

On the Edge: What Future for the African Sahel?

**The 2017 Annual Carter Conference in African Studies
Center for African Studies at the University of Florida
Organized by the UF Sahel Research Group**

**23-25 February 2017
University of Florida, Gainesville**

Conveners:

**Leonardo A. Villalón, Abdoulaye Kane, Sebastian Elischer, Sarah McKune,
Fiona McLaughlin, Renata Serra, Benjamin Soares, and Alioune Sow**

Conference Theme

There is unprecedented interest in the countries of the West African Sahel. Among the very least developed countries on earth, they were long on the margins of both scholarly and policy concerns; yet as the region has attracted world attention as a key battleground in the global “war on terror” there has been a proliferation of writing on the region. The vast majority of this recent attention, however, has been through the prism of security concerns: terrorism, violence, and “radical Islam.” While fully recognizing the immediate challenges that have brought the Sahel into international headlines, a primary goal of this conference is to move beyond this narrow and often superficial focus to provide a multidimensional and interdisciplinary assessment of the region in all of its complexity.

Beyond the security concerns, the region is at an important crossroads, under multiple pressures of diverse kinds: environmental, political, demographic, and economic, as well as rapidly changing social and cultural dynamics. Indeed there is a growing understanding that the security concerns of the region are intricately interrelated with broader socio-economic dynamics, and with the challenges of underdevelopment, population growth, social and religious transformations, climate change, and more.

This conference will bring together an interdisciplinary set of scholars from Europe, Africa and North America to offer perspectives on key issues shaping the region. The focus will be on the six Francophone countries at the heart of the geographic space of the Sahel—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad—considered in the context of their neighbors, notably Nigeria to the south and the countries of the Maghreb to the north. An important contribution of the conference will be to explore the historical and contemporary interconnections that make this set of countries, collectively, an identifiable sub-region.

Conference Information

The conference is free and open to the public, but advance registration is kindly requested. Please send an email with your name and institutional affiliation, as well as expected dates of attendance to: ufsahelresearch@gmail.com. Please use “Sahel Conference Registration” in the subject line.

For accommodations, we recommend contacting the Holiday Inn University Center. The Holiday Inn is located at 1250 West University Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32601 and is a 10-15-minute walk from the conference venue. Another option is the J. Wayne Reitz Union Hotel where the majority of the conference will be taking place, located at 686 Museum Rd, Gainesville, FL 32611.

All panels will be held in the Reitz Union of the University of Florida campus, except for the first keynote lecture and the opening reception to be held at the UF Harn Museum of Art. (Transportation to the Harn will be provided).

The conference is made possible thanks to a Minerva Initiative grant to the UF Sahel Research Group, as well as a Title VI US Department of Education grant to the UF Center for African Studies. Additional support has been provided by the UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the UF International Center, and the UF Office of Research.

Conference Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, all conference sessions will be held in the Chamber auditorium of the Reitz Union on the UF campus.

Thursday, 23 February 2017

1:00-1:30: WELCOME AND CONFERENCE INTRODUCTION

- Brenda Chalfin, Director, Center for African Studies
- David Richardson, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Leonardo A. Villalón, for the Sahel Research Group

1:30- 2:30: PANEL I: THE SAHEL AS REGION

Chair: Ernest Harsch

- *Mapping the Sahelian Space* - Olivier Walther and Denis Retaillé
- *French Colonialism and the Making of the Modern Sahel* - Gregory Mann

3:00-5:00: PANEL II: THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Chair: Boubacar Ndiaye

- *Agriculture in a Changing Climate Environment* - Chris Reij, Gray Tappen and Suzanne Cotillon
- *The Challenge of Food Security and Nutrition* - Sarah McKune
- *Demography and Health in the Context of Climate Change* - Malcolm Potts, Alisha Graves and Nouhou Abdoul-Moumouni
- *Climate Change and Human Conflict* - Tor A. Benjaminsen

6:30-7:30: KEYNOTE LECTURE I (Location: Harn Museum Auditorium)

Introduction: Renata Serra

- *The Construction of States and Societies in the Sahel* - Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan

7:30-9:00: DINNER BUFFET RECEPTION: Harn Museum Atrium

Friday, 24 February 2017

9:00-10:30: PANEL III: IDEAS AND THOUGHT IN THE SAHEL

Chair: Nancy Rose Hunt

- *Intellectual Figures and Political Thought* - Abdourahmane Idrissa
- *Cultural Production and Political Change* - Alioune Sow
- *Ruptures, Imaginaries, and Changes in the Sahel* - Felwine Sarr

11:00-12:45: PANEL IV: IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

Chair: Lisa Mueller

- *Hierarchy and Contestation: Caste, Slavery and Inequality* - Cédric Jourde
- *The Linguistic Ecology of the Sahel* - Fiona McLaughlin
- *Pastoralist societies in the Sahel: Persistence and adaptation* - Wendy Wilson-Fall
- *Education and National Identity: Citizenship between the Secular and the Religious* - Leonardo Villalón and Mamadou Bodian

2:15-3:15: KEYNOTE LECTURE II

Introduction: Sebastian Elischer

- *The Quest for Political Order in the Sahel: The Role of Civil Society* - Augustin Loada

3:45-6:00: PANEL V: THE CHALLENGE OF GOVERNING

Chair: Ketil Fred Hansen

- *The Democratic Struggle* - Mamadou Bodian and Leonardo Villalón
- *Surviving Democratization: Authoritarian Resilience* - Daniel Eizenga
- *Militaries in Politics* - Sebastian Elischer
- *The Politics of Security Provision in the Sahel: Capability and Legitimacy* - Cristina Barrios
- *France and Other External Actors in the Sahel* - Roland Marchal

Saturday, 25 February 2017

8:45-10:30: PANEL VI: THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Chair: Paul Lubeck

- *The Structure of National Economies: Formal and Informal Sectors* - Ahmadou Aly Mbaye and Fatou Gueye
- *Agricultural Policies in the Sahel: Policy Processes and Developmental Outcomes* - Renata Serra
- *What Role for Extractive Industries?* - Oladiran Bello

11:00-1:00 PANEL VII: THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN FLUX

Chair: Marie Brossier

- *Islamic Intellectual Traditions in the Sahel* - Rüdiger Seeseman (by Skype)
- *Islamic Practice in the Sahel: Sufism, Islamism, and some of their Alternatives* - Benjamin Soares
- *The Jihadi Challenge* - Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim
- *Muslim Women's Reform Movements* - Ousseina Alidou

2:30-4:00: PANEL VIII: ON THE MOVE: URBANIZATION, MIGRATION, TRANSNATIONALISM

Chair: Bruce Whitehouse

- *Urbanization and the Dynamics of Change in Sahelian Cities* - David Lessault and Florence Boyer (by Skype)
- *Crossing Borders: Intra-African Migration* - Sylvie Bredeloup (by Skype)
- *Sahelian Transnational Networks and Diasporas* - Abdoulaye Kane
- *Trans-Saharan Migrations* - Harouna Mounkaila (*pending*)

4:00-5:00: ROUNDTABLE: PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF THE SAHEL

The Honorable Hassana Alidou, Ambassador of the Republic of Niger to the United States

Kamissa Camara, National Endowment for Democracy

Hannah Armstrong, International Crisis Group

Vernelle Trim, US Department of State