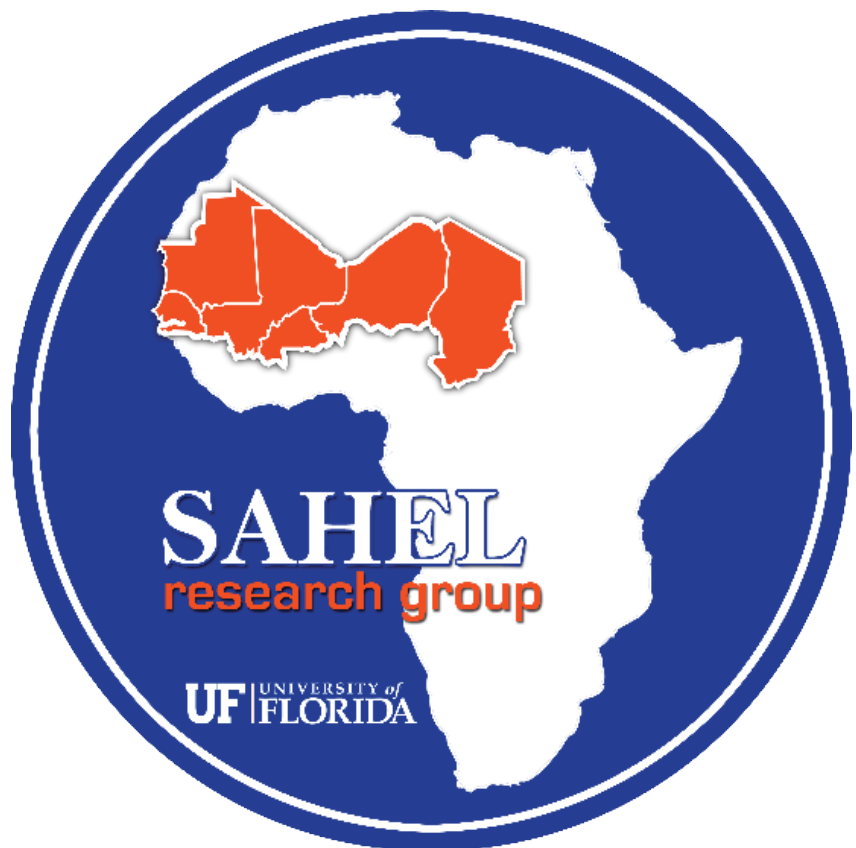


In a neighborhood on fire: 'security governance' in Niger

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The Sahel Research Group, of the University of Florida's Center for African Studies, is a collaborative effort to understand the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the countries which comprise the West African Sahel. It focuses primarily on the six Francophone countries of the region—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—but also on in developments in neighboring countries, to the north and south, whose dynamics frequently intersect with those of the Sahel. The Sahel Research Group brings together faculty and graduate students from various disciplines at the University of Florida, in collaboration with colleagues from the region.

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Paper Series: The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in the Sahel

In January 2012, Tuareg separatists launched a rebellion against the government of Mali in a bid to gain independence for the northern regions of the country. They were quickly joined by groups of Islamist militants seeking to establish control of the region, and dealing significant setbacks to the Malian military in a series of engagements. Following these defeats, on 22 March 2012 frustrated junior officers in the Malian military led a coup d'état which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré from power. Subsequently, the Islamist groups in the north were able to sideline the Tuareg separatists and take control of the provincial capitals in the northern regions of Mali—Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. The military coup in Mali and de facto partition of the country were shocking events in a particularly fragile region, and quickly captured the attention of scholars and policy-makers around the world.

While significant interest emerged regarding the Malian crisis and the unfolding events in the country, there has been relatively little discussion of the effects of the crisis and their implications for surrounding countries in the Sahel. Recognizing the lack of information available on the reverberations of the crisis in neighboring countries, the Sahel Research Group set out to write five discussion papers on the responses and reactions of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad to the events in Mali.

Fieldwork for these papers was conducted in sets of the countries by three different graduate student researchers during the summer of 2013. After conducting the initial research for these papers they were presented at the African Studies Association's 2013 Annual Meeting and revised with the additional comments of participants from the Sahel Seminar. These discussion papers were written with generous support from the Minerva Initiative Grant to the University of Florida.



A Neighborhood on Fire

In 2012-2013, the Republic of Mali was nearly destroyed in a crisis that had quickly gained the name '*guerre du Mali*' – the 'Mali War.' The Mali War was a direct consequence of the Libyan Civil War of 2011, since it was detonated by the return to Mali of armed Tuareg men who had been working in Col. Khadafi various military and paramilitary organizations. Some of those men formed an insurrectionary ethnic organization intent on 'liberating' Northern Mali (which they baptized with the name of the fossil valley Azawad), while others chose to create a jihadist armed group with the objective of transforming Mali into an 'Islamic state.' Both of these currents subsequently struck an alliance with a network of North African (mostly Algerian and Mauritanian, with a smattering of Tunisians) jihadists who had been present in the area for over a decade – and they proceeded to launch an attack on the Malian state. Mali's response was the worse that could be imagined. Not only was the army roundly beaten – leading to the cold-blooded massacre of 85 soldiers and gendarmes by Tuareg rebels at Aguelhok in January 2012 – but the state collapsed following a coup that replaced an incompetent government with inept military. While in the North the jihadists gained the upper hand over the ethnicists, the South was mired in crisis and growing anarchy. Mali soon became divided into a nascent theocratic state in the so-called Azawad and incipient statelessness in the rest of the country.

