

## **Announcing the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies of the Sahel***

In a May 18, 2017, article, "The U.S. is waging a massive shadow war in Africa," journalist Nick Turse reveals that special operators are carrying out nearly 100 missions at any given time in Africa. In 2006, just 1 percent of all U.S. commandos deployed overseas were in Africa. In 2010, it was 3 percent. By 2016, that number had jumped to more than 17 percent. There are now more special operations personnel devoted to Africa than anywhere except the Middle East: 1,700 people spread out across 20 countries dedicated to assisting the U.S. military's African partners in their fight against terrorism. "Africa's challenges could create a threat that surpasses the threat that the U.S. currently faces from conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria" (Turse, 2017).

People of the Sahara-Sahel have been active participants in the history of the region and beyond, not mere victims of foreign interventions.

In the long history of the region, the US' Pan Sahel Initiative is not as atypical as it might seem. The Sahel was important enough for the Roman Emperor Hadrian (76-138 CE) to build a wall across the region. Seven hundred fifty kilometers or more long, the *Fossatum Africae* (the African ditch) was built between his two visits of 122 and 128 as a measure to both defend borders and manage the empire's interests in North Africa.

In 711, the Berbers of North Africa, as part of the Islamic expansion, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and invaded Spain and Portugal. The Almoravids (a Berber movement) did the same in mid-eleventh century. Meanwhile, the Fatimids conquered Egypt in 969 and transformed it into an Islamic country independent from the caliphate of Bagdad. In the long history of the region, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other Jihadist movements in the region are not as atypical as it might seem.

In her book, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*, Rosa Brooks (2016) asserts that the state did not create the military. On the contrary, the military created the state as warlords looked for sophisticated ways to increase power and wealth. Such agency could not emerge in contemporary Africa as borders are the result of European rivalries and

compromises. Therefore, does it make sense to talk about failed and failing states in Africa when the states never existed *de facto* as opposed to *de jure*? On the contrary, it does make sense to see the African “state” as a semi-fiction useful for international negotiations, treaties and voting at the UN to manage an international community that, itself, functions like a failed state.

Given that the securitization of Africa’s space and population is mainly based on the perception and perspective of the West, we need to reframe the rhetoric about the Sahel. That is the rationale for the International Consortium for Geopolitical Studies of the Sahel (the Sahel Consortium) to launch the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies of the Sahel*.

The potential audience includes academics, researchers and policy makers interested in Africa and the Sahel. The audience of the Sahel Consortium is global and growing. Statistics show that in the Americas, readers of the Sahel Consortium’s website are mostly from the US, Canada and Brazil; in Europe, mostly from France, UK, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands; in Africa, mostly from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and Kenya; and in the Mideast and Asia, mostly from Israel, India and Pakistan. This journal will take this success to the next level. Stay tuned.

Marcel Kitissou

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