to provide support and training to the Malian Armed Forces, as well as to support the operationalization of Joint Force of G5 Sahel through dedicated advice and training. EUCAP Sahel supports Mali's security sector reform, including the police, gendarmerie and National Guard, in view of their re-deployment across the country. Since 2017, EUCAP –consisting of a team of advisors and trainers– specifically supports Mali in ensuring border controls, better migration management, and the fight against insurgents and criminal groups. They specifically focus on improving the human resources system, reorganizing training aimed at a 'critical mass' of future officers.¹⁶ The initial deployment of EUCAP Sahel Niger was also linked with the support of the security sector reform and it has reportedly contributed to the training of 12,000 members of the country's security forces, especially on cross-cutting organizational issues such as judicialisation, human rights, technical and scientific police, intelligence and forensic capabilities, and inter-force cooperation. It has also provided advice during the drafting of Niger's security strategies, such as the Internal Security Strategy, the National Border Policy, and the National Security Strategy (MMC, 2019, 26).

Annex V

'*Mimicry*' is an analytical concept, strictly related to hybridity, used in postcolonial theory to describe relations between the colonizer and the colonized in colonial and postcolonial contexts. This close relationship imposed through power relations where the colonized imitates the colonizer with an outcome that is deviant from the colonizer and from the

¹⁶ While the target of initial training consisted 600 officers in 2015, the final objective is to train one third of all officers in the gendarmerie, the National Guard and the police'.
http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/csdp/missions-and-operations/eucap-sahel-mali/docs/factsheet_eucap_sahel_mali_en.pdf

essence of the colonized was introduced by Homi Bhabha (1984). 'Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.