While this was happening in Mali, Southern Libya was slipping out of the control of the NATO-enthroned government of the country, despite heavy fighting in the Fezzan for much of late 2011 and early 2012. Given the brutal context of tribal infighting which developed on the Mediterranean seaboard, the tottering Libyan government could not impose order in an area of the country which had always been hard to control. Just like the Northern sections of Niger and Mali and the Southern section of Algeria, this is part of the heartland of the Sahara, an immense, forbidding, and sparsely populated area that forms an asset for mobile and unruly groups. Among those – and besides native Tuareg and Tubu communities – were "deterritorialized" North African jihadists and combines of people from all of those groups working in the drug trafficking networks that course through the Saharan on a double southwest-northeast/south-northeast axis.

Some time before all of those events, in the spring of 2009, the Nigerian security forces mounted an operation to 'root out' a violently radical Islamist movement widely known as 'Boko Haram' (i.e., 'No to secular training'). The effort soon escalated into murderous clashes occurring in several of the northeastern states of the country. Finally, in late July 2009, the police executed the main leader of the movement, firebrand preacher Muhammad Yusuf, and let photos and videos of his bullet-ridden corpse circulate on the Internet, apparently to put an end to doubts as to his death. These actions – in which uncounted bystanders lost their lives – proved to be not the end of 'Boko Haram,' but the beginning of a much more violent phase of the conflict that opposes it to the Nigerian state. In the heated ambiance, radicalized attitudes became ubiquitous and many groups with similarly autistic Islamist agendas emerged in much of the Northern states of Nigeria to fight enemies that included the state, Christians, Westerners, Sufi Muslims, and any other category of people they disapproved of.

These three crises so far have no epilogues. The one in Mali was partly resolved when the French organized a military operation to stop jihadists from invading the temptingly stateless south in January 2013. While this has removed the more pressing jihadist threat, the French

chose to let the ethnicist movement of the Tuareg rebels secure the northeastern region of Kidal as a stronghold. This ensured that Kidal would remain an ungoverned area, which dispersed groups of jihadists use now to organize new attacks in Mali – but also in neighboring Niger.¹ Moreover, both the special status given by French diplomacy to the Tuareg rebels and the bad blood left among other Northern Malian communities from their short-lived domination in 2012, contribute to maintaining simmering communal tensions in the area to date.

In Libya, government instability has only deepened on the Mediterranean seaboard, while lawlessness in the South has become chronic. In fact, the Libyan government frets that a coalition of disgruntled Tubu and pro-Khadafi armed groups might be forming there to prepare for a ‘recapture’ of the (largely vanished) state. Based on intelligence from its Saharan networks, the Nigerien government also believes that the murderous suicide attacks on Agadez and Arlit, on 23 May 2013, were orchestrated from Southern Libya. It is very likely from there, too, that came the bloody four-day terrorist seizure of the Algerian gas plant of In Amenas (at the border with Libya) earlier that year, in January.

In Northern Nigeria, the government is currently following a strategy of ‘containing’ ‘Boko Haram’ in the state of Borno, which has become its epicenter. The strategy of containment would be accompanied by a softer strategy of ‘de-radicalization,’ which, at this stage, is still at the level of a project. Containment being largely based on violent repression, the situation in Borno has become that of a war in all but name, with refugees periodically streaming into the far-eastern Nigerien region of Diffa, which borders Borno.

Thus, situated in the exact middle of Northern Mali, Southern Libya and Northern Nigeria, Niger is, now, in the eye of the cyclone – the zone of eery quiet at the center of turbulence. Hence the natural question: “Why is it that nothing happened/happens there?” And also the underlying concern that something bad might happen there in the near future. This paper is about both the question and the concern. I will first give some of the key reasons why, at this point, Niger has gone neither the way of Mali, nor that of Northern Nigeria. And following an evaluation of these reasons, I will reflect on causes for concern.

In the North: Ore and Arms

Given the many situational similarities between Niger and Mali (and also the fact that Niger borders Libya, which is not the case for Mali), many in Niger believe that the country escaped the fate of Mali more by luck than by pluck. There are important justifications for this belief, which I will revisit at the end of this section. However, it was not just luck that saved Niger from Mali’s fate in 2012: it was also some amount of pluck, but above all, a general context inherited from recent history that was very different from the one in Mali. First, there is the key difference between Northern Mali and Northern Niger that the latter harbors substantial mineral resources (uranium and coal especially) that play a critical role in Nigerien politics and policy; and second, there is the legacy of the Nigerien Tuareg rebellion of 2007-2009.

