

MAPPING BORDERS AND CITIES IN WEST AFRICA

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Since I joined the Sahel Research Group at the Center for African Studies in July this year, my work has primarily focused on coordinating the 'Cities and Borders' program of the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club. This two-year program is part of a memorandum of understanding signed between the OECD and the University of Florida in March 2017 aiming to reinforce the links between academics, institutions and policy platforms. The purpose of this work is to provide support for regional policies and international strategies in order to better understand the contribution of border cities to regional integration in West Africa.

One of the most exciting parts of this new program is to launch a survey on women's trade networks. Our first goal is to map supply chains in which women producers, traders and consumers have a particular interest, and highlight gender inequalities in market activities. In collaboration with the University of Niamey, we will interview more than 300 male and female traders between Niger, Benin and Nigeria. Our second goal is to identify the institutional actors involved in the promotion of women's business activities in West Africa, their relations and the structural obstacles to their activities. With our colleagues from Chatham House, we want to understand the complexity of the institutional field linked to the economic promotion of women and to identify the gaps between the functioning of women's networks and associated strategies.

In both surveys, interviews will follow a methodological approach based on social network analysis, which looks at the inter-relationships developed among a specific set of policy actors engaged in women empowerment. Data will be collected using a snowballing technique, according to which a number of key individuals are asked to nominate with whom they have been exchanging information related to women's business activities.



Within this collaboration with the OECD, researchers from the UF Sahel Research Group will also deliver a series of policy notes to be published by the OECD in its West African Papers series, based on on-going researches on security, trade and political issues. Thus far, four working papers have been published, including one on jihadist insurgencies by Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim, one on civil-military relations in Niger by Sebastian Elischer, one on political stability and security in Chad by Dan Eizenga, and on the future of warfare in the region that I authored.

The past six months have been busier than ever. Not only did I move from Denmark to Florida and started a new research project but I also edited a book entitled *African Border Disorders* with my colleague William Miles from Northeastern University. The book builds on a workshop organized at the Division of Global Affairs at Rutgers last year. It explores the complex relationships that bind states, transnational rebels and extremist organizations on the African continent. Combining network science with geographical analysis, *African Border*

Disorders highlights how the fluid alliances and conflicts between rebels, violent extremist organizations and states shape in large measure regional patterns of violence in Africa. Some of our contributors also examine the spread of Islamist violence around Lake Chad through the lens of the violent Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram, which has evolved from a nationally-oriented militia group, to an internationally networked organization. A couple of concluding chapters explore how violent extremist organizations conceptualize state boundaries and territory and, reciprocally, how do the civil society and the state respond to the rise of transnational organizations.

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