

## ***Geographies of the Sahara: new research challenges and renewed methods***

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The Sahara is an area that has long attracted the curiosity of scientists in general and geographers and cartographers in particular, both from the point of view of human geography and physical geography. The world's largest desert has fascinated many outside observers due to its people's ability to live in such a constrained environment, at the limit of habitability. Moreover, Saharan environments and landscapes offer traces inherited from the past and incomparable forms of continuity. In the long term, the evolutionary trajectory of the Sahara is in line with geohistorical constants. One of the clearest of these is undoubtedly the mobility of populations, often considered in the light of the constraints linked to the aridity and mineral nature of the landscapes. Circulation is crucial because the Saharans have never relied solely on the resources of the desert to continue living there.

Focusing too much on invariances and survivals could lead to neglecting the plural and above all very dynamic nature of Saharan geographical realities. From every point of view, there is a continuous recomposition of environments, landscapes and populations, as well as of their agropastoral and extractive activities, conflicts, the management of mobility by States and the governance of these territories on the borders of States, etc. The Sahara thus clearly appears as an area to be studied in itself and in continuity with its Sahelian and Mediterranean shores, for what it brings to the reading of the past (paleoenvironments and climatic variations or long-distance commercial mobility systems, for example), but also to understand the evolution of our contemporary world through one of its emblematic margins.

Nevertheless, it is also one of the most difficult regions in the world for scientists to access, partly due to factors that lead to the richness of the scientific questions mentioned above: climate and environmental conditions that involve complex logistics, insecurities and geopolitical conflicts, administrative restrictions on foreign researchers from travelling to these regions considered to be at risk. Despite all these difficulties, geographical research on the Sahara remains dynamic. A desert space often considered as "empty", the Sahara offers strong and constantly renewed problems and issues: desertification, resource management and gold rush, migration and smuggling, border issues, etc.

In order to continue to carry out research on the Sahara, the 'traditional' empirical methods (in particular the field survey) have necessarily had to be adapted. Some of these methods are already functional, while others have yet to be initiated or invented. New combinations of sources and analyses can be used to compensate for the absence of direct analysis in the field and even to develop innovative approaches. The careful rereading of travel and exploration accounts, the analysis of freely available, high-resolution satellite imagery and artificial intelligence, indirect survey devices, work based on filmed images and social networks, etc. are all elements of methodological innovation that renew the analysis of Saharan geographies.

In the age of the Anthropocene, what can inhabiting, exploiting and circulating on the margins of the ecumene still teach us today? This issue thus proposes to consider Saharan geographies in a very broad and reflexive way, both from a spatial point of view (from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea) and from a thematic point of view (urban, rural, geopolitical, socio-anthropological, economic, environmental, etc.), as well as from the temporalities of analysis: contemporary as well as medium/long term by integrating geohistorical and geoarchaeological aspects. Other disciplines that are interested in the spatial and environmental dimension or that mobilise geographical approaches are also encouraged to participate in this transdisciplinary issue. Young researchers are particularly invited to present their approaches, while experienced researchers are invited to report on the evolution of research themes and conditions in the Sahara.

Three axes are proposed: **memories, mutations, marginalities and Saharan centralities**. The proposals can thus, on the one hand, consider Saharan geographies from the memory of landscapes and populations, highlighting constants, forms of continuity and resilience, and slow or abrupt evolutions over the long term; on the other hand, the contributions can emphasise current mutations, emergences and dynamics, the lines and points of tension, tipping points and bifurcation. Finally, other proposals may articulate the ambivalence of the analyses, depending on whether they consider the Sahara as a national or global periphery or whether they adopt a gaze centred on Saharan issues in order to take account of more global perspectives. We expect **a title and an abstract** (2000 characters maximum) **by September 10, 2022**, and a return of the texts by December 20, 2022. The three languages of publication are **French, English and Spanish**. It is envisaged that a seminar will be organised during the editorial process.

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