¹In Niger, this concerns one event, the Niamey prison break of June 2013. An earlier event, the abduction of two Frenchmen in January 2011, was organized from the earlier Malian bases of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Not always a curse...

Extractive resources are often seen as a 'curse' in poor countries. For instance, a widespread interpretation of Niger's Tuareg rebellions of the early 1990s and mid-2000s ties them to uranium exploitation in the northern region of the country. In this case, however, the empirical data do not support the notion. The élan of the first Tuareg rebellion came from the Azaouagh fossil valley area (region of Tahoua) – Niger's version of Mali's Azawad –, not from the Aïr, which is the area adjacent to the uranium mines; and there was no talk of uranium in that period, since the ore was only minimally exploited due to a major slump in international markets, accruing only trifling income to Niger's then sinking state revenue. The second rebellion used the uranium theme, but mostly for propaganda purposes and with some level of French involvement/manipulation. In fact, recent developments rather indicate that as far as the objectives of the Nigerien state – maintaining territorial integrity – are concerned, uranium, coal and other natural resources in the North have been a blessing, not a curse.

On appearance, both Northern Niger and Northern Mali verge on being Sahelian versions of the Bilad al-Siba, the 'ungoverned' (ungovernable?) Berber south adjoining the Bilad al-Makhzan in old Morocco. This notion too is not entirely borne by the facts. To be sure, these are vast areas (600,000 sq. km or 232,000 sq. miles for Northern Niger) with small populations (below 500,000 people in Northern Niger by 2005). While surprisingly large portions of these regions are in fact agriculturally viable – with abundant aquifers in oases and characteristic conflicts between colonizing tillers and beleaguered herders – most of them are forbidding expanses of sand desert. Typically, such environments – immense, difficult and sparsely populated – are less governed than other parts of a territory. High costs of access are a deterrent and the thin demographic densities discourage expenditures that would tend to be larger in proportion of the smallness of the population. Unless they are taken in large commercial flux, regions like this are bound to be less developed, certainly less economically vibrant, than other, more populated and more hospitable areas. Taking all of this into account, the potential Bilads al-Siba of Mali and Niger enjoyed, as it turns out, comparatively favorable conditions before the present crisis.

Both Northern Mali and Northern Niger developed successful tourist industries, to the extent that an international airport in Agadez became the only viable airport in Niger outside of Niamey. There are smaller airports in the Malian localities of Kidal and Tessalit, all also made viable by tourism. In Mali, the Niger River runs through the region, supporting, besides Tuareg and Fulani nomads, the riverine Songhay people and kindred groups with strong economic and social ties with the rest of the country. Although the heavily populated South naturally enjoyed a more vibrant economy, the North had developed a special economy of its own, which was being increasingly integrated into a Saharan commercial space dominated by Algerian and Libyan capital and goods.² This, of course, also obtained in Northern Niger. There, the development of so-called counter-season agriculture and the new uranium boom of the early

²This trade economy has been studied in the late 1980s-1990s by Emmanuel Grégoire ("Sahara Nigérien: terre d'échanges," *Autrepart*, 6, 1998, pp. 91-104; and some chapters in his *Touaregs du Niger: le destin d'un mythe*) and by the late economic anthropologist Pascal Labazée (the results of the latter's research work have been published only in working papers for ORSTOM (currently known as IRD)). Since then, it has become more complex and remains today an important component of economic conditions especially in Northern Niger. The security dimensions of this economic zone are also significant, insofar as jihadist groups, flush with ransom money, now control large parts of it. Of course, for this very reason, it has become more difficult to study it than in the early 1990s.

2000s, combined with tourism, made of the region of Agadez the most economically dynamic one in the country after Niamey. This can be measured by the fact that the city of Agadez became the second internal migration destination in the country after the capital. In the ten-year period between 1996 (end of the first rebellion) and 2007 (beginning of the second rebellion), the population of that city and of Arlit doubled or trebled depending on estimates used, while the Aïr region also became part of the newly profitable trade in onions on a year-round basis. In short, despite the odds, these two regions were no economic backwaters in their own contexts – even though, especially for the pastoral economy, they remained acutely vulnerable to climatic vagaries.

This said, both regions suffered from three underlying ills – and it is here that a real difference between Niger and Mali developed on account of the former holding lucrative natural resources in the area. First, there was a hangover from the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s, called ‘residual insecurity’ in officialese. Part of this was basically highway robbery and sporadic attacks on isolated gendarmerie posts made by disgruntled ex-rebels (a number of whom felt they did not profit by the settlements of 1995). Second, there was a development of drug trafficking, especially in Northern Mali. And third, North African jihadist groups started to settle in the area.

