

Annual conference of the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO)
Venice, Ca' Foscari University, January 16-17, 2015

CALL FOR PAPERS

Panel n. 3, title:

**THE ARAB WORLD AND SAHELIAN AFRICA:
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AN EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP**

Panel organisers:

Giorgio Musso (Ph.D), University of Genova, giomusso@gmail.com

Raphaelle Chevrillon-Guibert (Ph.D), University of Auvergne, raphaelleguibert@gmail.com

Paper proposal must be submitted directly to the panel organizers (without addressing them to SeSaMO secretariat) and must include a short CV of the applicant and an abstract of max 400 words.

*Deadline for abstract submission: **August 24, 2014***

*Acceptance/rejection of paper proposals: **September 7, 2014***

*Working languages: **English and French***

Panel description

In this panel, we propose to analyse the multiple links existing between the Arab World and Sahelian Africa, with special attention to economic resource issues. Taking a political economy approach and focusing on the contemporary period, the panel aims to better understand *which* resources (in a broad sense) constitute the core of these relationships, in addition to how they are shared, controlled and managed. We also invite scholars who wish to examine actors who are at the heart of the resource accumulation processes and detail their development and evolution over time.

The term “resources”, for what concerns this panel, should be meant in the broadest meaning. It relates to the control, management and sale of natural resources (water, oil, mineral rents, etc.) as well as to a wider range of topics such as trade, remittances and foreign investment just to name but a few. As an example, analyses focusing on trade activities that historically constitute the core of the relations between the Sahelian Africa and Arab world as the cattle trade or the trade of manufactured goods will be greatly appreciated.

It is also possible to examine the development of economic relations between the Arab world and Sahelian Africa by crossing questions related to different types of resources and to new economic competitors. Contributions that will analyse the impact of the rise of new global actors – particularly China and the other Asian emerging powers – on the reorganization of economic relations between the Sahelian countries and the Arab-Muslim world, but also inside local societies, could be very relevant.

The existence of trans-Saharan long-distance trade links, pilgrimage routes connecting Sub-Saharan Africa with the Arabian Peninsula, the expeditions of explorers, conquerors and missionaries, give testimony to the strong and long-standing relationship that has been forged between the Sahel and the Arab-Muslim world.

Far from being anecdotal, these links historically unfolded in various political spaces and were central to the state-formation processes in the region. The famous "Forty Day Road" linking Darfur with southern Egypt is a prime example in this regard. It played a key role in the formation and development of the Darfur Sultanate, whose prosperity was built on the control of the trans-Saharan caravan trade.

Today, these links remain at the heart of multiple sociocultural, economic and political dynamics, which significantly affect political formations in the region.

The recent political upheaval in the Arab world, commonly referred to as the "Arab Spring", shows that several processes were at play below an apparently "frozen" political surface. Many of the issues driving change (labour migration, the spread of satellite media and the internet, civil and religious activism, the rise of new economic actors, etc.) had a clear regional and, sometimes, transnational character which needs to be investigated. In this perspective, the Sahel has been one of the most affected regions The events in North Africa and the Middle East . Most of the interest and attention of researchers and policy makers in this regard has been focused on the security aspect of transnational relations, only marginally addressing the other aspects.

Strategic and security issues are important and should be adequately addressed. However, it is our intention to avoid the obsession with security that has characterized the literature, albeit non-academic, in this domain, since other relevant dynamics that link the Arab world to the Sahel tend to be overshadowed by security issues.

By studying these relationships through a broader lens, our panel aims to provide an alternative perspective on the relations between Sahelian Africa and the Arab world, placing them in a wider historical and geopolitical context in order to convey their complexity.

The panel wishes to understand both the continuities and breaks in the relations between the Arab world and Sahelian Africa at different levels of observation and analysis (local, national, international, regional, transnational, etc.). Our panel therefore invites contributions assuming a dynamic perspective on the connections between the micro, meso and macro levels in which actors operate and interact with each other. Papers analysing how states and societies shape each other through the control and management of resources will be particularly welcome. We suggest contributors to frame their study in a historical perspective, although we expect papers to be centred on the contemporary period.

The changing nature of borders, the emergence and decline of transnational actors, the transformation of power relations will be central to our analysis, especially as we consider an area widely regarded as peripheral to both the Arab and "black" Africa.

We believe that is precisely the liminal nature of the Sahel that makes it central to multiple dynamics of connection, exchange and conflict. However, because of their geographic location at the periphery of the Arab-Muslim world, the Sahelian countries – which nevertheless share many characteristics of the core countries of the Arab world – are usually excluded from analyses on the transformations of the area. In light of how porous both the physical and conceptual borders of North African and Sahelian countries are, this panel will be also an opportunity for a reflection on the established research patterns covering the Arab-Muslim world. This may open new avenues of research, based on a broader understanding of the processes at work in the Arab-Muslim world.

This panel therefore aims to bring together studies dealing with economic resources which are at the heart of relations between Sahelian Africa and the Arab world.

Applicants are invited to use a political economy approach focused on multiple scale levels. However, contributions tackling the research object from other disciplinary fields will be appreciated and evaluated. The use of sources resulting from fieldwork and empirical analysis will be a key criterion for the evaluation of proposals.

Selected authors will be invited to participate to a special issue that will be proposed to an academic journal covering the Arab-Muslim world, such as the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* or the *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, or to an African studies journals such as *The Journal of Modern African Studies* or *Politique africaine*.