

Santander Travel Award,
Moudwe Daga,
PhD candidate, Politics and International Relations

Thanks to the support of the Santander Travel Award, I had the opportunity to gather evidence for my doctoral thesis through a fieldwork, which I conducted in Chad. I arrived in Chad on March 25th, 2018 with the aim of having informal discussions with ordinary citizens in order to gather first-hand information, and to reflect their ideas and understanding of statehood.

My thesis engages with the capacity of the state in Chad to project authority, by establishing itself in the mind of its citizens. It does so by exploring a question that has now grown central to the scholarship on the state in Africa, which is how do African states with limited institutional capacity and in ethnically plural societies expand their authority? The importance of this question reflects the idea that the stability of the government, and its ability to integrate societies, is a matter of whether the state can project authority over the territory under its control. Unlike much of the literature on the African state, concerned with the role of the elites and their interests in consolidating state authority, my research builds on an innovative approach of understanding state authority as a construction from below, fed by the feelings and emotions of ordinary citizens. This methodological stance implies on me choosing data collection techniques that would ensure my direct contact with citizens living in Chad, hence the reason for my fieldwork. Practically on the field, this research is all about discussing people's subjectivity. In other words, my research builds on data which would allow me to seize Chadians' emotions, perceptions, sense of esteem, apprehensions ..., about their state and their everyday interactions among themselves.

While in Chad, I had the opportunity to travel between the cities of Ndjamena (the capital), Doba (South) and Abeche (East-North). I was able to conduct around 8 focus-groups involving between 40-50 participants. My focus-groups were with students that I randomly recruited across the campus, young activists and with young men locally known as 'clandomen' (informal workers whose activities consist in offering public transportation on their own motorbikes). In rural areas, my respondents were village elders, tanners and local artisans. I then completed my fieldwork with a series of informal interviews with scholars at the University of Abeche and the University of Doba.

The major challenge to my research was the travelling distance between my different sites. The traveling distance between Abeche and N'Djamena is 1,000km, and around 600km from N'Djamena to Doba. While public transportation in Chad is limited to bus services, this means that it takes at least 12 hours to go from Ndjamena to Abeche.

However, the data collected through the field trip and their interpretation helped me refine the initial arguments and the direction of my doctoral thesis. Subsequently, the analysis of the data has been the central component of my presentation at the biennial Conference of the African Studies Association UK, held at the University of Birmingham, from 11 to 13 September 2018.

I am much grateful for the college support through the Santander Travel Award. It has brought a meaningful impact on the course of my doctoral formation.

The following are two random pictures during my road trip between Ndjamena and Abeche, 8 May 2018.