Both Niger and Mali treated the ‘residual insecurity’ lightly, considering it as only an annoying form of desert thuggery by restless Tuareg youths (In Mali, the peace agreements for the earlier rebellion in the 1990s also forced the army to reduce its presence in the North, which would have impeded any investment in a security policy there). The difference in attitude came with the more external problems: drug trafficking and the jihadists. For a variety of reasons – including geographical proximity with the main port of entry of the drug flows into West Africa, Guinea Bissau – the Malian state was much more deeply corrupted by the trafficking than the Nigerien. Nigerien officials were more systematically hostile to the illicit trade, not just because they profited less by it, but also because of the strong feeling that it endangered exploitation of the resources in the North. Drug trafficking was seen as a security problem because the analysis in Niger was that it was the key reason why Saharan (mostly Tuareg) banditry was not dying down fast enough. A good deal of the ‘residual insecurity’ was certainly an effort, by Saharan outlaws, to secure drugs routes against government forces. For Niger, this was unacceptable because it interfered with the safety of mining (especially in terms of transportation of personnel, supplies, and the trade economy around the mines). At the same time, Niger’s security policy, essentially geared to protect mining, had the unintended effect of discouraging jihadist groups from trying to settle in the country. This point needs some elaboration.

After losing the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, Algerian jihadists, mostly gathered in a group known as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), had tried to find a home in the Sahara, including in the northern parts of Mali, Niger and Chad.³ While Southern Algeria was its main target at the time, the GSPC found it militarily difficult to establish its base of operations there. It therefore looked for options in the Sahelian countries and Mauritania and found Mali to be the more obvious place to settle. Unlike Mauritania and Chad, it was directly adjacent to Southern Algeria, and unlike Niger, it did not have any real security infrastructure in the region. In 2004, the GSPC attempted to penetrate into Chad, and in the process, its six-

³Founded in 1998 by Hassan Hattab (with nom de guerre Abou Hamza), the GSPC became in 2006 an affiliate of Al Qaeda under the name Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (In the process, Abou Hamza lost its leadership to the current chief of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, with nom de guerre Abou Mossâab)

vehicle expedition crossed through Northern Niger, coming from Mali. This was part of a strategy to peg jihadist efforts onto the ethnic rebellions that regularly emerge among the natives of the Sahara (Tuareg and Tubu): in that specific case, the GSPC was intent on joining forces with the Mouvement pour la Justice et la Démocratie au Tchad (MDJT), a Libya-supported Tubu rebellion led by Youssef Togoïmi. The expedition was defeated by the Chadian army, but it might in fact have failed in the end anyway, just like similar efforts made during that period to enroll Niger and Mali's Tuareg rebels into a jihadist force.⁴At this stage, there were tactical collusions between jihadist and Tuareg groups, but nothing similar to the strategic convergence that will be exemplified by the foundation of Iyad ag Ghaly's Ansar Dine in Mali, in 2012.

In this fluid and simmering context, Niger had over Mali the advantage of maintaining some security infrastructure for the protection of mining interests in the North. Because of this, (1) drug trafficking exercised significantly less corrupting influence on Niger's security forces and officialdom, and (2) the jihadists found it a better option to settle in Northern Mali.

Seasoned and Rewarded

In 2007, a new Tuareg rebellion erupted in Northern Niger, this time principally in the region of Agadez – led by a Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ). Leaving the gendarmes alone, the new rebels boldly attacked the army, to whom they inflicted heavy losses in a series of surprise attacks. The shorter warfare that set in was more geographically concentrated. It was mostly confined to the Aïr area. The key difference from the 1990s was that the new rebels were more heavily armed and came with dozens of landmines, both anti-tank and anti-personnel, which they planted throughout the region and as south as Tahoua and Maradi. It is not clear where they got that weapon, with some accusing Libya and others drugs traffickers. In any case, in addition to making civilian casualties, landmines thoroughly demoralized the army, which responded much more fiercely than in the 1990s. The situation was very dangerous, because a greater militarization of the war meant it might turn into a high intensity conflict with more noncombatant casualties and greater political fallout. In the end, and unlike in the 1990s, the solution was military. Because of the landmines, the government purchased and used military helicopters capable of firing and dropping bombs, with immediate results on the ground. Soon the conflict was restricted to mountain areas, as rebels felt no longer free to range the desert and the army wanted to minimize risks of landmine blow-ups. This was essentially defeat for the rebels, and a face-saving process was organized by Libya in the summer of 2009 to end the stalemate.

The events were interpreted in the international media as a 'failure' of the peace accords of 1995-96, and Niger was at the time unfavorably compared to Mali, which was praised for having preserved the peace with the volatile and 'maligned' Tuareg. In Niger, they triggered a process of revising the position of the army in the state. Until then, the Nigerien army was seen essentially (and not without reason) as a coup d'état engine, and efforts were geared toward transforming it into an 'armée républicaine,' respectful of laws and democracy. In 2007-2009, it started to be considered by the rulers as a true defense asset. Public opinion about the war was

⁴In this regard, it must be noted that Tuareg and Tubu rebellions had an ethnic, not a religious essence, and they were also all supported by Col. Khadafi of Libya, who was opposed to the Salafi orientation of the jihadists.

not initially supportive of the government, which was divided between hardliners (following President Tandja) and diplomats (following Prime Minister Amadou). The name 'Nigeriens for Justice' taken by the rebels gave the general impression that this was not another ethnic insurgency in the Sahara, but a wholesome radical criticism of the ruling regime. In early 2008, however, the MNJ suffered a propaganda defeat when its website posted a flag of an independent Tuareg republic, and the opposition to the hardliners frayed afterward. There was no triumphalism after the war was won, but the take-home lesson for the government was that the army achieved this, thanks to equipment bought to support its actions and boost its morale. The perception of the army in government circles started to shift in measurable ways. Thus far, like many African governments, the Nigerien rulers had tended to be stingy on military expenditures, not just for fiscal reasons, but also because there was a perception of the army as a threat to their power. After 2009, military expenditures started to grow, and have not stopped doing so ever since, with every new budget increasing their portion and funding it through stable internal revenue.

