

Programme Name: Environment and Human Behaviour

Project Title: Indigenous Peoples, Environmental Change and Tourism in Extreme Environments

Award No: RES-221-25-0027

Award Holder(s): Dr. Jeremy H Keenan

Period of Report: 01.01.2003 to 31.12.2003

Institution(s): University of East Anglia

Total ESRC Award: £39,978

Total co-funding of Award from outside ESRC (do not include HEFCE or University contributions):
n/a

Aims of Research:

To identify new directions, theories and methods in environmental social science research, with specific regard to the behavioural responses of indigenous / threatened peoples in extreme environments to: (1) extreme climatic variability; (2) resource management; (3) conflicting tourism development strategies.

To demonstrate: (1) the essential importance of an interdisciplinary approach to environmental social science research; and (2) that the environment is perceived by indigenous people as a socio-cultural and not simply a physical entity.

To demonstrate (with specific reference to the Sahara/Tuareg case study) the policy, business, and international relevance of environmental social science research within the specific contexts of sustainability, resource management, tourism development strategies, primary commodity extraction (oil/gas and minerals), population movement and (re)settlement (e.g. UNHCR, WFP, WHO), international development/aid strategies (e.g. UNDP, UNICEF, IFAD, FAO, etc) and regional destabilisation and insecurity.

To ascertain, in regard to the case study region (Sahara-Sahel), the existing evidence for climatic change and/or extreme climatic variations.

To provide an assessment of the implications of pending international indigenous rights legislation for current and future development strategies in such environments.

Methods of Research

Library-based Reviews of the considerable body of research data on these subjects, combined with field research in the Tuareg regions of the Sahara-Sahel. This field work to be undertaken largely through the long established and recognised method of participant observation, combined with meeting and interviews with key agencies in the region.

Confirmation Statement:

I hereby confirm that the research has been conducted as anticipated in the initial contract.

Highlights of the Research and Important Findings:

There are insufficient meteorological records to suggest that the Sahara-Sahel is experiencing climatic change as distinct from extreme variations within a medium-term norm. (Brooks, 2004). While people of the Sahara-Sahel are accustomed to periods of extreme drought, there is little to suggest that they

are exercised by largely hypothetical question of possible climatic change. This is because they have far more serious and urgent problems to contend with.

For the indigenous people of this region, as in many other parts of the world, the environment is not perceived solely as a physical entity, but also as a socio-cultural entity. This is rarely understood by most external agencies, including government and many 'aid' and tourism-associated agencies.

There is increasing concern amongst a small but growing number of the indigenous population of the C. Sahara (Tuareg) that tourism is likely to lead to an environmental catastrophe (especially to their cultural heritage). These people have become increasingly organised and vociferous in their demands for controls over '*tourisme sauvage*' and for more environmentally sustainable forms of tourism.

This research has examined the actions and strategies of these 'environmentalists' in their increasingly 'political' struggle against the pressure for mass tourism and '*tourisme sauvage*'. However, their major struggle has been against government agencies, which have actively opposed their efforts for what at first appeared to be seemingly quite irrational reasons.

After three months of this research project, the environmentalists appeared to be well on their way to winning their case. Their successes were short-lived, however, being interrupted by the kidnapping of 32 European hostages by 'Islamic militants'. By the time the hostages were liberated six months later, Saharan tourism had diminished, with severe consequences for the livelihoods of many local people.

The hostage crisis put any further moves to develop more sustainable forms of tourism on hold. It also resulted in a growing perception amongst local people that the hostage crisis had been organised by government elements trying to create a 'terrorist situation' in the Sahara and hence secure US and other external military assistance. As this perception became more widespread, government agencies (including security forces) began harassing those 'environmentalists' who had brought the central government's attention to widespread local government corruption and 'bad governance'. The more 'environmentalists' tried to bring their case (now including illegal harassment) to the attention of government ministers and the President, the greater their harassment at the hands of local government agencies. Unable to understand the rationale for this government action, the environmentalists undertook their own research and discovered that a network of individuals in the top echelons of local/regional government were not only related to some of the most notorious Saharan bandits but were actively involved in widespread smuggling (narcotics, arms, etc). This, along with the central government's involvement in orchestrating the hostage crisis, was perceived by the environmentalists as the reason why government agencies have consistently opposed their proposed reforms and demands for good governance. Attempts to draw this state of affairs to the country's President appear to have failed. The entire 'dossier' has now been presented to certain international agencies, including the International Crisis Group, which is likely to declare the Saharan regions of S. Algeria, Niger and Mali as an 'international crisis zone'.

