Panel E31: Re-imagining the Sahel: The Place of Endogenous Knowledge [initiated by CORDESRIA with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and ASCL/Lasdel] on 3 February 2021

Convenors

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Contributors

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- Boubacar Haidara (Université de Ségou)
- Ekaterina Golovko (Independent researcher)
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Abstract Summary

The Sahel is generally misunderstood and misrepresented as a special reality that reflects flows and ruptures defining deeper history; revealing deeply embedded and complex livelihoods under stress. According to the panel, the Sahel is a place that defies easy generalizations, challenges, statist assumptions (with their heavy security narrative) and as a place that accommodates multiple temporal and spatial realities. The panel also locates the Sahel is a connector in Africa and uses the historic role of endogenous knowledge in the region as an illustration.

Accepted Papers

When Marginalised Indigenous Knowledge Complements Scientific Practice in the Securitization of Sahel Region, Africa: An Analysis of Northern Nigeria's Security Architecture by Yusuf Abdulazeez (Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto)

Nigeria is among the ten African countries recognised by the United Nations as the Sahel Region facing security threats. Nigeria is the most populous of these countries (201 million out of 342.3 million) and is endowed with indigenous knowledge, diverse ethnic, cultural, religious

groups and vegetation. Despite using non-African conventional knowledge and tools to respond to diverse rising insecurity, lives and property remain vulnerable. Little or no literature is available regarding the indigenous knowledge of local security agents (hunters, vigilantes, traditionalists) who complement federal security agents as auxiliary security operatives. This paper analyses applied indigenous knowledge, reasons behind its application, relevance of the knowledge and challenges faced by local security operatives when applying indigenous knowledge in the securitisation of Sahel Nigeria. The methodology of the paper include Auguste Comte's law of three stages, qualitative research design and sampled online newspaper research. Results obtained from the study indicate that indigenous knowledge is common to local security agents and complements, strengthens and supports activities of federal security agents. However, the local security agents face the challenges of poor kitting, scientific strategies training, government recognition, monthly remuneration and intermittent provision of collaborative security services.

Excavation and Creation: (re)setting Personal and National Self-confidence in the Nigerien Sahel by Antoinette Tidjani Alou (Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey)

Niger is a country with strong epic domestic, historic and immutable values. Paradoxically, she remains unfamiliar on the international scene. Various internalisation processes of Niger have influenced the loss, silencing and negation of its valuable ancestral knowledges and icons. Niger dilemma is its alternate/episodic stigmatisation and its struggle with policies of positive national identity construction. The paper therefore examines some examples that attest to these social dynamics and cultural processes and ways in which cultural knowledge and (meta)criticism, creative cultural practice can contribute to (re)setting personal and national self-confidence in the Nigerien Sahel?

Climate Change and Livelihoods in the Sahel: Revisiting Nexus and Focusing on Endogenous Knowledge by Oriol Puig-Cepero (CIDOB, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)

This paper closely examines climate change "threat multiplier" using both long and short paper abstracts. Some of the key perspectives include similarities and coping strategies of climate change "threat multiplier" the Sahel, accuracy and relatedness of the climate change hypotheses outlined in UNEP (2011), IPCC (2019), Myers (1995) and Homer-Dixon (1994). The paper also scrutinises the local strategies employed by locals to cope with environmental degradation.

The paper scrutinises EU's Sahel security perspective (Barnett & Adger, 2007) and paradoxical conclusions of different studies indicating that parts of the Sahel have been "re-greening" (Hutchinson et al., 2005), and that increase of rainfalls as a consequence of climate change could turn this dry region into a very wet one (Schewe & Levermann, 2017). According to this paper, these countervailing studies are often ignored or undervalued by policymakers and international organizations. Therefore, this paper avoids the neo-Malthusian arguments to explain climate risks in the Sahel and brings to limelight the impact of climate change on livelihoods in Niger and Mali, mostly based on rain-fed agriculture, nomad and transhumance activities. Political ecology approach is employed to better demonstrate the application of local coping strategies to environmental stressors such as mobility in the Western Sahel zone. The article also values the importance of indigenous knowledge and points how to incorporate it in current policies.

Conflits Armés et Insécurité dans le Sahel Ouest-Africain: défis pour la Recherche Africaniste par Boubacar Haidara (Université de Ségou)

La recherche scientifique à destination des pays du Sud fut longtemps l'apanage des chercheurs et institutions du Nord. Cet article examine en profondeur l'impact indéniable qu'exerce les crises sécuritaires qui agitent certains pays du Sahel, y compris le Mali, sur les productions scientifiques. Il est important de soulever trois situations prioritaires à ce propos: (1) la désertion des zones conflictuelles par les chercheurs du Nord par crainte de leur sécurité; (2) la suivi de la recherche par les chercheurs en ayant pour terrain les zones conflictuelles; mais avec la "seconde main" comme pourvoyeur des données (souvent très peu qualifiées); (3) la poursuite de la recherche par les chercheurs aussi bien que la production de la quantité de résultats, sans aucun recours au terrain.