This created an important difference in the response of Niger to the Libyan crisis of 2011. It has been noted that while Niger insisted on disarming returning Tuareg militia at the border, Mali let them in bag and baggage – meeting the potential danger only with the offer of a financial support plan to returnees. The difference was perhaps not so much of political will as of practicality. Niger's security forces, reinforced in their equipment, their bases in the North and their morale (including pay raises), could simply be relied to perform such a mission. Indeed, as the collapse of the Malian army in 2012 shows, these factors were essential in the performance of military duties, including a simple operation of policing such as the one entrusted to Niger's army in the dangerous fall of 2011 (the well-coordinated 'Opération Malibéro'⁵). This achievement – which, however, should not be overestimated⁶ – was clearly a result of what happened to the army following the war of 2007-2009.

In the South: Parameters of Containment

Unlike the North African jihadists and their Sahelian allies, 'Boko Haram' and the constellation of other violently radical Islamist groups around it do not appear to have international objectives. The state of Niger is therefore not a direct target of their actions. Moreover, perhaps as a result of the policy of containment followed by the Nigerian government, 'Boko Haram' has tended to remain confined in Borno state as its key turf. This regional dimension, with a strong Kanuri ethnic component, has somewhat stunted its influence through Northern Nigeria, and, by repercussion, through the Hausa-populated central section of Niger. Thus, it looks like, with regard to 'Boko Haram,' that the metaphor of the fire is an apposite one. The conflagration smolders in Borno state, but the heat is felt in decreasing degrees in neighboring parts of Northern Nigeria – up to Kano and Katsina – and Niger – especially the region of Diffa, with embers in Zinder and Maradi.

⁵This operation of the Nigerien army shows the direct links between Niger's reactivity and mining, since Opération Malibéro has later developed a strong mining protection component that synced with the operation plan of 'special forces' sent by France.

⁶In that period especially, the Nigerien army lacked the means to fully control the desert borders – which would have implied aerial equipment. It is this strategic weakness which is behind Niger's eagerness to accommodate American drones.

Measuring this by reported violent events – bombings, killings, abductions and clashes with security forces – ‘Boko Haram’ remains a purely Nigerian phenomenon. Measuring it, however, by influence, it is *also* a Nigerien phenomenon. Like any clandestine organization of this nature, ‘Boko Haram’ has active and dormant cells, and some of the latter are present on Nigerien territory, especially in the regions of Diffa, Zinder and Maradi. Besides cells, ‘Boko Haram’ has many sympathizers in Niger, who, while they do not represent a direct security threat to the state, propagandize on behalf of the movement and work therefore to spread its influence in the country. However, the ethno-regional variable has so far worked in favor of the Nigerien government’s own policy of containment, an indirect result of the efforts of the Nigerian government. In effect, it is likely as a result of these efforts that the influence of ‘Boko Haram’ remains strongest among the Kanuri of Borno state. And in Niger, the Kanuri represent a small minority group with its ethnic homeland in an isolated region over 1,300 km away from the capital. The adjacent regions of Zinder and Maradi are certainly among the most important and populated in Niger, but in the context of a centralist country, they lack the autonomy of governance which Nigerian states such as Katsina and Kano enjoy, and which has been a significant hurdle in the coordinating and organizing of a coherent federal security policy there.

Lastly, it should be noted that while historically Nigeria has always exported its radical non-violent Islamist ideologies into Niger, the violent brands of these ideologies have never successfully crossed the border. This is in part a result of the differing social and political contexts in the two countries,⁷ but also of actions taken by successive Nigerien governments, which rest on a doctrine of broadly defined containment relative to what Nigerien officialdoms often perceive as a continuous chaos in Nigeria.

Assessment

To sum up the answer to the question, “why it isn’t happening in Niger”:

In the North, Niger has escaped the build-up of jihadist forces that happened in Mali because its mining-related policing and security measures had made of Mali a better option for settlement for North African jihadists in the course of the 2000s; the MNJ war of 2007-2009 created incentives in Niger’s officialdoms to improve the working conditions of the army, and this in turn proved useful when it came to control and deter Tuareg militia returning from a collapsing Libya. Thus, the lethal convergence of jihadists and ethnicists which set upon an unkempt Malian army in early 2012 could not happen in Niger.