The case study is typical of what is happening in many of the world's more politically marginalized regions where local people become concerned by the degradation of their environment by external agencies. Attempts to introduce better governance, better resource management and more sustainable development policies tend to run counter to these external interests which are usually allied to state and/or other exercisers of power.

Based on several years of detailed research, this study well illustrates how the environment, in its wider meaning, is at the core of many conflicts, especially in regions which are at or beyond the margins of the state. Such regions cover approximately 15% of the globe's land surface. It also enhances our empirical and theoretical understanding of key issues in the debates on postcolonialism, sustainable development, tourism, globalisation, marginalisation-exclusion, indigenous rights, weak/failed states and, most especially, the new imperial order. It also highlights how resistance to bad governance, resource exploitation, etc., invariably becomes articulated through environmental discourse.

Changes to Original Award: None.

Research Staff: None

Publications emanating from the project:

by Jeremy Keenan:

- 2003 The Lesser Gods of the Sahara. Social Change and Contested Terrain amongst the Tuareg of Algeria. Special Issue of *Journal of North African Studies*. Vol. 8 numbers 3-4, Autumn-Winter 2003. Also published as book: *The Lesser Gods of the Sahara. Social Change and Contested Terrain amongst the Tuareg of Algeria*. Frank Cass (2003) and Routledge (2004).
- 2003 'Contested Terrain. Tourism, environment and security in Algeria's extreme south.' In *Journal of North African Studies* (Special Issue), Vol. 8 numbers 3-4, 226-265.
- 2003 'Indigenous rights and a future politic amongst Algeria's Tuareg after forty years of independence'. In *Journal of North African Studies*. (Special Issue), Vol. 8 numbers 3-4, pp. 1-26.
- 2003 'The last nomads. Nomadism amongst the Tuareg of Ahaggar (Algerian Sahara)'. In *Journal of North African Studies* (Special Issue), Vol. 8 numbers 3-4, 163-192.
- 2004 'Tourism, development and conservation: a Saharan perspective'. In Mattingly, D. J., McLaren, S., Savage, E., al-Fasatwi, Y., and Gadgood, K. *Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage of the Libyan Desert: Proceedings of a Conference held in Libya. 14-21 December 2002*. Society for Libyan Studies, London.

Conference/Workshop papers (2003):

- 2003 'Geopolitics of the destruction and conservation of Saharan Rock-Art: the price of patrimony'. Paper presented at Workshop on Practices in Rock-Art Research, Cambridge Rock-Art Group (CR-AG), Dept. of Archaeology, Cambridge. 3rd May 2003.
- 2003 'Damage, looting and conservation of Saharan rock art: changing notions of heritage'. Research seminar, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. 4th June 2003.
- 2003 'The Tuareg of the Sahara: managing crises and insecurity'. Research seminar. Dept of Social Anthropology (West Africa seminar). UCL. Oct 17. 2003.
- 2003 'Bad lands and borderlands: the insecurity of Central Saharan frontiers'. Paper delivered at 46th Annual meeting *African Studies Association*, Boston, Mass. October 30 – November 2, 2003.
- 2003 'Crises and insecurity in the Sahara: indigenous perceptions of America's War on Terror'. Paper delivered at Middle East Studies Centre, Fordham University, New York and Dept. Social Anthropology, University of Vermont, USA, November 2003.

Books in preparation:

Capitalism and the Wide Open Spaces: Nomads, Narcotics, Islam and the New Imperial Order. (Pluto Press). (2004-5)

Looting the Sahara: the material, intellectual and social implications of the destruction of cultural heritage. (provisionally 2005)

Papers in international refereed journals (in preparation and forthcoming):

‘The Social and Political Ecology of Rock-Art: the destruction and conservation of Saharan rock-art and associated cultural heritage’. *American Journal of Archaeology*.

‘The Lesser Gods Revisited’. *Public Archaeology*.

‘Who stole the cattle? Henri Lhote and the theft of Saharan rock-art’. *Antiquity*.