A cet effet, beaucoup de questions s'y posent: Doit-on abandonner la recherche dans les zones d'insécurité du Sahel, alors même que les facteurs qui y sont à la base méritent fortement qu'on y mène des réflexions? Quelle valeur accorder à des résultats de recherche en sciences sociales, obtenus hors du terrain? Pouvons-nous penser les sciences sociales en dehors de leur dimension empirique? Selon quelles modalités, et par quels moyens, les chercheurs internationaux et leurs collègues locaux peuvent-ils contribuer à perpétuer la recherche dans les zones dites "sensibles"?

Il est bien de noter que les terrains dits "sensibles" ne présentent les risques variables par rapport aux différents chercheurs (international, national ou même local).

Re-imagining Sahelian Borderlands, a Postcolonial Perspective by Ekaterina Golovko (Independent Researcher)

In this paper long and short abstracts, the author re-imagines the Sahel as a physical and conceptual space by analysing border management initiatives. The author presents Liptako-Gourma as a center of ongoing political and social processes and transformations using Homi Bhabha's 'hybridity' and 'mimicry'.

The Liptako-Gourma region, specifically described as a 'peripheral and remote area' is a centre of academic, non-academic and journalistic attention for several reasons: it is a tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and an epicentre of violence and increasing militarization in recent times. and is often described as a 'peripheral and remote area'.

The paper examines different securitization practices of the area such as border management and complex networks involved in order to create a better understanding of some existing patterns of the Sahelian statehood, power relations and new emerging forms of territorial legitimacy.

The author also employs 'hybridity' and 'mimicry' approaches of Homi Bhabha as well as political analysis and postcolonial theory to create new avenues for transdisciplinary discussions on state, sovereignty and conflicts in the Sahel.

Sahelian Intellectualism in the Process of Modernity by Rahmane Idrissa (African Studies Centre Leiden)

This paper studies particularities of the Sahel as a meeting ground of West African, Islamic, and Western cultural influences to describe and analyze a specific Sahelian intellectual attitude in the time of modernity. The author consults a variety of works from oral literature to Arabophone and Europhone writings and film - to delve into the trends and tensions that define the Sahel's intellectual engagement with the problems of modernity.

Key Take-aways from Panel Discussion

Although the Sahel is in the headlines for negative reasons including internal and material poverties, the region possesses perplexities from which the world in general and Africa in particular can learn. The panel kicked off its discussions with one key question: 'What does Sahel teach us through conflicts, mobility, (in)security, material poverty and intellectual wealth?

Katia on 'Re-imagining the Sahelian Border Space':

- Border management as a practice and how it fits in international context.
- Mechanism of intervention and how external management can reinforce or weaken the security of a state.
- Larger migration management issues controlled by international bodies.
- Border management as the purchasing and sharing of facilities and services.
- Capacity building in border management impacts sovereign development, border land spaces of political negotiation and transformation.

The 'why' of border management

- Because of the question of knowledge and knowledge production.
- Universal norms and technical interventions.
- Postcolonial power relations.
- Reimagining Sahelian geographies and power dynamics.

Borderland

- space of multiple sovereignties
- space of negotiation and change.
- space of observation of multiple change, power relations and dynamics.

This discussion concluded that border strategies cannot be based exclusively on international standards and that quality research and new ideas can only come from collaboration involving different fields of knowledge.

Boubacar Haidara on 'Conflits Armés dans la Région du Sahel'

- Researching the Sahel region is problematic to researchers due to its inaccessibility.
- Research in this area is often conducted away from the field and this affects its quality and quantity.
- The field presents many dangers therefore, requiring different research domains and perspectives.

What does 'difficult' or 'dangerous' mean?

- Inaccessibility due to 'high insecurity'. For example, researchers from the North designated as specialists on (researching) Mali end up deserting the research area because of insecurity. It is therefore important to research different factors of insecurity

in order to better understand and propose solutions that favour and encourage profound research.

- Suspension of research programmes due to insecurity.

Consequences of insecurity on research:

- No financing for (more) research.
- Research is prescriptive (by the funding agent/agency).

Questions to ponder over:

- What value can be given to social sciences away from the field?
- What available statistical data are available or could be created to give evidence of the impacts of insecurity in the Sahel region?
- What can we do in the present situation to continue/encourage research despite the insecurity?

Key answer: A means of collaboration and dynamism should be created between international and local researchers to promote and ease research.

The main lesson of the presentation was to demonstrate how insecurity in the Sahel region has impacted research qualitatively and quantitively.

Orio Puig on Climate Change and Livelihoods in the Sahel: Revisiting Nexus and Focusing on Endogenous Knowledge.

- Deconstructs glaring discourses such as migration, climate change and local practices in the Sahel.