These are, however, circumstantial factors. If Northern Niger did not harbor valued natural resources, and if the working conditions of the army had been left as they were before 2007, it is easy to imagine that Niger would have been just another sitting duck alongside Mali for both the jihadists and the ethnicists. The Nigerien government did take actions that created a virtuous circle from its point a view – and here lies pluck –, but it did so for contingent reasons, not in view of structural reform – and here, we have luck. In other words, Niger is not significantly more robust, structurally speaking, than Mali: but it enjoyed marginally better circumstances at all the right points in time – ironically thanks to decisions, such as the one to confront militarily the MNJ in 2007, that were widely criticized at the time.

⁷These are analyzed in the final section of the paper ‘Paradoxes of Security and Fragility.’

The South presents a different picture. ‘Boko Haram,’ just as the ‘Maitatsine’ movement of the late 1970s-early 1980s, has an overriding interest in gaining some sort of supremacy in Nigeria,⁸ which makes of Niger a sideshow at best. Here too, structural social and political differences undergird the security options of the government and have thus far worked to limit the influence of Nigerian militant groups to a few perennially dormant cells and perhaps larger numbers of sympathizers. In my view, this situation can be fully understood only through a focused comparison between the Nigerien and Nigerian contexts.

In any case, Nigeriens are acutely aware that circumstances and other contingent factors have played an important role in saving their country from being another Mali. Moreover, many feel that the ‘Boko Haram’ fire may have anytime graver repercussions in Niger than has been the case so far. Such views and feelings have considerably shaped the Nigerien government’s response to the various crises in terms of setting up a ‘security policy.’ Before concluding on how exactly to characterize the situation in Niger, let us say a few words on that security policy.

‘Security Governance’

After the crisis in Mali, the phrase ‘security governance’ and the issues it implies have become fashionable throughout the region. Here, I will examine the underlying doctrine of security that informs the actions of the Nigerien government and some of the tools it has at its disposal.

In a speech on 7 April 2014 celebrating the third year of his term, President Issoufou paid tribute to the army, saying that “a democratic state must have a strong spine. That spine is its army, and more generally, its defense and security forces.” And he proceeded to announce that increased resources will be allocated to the military to “recruit, train, drill, arm the men, boost their morale, notably through higher pay rates.” He concluded on this theme by adding that “we intend to create new military bases, to distribute them adequately across our territory, so that, in the end, any enemy will know what it will cost him to attack us.” In an epilogue to the speech, Issoufou stressed the connections between ‘security’ and ‘development,’ but as the general tenor of his statements shows, the military dimension is primary in Niger’s current security policy.

As indicated in a previous section, Niger’s defense budget started to grow slowly but steadily during and after the MNJ war. In 2010, it was of 46 millions USD. It grew to 50 millions the following year. In 2012, however, following the Mali war, defense allocations jumped to 72 millions, with 37 millions more added in May 2013, to finance Niger’s participation in the French-led intervention in Northern Mali. For 2014, the defense sector is receiving about 200 millions USD – an enormous sum for a national budget of about 3,8 billions USD. This is set in a general framework where Niger has sought the support of international hegemons – France and the US – as early as 2010, and also through the passing of an anti-terrorist law in 2011 (with the attendant creation of a civilian-military ‘cellule antiterroriste’). Cooperation with the two Western powers has only deepened as a result of the French intervention in Mali and its

⁸Muhammad Marwa, the founder of ‘Maitatsine,’ was a Cameroonian from the northern town of Maroua: but Nigeria, with its large Muslim population in a vibrant urbanized setting, was a more fertile ground for his objectives than Northern Cameroon. ‘Maitatsine,’ which is today primarily known as ‘Kalo Kato’ in Niger, has dwindled to the state of an unobtrusive minority movement in the region. Yet, between 1980 and 1985, it waged a veritable war against the Nigerian state, with several risings in different places and thousands of casualties.

aftermath.

In 2012, Niger also set up an executive secretariat for a defense and security strategy in the Sahel-Sahara (SDS Sahel Niger), with the mission to coordinate security and development projects in the northern region of Agadez and the northern portions of all the southern regions (with the exception of Dosso). Unlike the defense policy, however, SDS Sahel Niger is not directly funded by the state: rather, it is a fundraising outfit, with operational resources from the state and the bulk of field budget to be fed through international cooperation. Moreover, the policy statement of the program also highlights defense and security as the primary goal, with 'development' being seen ambiguously as something that supports security and is also a consequence of security. SDS Sahel Niger has been obviously set to tap into Niger's newfound international prestige as the eye in the Sahelian cyclone, while also channeling state patronage to the country's restive areas (characteristically, SDS Sahel Niger is part of the office of the prime minister, an experienced Tuareg politician). The program is in fact only the latest element in a policy network that includes the High Authority for Peace Consolidation, an institution whose pedigree goes back to the peace accords of 1995, which is directly tied to the presidency, and which has moved from being a patronage program controlled by former Saharan rebels to being a security outfit headed by a military officer. Niger's security policy is therefore – and perhaps unsurprisingly – essentially based on variations of military force. This is shown by the growth of the defense budget (directly at the expense of education and health, which had been announced in 2011 as the top priorities of the newly-anointed PNDS government); the potentially very unpopular military alliances with France and the United States; and the ramping up of the security policy network. Moreover, the regions of Agadez and Diffa are run by military governors, which is tantamount to a low level state of emergency.