‘Smuggling, banditry and the destabilisation of Saharan-Sahel border zones’. *African Affairs. The Journal of the Royal African Society*.

‘US imperialist interests in Saharan and Sahelian Africa’. *African Affairs. The Journal of the Royal African Society*.

Future conference papers, etc.

A international conference on ‘The Sahara: Past, Present and Future’ (working title) is being held at UEA in June (Social Science Week) 2004. A major paper, covering most of the findings of this research project will be presented. Papers are to be published in a Special Issue (edited by Dr. Jeremy Keenan) of the *Journal of North African Studies* (mid-2005),

Two Papers are being given at the conference on: ‘Trees, Rain and Politics in Africa. The dynamics and politics of climatic and environmental change’, being held at Oxford University 29 Sept.-1 Oct, 2004.

Publications by Dr Nick Brooks

2004 ‘Drought in the African Sahel: variability, change and agency’. (forthcoming. *Journal* to be confirmed)

Engagement with potential Research Users (outside the academic community):

Specific reports have been submitted to the Copenhagen-based International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs.

A report is being prepared for the ICG (International Crisis Group) in Brussels.

Members of the FCO and DFID, who are alarmingly ill-informed on this part of the world, are being invited to the Conference being held at UEA in June 2004.

Contribution to Programme

This research project stands slightly apart from most other contributions to the Programme in that it focuses on the world’s marginal areas, the more peripheral parts of what used to be referred to as the

Third World. These areas cover approximately 15% of the world land mass (excluding Antarctica), are fairly extreme environmental regions (hot deserts, mountains rain forests, etc.). The case study on which most of this research is based highlights a number of important issues. One is that the concept of the environment is seen rather differently by the peoples of these regions than by most external agents. Secondly, these regions are mostly politically marginalized or conflict zones in which demands for such things as 'democracy', 'indigenous rights', better governance etc., often focus on environmental issues, so that such demands are often framed within the environment discourse. Because the peoples of these areas generally have to contend with more immediate and pressing issues, relating to their survival, questions relating to the possibility of climatic change are often of little or no concern to them. Their ranking of 'climatic change' as one of the agents that may turn their world upside down is low.

The parts of the world described in this research tend to be those that have become widely sought after by international tourism agencies, particularly those seeking 'adventure tourism'. Most of these regions welcome tourism, as it is an important means of livelihood. However, it is also seen as posing major threats to their 'environment' and 'way of life'. Perhaps even more alarming is that tourist development in such regions is invariably closely associated with those same agencies, notably state and commercial elements, which are at the heart of the people's marginalisation and other 'grievances'. In short, sustainable development in such regions, especially in the form of tourism, is not merely an 'environmental' issues, but often of a highly political nature. This is rarely understood by elements of the 'travel-tourism' industry, nor the agencies with which the industry is usually associated.

It has been my view that the programme has been very UK-centric. That is understandable and not necessarily a bad thing. This contribution will hopefully draw attention to the fact that the environment is 'global' and that the issues raised in this project cover many millions of people across a large part of the world's landmass. Given the nature of the new imperial order, and especially as it is unfolding in the region focused on by this case study, it is difficult to make recommendations other than to continually focus attention on what is happening in these areas. In the case of this particular case study, the research has led to the region becoming designated as an 'international crisis zone'.

Detailed Progress:

The project effectively began and ended on time, with a number of publications already in press. A more detailed report (c. 5000 words) will be presented to the ESRC before end March.

Two reports have been presented at the June and December workshops.

The most significant recent development has been the further deterioration of the political situation in the case study region (C. Sahara and Sahel). While the cause of this deterioration is rooted in the determination of local people to take control of the safeguarding their environment, it has expanded to cover wider political issues, including what local people now perceive as the 'invasion' of their lands by the US military. At the time of writing this report (30.01.04), the original group of 'environmentalists', regarded in the absence of any formal democratic institutions as the legitimate representatives of the 'people', have decided to press the ICG in Brussels to declare the entire region an 'international crisis zone'. The ICG's report will be based on this research.

(In re-reading this report at the end of February 2004, it should be noted that the situation described in this report is rapidly deteriorating further.)

No difficulties have been encountered in staffing, access, data analysis, etc.

No changes have been introduced in the research objectives or methodology.

The original timetable has been met.