Methodology: desktop research, semi-structural interviews, online elite survey, limitations, reflexibilities (internal debates).

Main question: How can research be conducted in times of limitations like covid restrictions?

Main points on misconceptions about climate impacts in the Sahel:

- Desertification and/or re-greening
- Unconclusive future climate predictions (depending on climate models and geographical area).

- Academic consensus – rainfall variability, more extreme weather (drought, flooding), increasing temperatures.
- Lake Chad shrinking.

Human mobility as an adaption strategy in the area

- Human response to climate hazards intertwine with other factors such as intra and inter-regional movements and externalisation.

Inclusion of local practices in current policies:

- Pastoralists' nomadic circular mobility.
- Agricultural practices.
- Pastoralist practices.
- Local knowledge contribution to adaptation and mitigation.
- Promotion in complementarity to modern norms.

Conclusion

- Desertification and re-greening are facts.
- Human mobility – local coping strategies and economic diversification plan.
- Traditional knowledge is important.

Quotes from Rahmane Idrissa's discussion:

"The Sahel is a site for intellectual battles…"

"The act of thinking comes after the event"

"Intellectual battles do not necessarily result in victory. They are a result of encounters that happen at many levels of society."

"The Sahel is a 'Crossroad' and 'Battleground'. There is a trade of 'views' and 'battles'."

Concepts employed

- Dynamics of fractures and synthesis – the former defining the Sahel by conflicts and losses and the latter defining the Sahel by views. These concepts as used to translate the reality of physical strife.

Q&A

Q: What is the Sahel's position regarding the production of knowledge in/of itself?

A: It is a connection of power and knowledge. "You create a state by creating borders" buttresses the existence of a state.

Reaction from Katia: her (Katia's) discussion with the border police inspired her to think about the incoherence of the idea of border and reality. For this reason, she used the concept of 'hybridity' based on the 'real' history of the Sahel.

Border management is a technical universal concept that needs careful handling in order to obtain specific results.

Local geographies, knowledges need to be considered. There is need for negotiation and discussion on different levels including state actors at the receiving end.

"State actors live in a world that creates state powers and orders which also make them a problem."

Q: Countries turn towards protectionism to protect against food security. How can you argue this?

A: There should be some pressure from ECOWAS and UMOA because of some established protocols. Human mobility is used as a pretext to divert resources. Closing borders is no guarantee for ensuring national food security. The pandemic could also be used as a pretext to border closure.

Q: What is migration and what is mobility?

Big data – whatsapp, tweeter, facebook.

Truck drivers as researchers use modern technologies to do research – co-creating data with locals using modern technologies.

Concerning social and political engagement in Africa, researchers are not supported by research policies. "Les représentations sont plus que les réalités."

Panel E31 Side notes

Do you know 'The Impact of Climate Change on Drylands, with a focus on West Africa, (2004) edited by Dietz, Ruben& Verhagen and with inputs from a.o. Han van Dijk and many others including many Sahelian scholars.

From Rahmane Idrissa to Everyone: 11:05 AM

I will mention it to Oriol

From Oriol Puig to Everyone: 11:07 AM

Yes, I know the reference. It is really interesting. Thank you ;)

From Monique Calon to Everyone: 11:19 AM

Thanks to the panelists. Does anyone have suggestions on further research pertaining to population growth in the Sahel region and food security/agricultural development? If so what solutions (policy wise) are being proposed.
I really appreciate the discussion on human mobility as a crucial part of food security. Could you elaborate on protectionism (food security considerations) as a constraint to mobility in favour of food security and how ECOWAS policies on free movement of people and goods could have an impact?

From Han van Dijk to Everyone: 11:31 AM

it is not only about human mobility but also livestock mobility

countries close borders for livestock and this leads to tremendous conflicts

From Ton Dietz to Everyone: 11:33 AM

I think that crucial roles are being played by truck drivers (including the ones transporting food). By making these drivers co-researchers (as was done in East Africa to fight on-the-road-corruption) researchers could really increase their understanding of what happens at and because of borders. And truck drivers make use of social media!

From Monique Calon to Everyone: 11:49 AM

Hi Ton, I think that Borderless Alliance has done some surveys with truck drivers but certainly not enough is being done by the research community to further explore this
I will check whether there has been a follow-up on the app that was being developed monitor barriers experienced by truck drivers on the road

From Me to Everyone: 12:00 PM

Presently there is a bloody conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon thereby, making it a 'difficult' area for research. Apart from intermittent internet disconnection in the area, locally-produced and disseminated knowledge about field realities are often overlooked and 'truth tellers' treated as traitors. What role can a conference like this one play in that case?

From Ton Dietz to Everyone: 12:04 PM

To Joan: The role of diaspora scientists can be crucial there and their linkages in the North. E.g. look at the current debate about the recent elections in Uganda, where the server of critical Ugandese NGO-researchers monitoring the election results is based in Amsterdam, to avoid interference by Museveni cs