The results are difficult to assess. While two suicide attacks in Agadez and Arlit in May 2013, followed the next month by a prison break in Niamey, were setbacks for Niger's security forces, there are also some successes. The main escapee from the Niamey prison, Malian murderer and terrorist plotter Cheibani Ould Hama, was soon recaptured in the region of Kidal by French forces following Nigerien intelligence (November 2013). A Nigerien national, Beidari Moulid, was arrested in the same period after having reconnoitered potential attack targets in Niamey. In the South, reports from Nigerien security forces show an uneasy situation, where arrests have been several times made allegedly to avoid imminent attacks. As early as February 2012, 15 persons were apprehended in the region of Diffa and found in possession of artisanal grenades. Some time in 2013, a number of other alleged 'Boko Haram' affiliates (nationality undisclosed) were arrested while crossing from Mali – where they would have received training – in order to go 'lie low' in the town of Madaoua (central Niger). In February 2014, 20 men (all of Nigerian nationality according to Nigerien intelligence) were picked up after a raid organized by the 'anti-terrorist cell' of Niger's military. They were reportedly preparing to attack markets in the city of Diffa.

What all of this shows is the reemergence, in the crucibles of terrorist threat, of a Nigerien security state, which had disappeared in the period following the death of military ruler Kountché in 1987. The apparatus that is being set up appears especially strong on intelligence collection, which means an unknown degree of surveillance and monitoring that is especially felt in places like Diffa or Agadez. In short, despite official rhetoric, the government response is not based on 'security and development': rather, it is all about security, and therefore, the

strengthening of the military base of the state. In this fashion, Niger's response is no different from the one observed in the West – which goes a long way toward showing how truly of the same specie states are.

However, Niger as a country is neither France, nor the US. How then does this play out in the specific social and political context of the place?

Paradoxes of Security and Fragility

I will consider here two critical sets of structural features characterizing Niger's social and political context. On the social level: poverty and religion; and on the political level, the political system and the neoliberalized state. On both scores, I will compare Niger's situation with that of Mali and Nigeria.

With a total population of 17 million (2012), Niger is a low-income country (current GDP: 6.7 billion USD) with 59.5% of the population below the poverty line. In comparison, Mali, with a population of 14.8 million (2012), has a GDP of 10.3 billion USD and a population below the poverty line of 43.6%; and Nigeria, with a population of 168.8 million (2012), has a GDP of 262.6 billion and a population below the poverty line of 46%.⁹ Niger is much the poorer country, but Nigeria is spectacularly the more unequal – inequality being consistently a greater factor of violent instability than poverty. The difference between Niger and Mali in terms of poverty is probably due to geographic location and the differentials in population pressure, since the two countries have roughly the same levels of economic development and generally very comparable socio-economic structures. Niger is more “Sahelian” than Mali in that the bulk of its territory is situated more to the north, with therefore less croplands and precipitations. Niger has nearly 0% permanent croplands and average precipitation of 151 mm/year, against 0.1% permanent croplands in Mali and average 282 mm/year of precipitation (same figures are 3.3% of permanent croplands in Nigeria and 1150 mm/year of precipitation). In places so dependent on climate, soil conditions and natural cycles, with the bulk of the population working in agriculture (80% of the labor force in Mali and 90% in Niger), such factors have critical impacts. The geographic differences between Niger and Mali carry another important implication: the South/North divide is less marked in Niger (which is mostly a Sahelo-Saharan country in terms of ecosystems and attendant lifestyle and economy) than in Mali, where the South is in fact mostly Sudanic – corresponding more to Northern Nigeria than to Southern Niger. Again, given that these are non-industrialized countries where economic variations are closely linked with ecological resources, these are no trifling differences. Another important social indicator is the rate of urbanization, which is of only 17.8 % in Niger, against 34.9 % in Mali and 49.6% in Nigeria. What do these data tell us?

Niger is broadly speaking a mostly rural country, very poor, with moderate inequality.¹⁰ Data are similar in Mali, which is, however, marginally less rural, less poor and more unequal. Nigeria, on the other hand, is much less rural, much less poor and much more unequal. Such parameter differentials obviously will have an impact on the religious (Islamic) scene in each

⁹World Bank data.

¹⁰The Gini coefficient of Niger is in the 32.0-36.4 bracket, similar to that of moderately equal countries such as France or Canada. That of Mali is higher (more unequal at 36.5-40.0) and that of Nigeria, predictably highest in this group (45.5-49.9 bracket).

country, especially allowing for the specificities of Northern Nigeria within the Nigerian federation. Here, as elsewhere, the religious scene is livelier in urban centers than in rural areas – since the infrastructure supporting religious activities and activism (schools and preaching stages, bookstores and CD shops, mosques and *markaz*, outside connections) are more developed in cities and towns, and the leisure necessary for religious commitments is more affordable there too. There is, thus, an ipso facto argument to be made that the religious scene will be inherently more vibrant in Nigeria than in the other two places – and slightly more in Mali than in Niger. Structurally, Niger and Mali appear therefore less prone to religious agitation or fermentation than Nigeria. This does not mean that they would lack strong undercurrent of radical (and even, violently radical) Islamist opinions – but that such opinions will find here a more difficult field of expression and agitation than in Nigeria. Hence, though Niger's poverty is a fragility from a development perspective, it is not so in the context of a security policy targeting radical and violent religious movements. Of course, it should be stressed that it is not just poverty that would (paradoxically) be strengthening security, but the lower level of inequality as well.

In terms of the political system and the state, Niger and Mali are more comparable than Nigeria. Since the early 1990s, Niger and Mali have maintained a version of the French-style mixed-regime (semi-presidential) system with a stable political class. Eyes are easily caught by differences that have a superficial (but not entirely negligible) scope. After a major crisis in 1993, the Nigerien political process has gone through a series of hiccups (two military and one constitutional coups) while Mali has remained stable on that level. But in fact – hence the apparently euphemistic term 'hiccup' – there was no 'regime-change' in Niger, nor any makeover of the political class, still dominated at the time of writing (2014) by much the same figures as in the early 1990s. The real difference at this level is that the Nigerien system remained highly competitive (hence the various 'political crises'), while the Malian, after 2002, was numbed by the soft consensus adroitly created by President Toumani Touré to protect his power. Hypothetically, and in the same paradoxical way as poverty, this may be accounted as an asset for the Nigerien system. The sudden collapse of the Malian regime after the Sanogo coup of March 2012, and the bitter infighting that developed afterward, can be interpreted as a release of hostile energies that had been repressed under the decade-long 'consensus system.' In Niger, by contrast, the habit of vigorous opposition did not preclude the formation of a multi-partisan support for the government's security policy.

The real issue for Niger and Mali lies in the very weak capacities of their state. After severe retrenchment through the 1990s (but starting in the 1980s, with the early anti-state adjustment programs of the IMF), these are no longer 'developmental' states – meaning that they lack the organizational and regulatory means to initiate, develop and implement large-scale development ventures, as used to be the case in the past. This, in particular, has physically removed or impeded some critical state functions (direct administration, social services and rule of law) in remote regions. At the beginning of this paper, I insisted that Northern Mali and Niger are not, in normal times (i.e., absent Saharan rebellions) economically marginalized regions, as is tirelessly (and lazily, shall we say) claimed by study after study. But the improvement of their circumstances, which originates in the late 1980s and took a sharp turn up after 1995, does no longer result from state policy or financing, since the state has by now

deprived itself of the means of having such an impact.¹¹ Except for now-defunct tourism, the labor market tied to mining and some trade, the newer evolutions belong primarily in an unregulated private economic sector very open to all manners of trafficking, including by state agents and enemies of the state. In remote areas of the regions of Agadez and Diffa, the state has either receded, or discontinued any efforts at becoming present, except in its fiscal and policing functions – which are also the most susceptible to serious abuse.

The level of poverty is not, in this view, the ‘cause’ of trouble in these areas – which are not necessarily poorer than other parts of the countries.¹² Rather, the fundamental political weakness comes from the nature of the state post-structural-adjustment, which, from the point of view of the populace, lowers its capacities for ‘good’ (development projects, social services) while increasing its abilities at being ‘bad’ (predation and corruption). Inasmuch as this impairs the social contract and undermines the legitimacy of the state, this is arguably the most serious structural weakness in both Mali and Niger. It also leads us to question the ability of Niger to pursue – as its leadership aims to – a strategy of ‘development’ as a response to security dilemmas. However, on this score, the country has been receiving increased development aid and investment, with the security crisis in the Sahel being a major factor of international solicitude.

Conclusion

Circumstantial and more structural factors worked – sometimes in unexpected ways – to save Niger from the combustion in the Sahel. Although the situation remains dangerous, since Southern Libya remains chaotic, Northeastern Nigeria at war, and Northeastern Mali exposed, the prospects for security in Niger appear to have considerably improved since the outbreak of the Malian crisis. The government has been given the time to build a response that is broadly supported in public opinion, and the international climate is favorable to its actions – which has not been the case in the past with regard to fights with Tuareg rebels. Terrorist hits and attacks remain highly possible, but an extension of the ‘fires’ of the Sahelien neighborhood into the Nigerien house is highly unlikely.

¹¹In the 1980s, the Nigerien state – which still had some developmental capacities – used COPRO-Niger (a state trading organization wiped out since by structural adjustment) to foster the development of trade economy especially among the Arab communities of the region of Agadez. Counter-season agriculture, now a mainstay of the region’s rural economy, was initiated by the Second Republic’s ruler Ali Saibou (1987-1991).

¹²Allowance must be always made, of course, for the dependence of these countries to evolutions in the ecosystem, as well as to the notion that those in their northern areas are more vulnerable than those in the South: but even here, it is characteristic that the “Niger famine” of 2005 was much more devastating in the regions of Maradi and Zinder than in the North, given the complexity of factors involved in such crises.