

The 5th Francophonie Sports and Arts Festival: Niamey, Niger Hosts a Global Community

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Abstract: This paper explores transnational and local cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the 5th Jeux de la Francophonie (“Francophonie Games” or “Francophonie Sports and Arts Festival”) held in Niamey, Niger in December 2005. The Jeux were designed to promote peace, solidarity, and cultural exchange through sports and the arts. This paper focuses on the kinds of discourses that were represented and celebrated in the social and political arena of the Jeux. It aims to contribute to the discussion of (1) the politics of Francophonie concept, (2) the negotiation of local and global politics in the context of major sports and arts events, and (3) the representation of local, national, and global politics in public ceremonies.

The Francophonie Community Seeks Solidarity through the Universal Languages of Sports and Arts

This paper explores transnational and local cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the 5th Jeux de la Francophonie (“Francophonie Games” or “Francophonie Sports and Arts Festival”) held in Niamey, Niger in December 2005.¹ Approximately 2,500 athletes and artists, and hundreds of their coaches representing 44 member nations of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) competed in seven sports (track and field, basketball, boxing, soccer, judo, African wrestling, and table tennis) and seven arts (singing, oral storytelling, literature, dancing, painting, photography, and sculpture). While all participants in the Jeux reside in member nations of the OIF, choices of athletes and artists were based on the excellence of their performance and not on French literacy. Roughly 2,000 foreign nationals also attended as supporters.

The Jeux produced collective exhilaration. This extravagant spectacle of global Francophonie, Nigerien nationalism, and ethnic diversity enabled participants to celebrate and examine their fluid transnational, national, and local identities. In this time of culture wars, misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians, growing divisions within France (exposed dramatically in the massive protests staged largely by African immigrants in fall 2005), hot wars, and the so-called “global war on terror,” the Jeux offers a fantastic idea: we can work toward peace, unity, and global understanding through sports and the arts—“the two universal

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v10/v10i2-3a6.pdf>

languages” (CIJF 2006). Several important sub-themes were also expressed throughout the Jeux, namely: a vision of universal humanity with generous hospitality offered equally to all people, the creative blending of tradition and modernity, and gender equity. These ideals were expressed through sports, but even more directly through the arts and grand spectacles. Indeed, the inclusion of arts and sports in equal measure distinguishes the Jeux from analogous events such as the Olympics and the British Commonwealth Games.

The core agenda of building Francophonie solidarity through sports and the arts created a distinctive ethos for the Jeux. Planners, participants, and audiences sought creative synergy between competition and cultural exchange. While world-class athletes vied for hundreds of gold, silver, and bronze medals and were monitored by anti-doping officials, winning was not everything. For example, as the two leading women in the marathon—Céline Comerais and Elena Fetizon, both of France—ran down the home stretch, they locked arms to cross the finish line simultaneously. Furthermore, although some artists were “in it to win it,” the arts lend themselves better to cultural dialogue than to competition and ranking. Many artists avidly discussed their work with each other. Audiences appreciated non-medal winners’ talents as much as—and in many cases more than—medal winners’ skills.

This paper focuses on the kinds of discourses that were represented and celebrated in the social and political arena of the Jeux. It aims to contribute to the discussion of (1) the politics of Francophonie concept, (2) the negotiation of local and global politics in the context of major sports and arts events, and (3) the representation of local, national, and global politics in public ceremonies. Some consider Francophonie as an exemplary form of solidarity; others see it as a symbol of conscious or unconscious neocolonialism. This paper analyzes how President Mamadou Tandja and political leaders in Niger used the Jeux to define Niger as a pillar of global Francophonie and also to represent and reinvent a Nigerien national identity of pride that would contrast with images of Niger as a country of underdevelopment and famine. The ways by which the Nigerien state incorporated and transformed different local traditions in the opening and closing ceremonies as well as in the introduction of West African wrestling—Niger’s national sport—offer the most revealing examples of how the central themes of the Jeux were negotiated through global, national, and local articulations. The paper also highlights the diverse ways that Nigerien citizens defined, presented, and perceived themselves vis-à-vis the strategic aims of international Francophonie and the Nigerien state.

The paper draws primarily from 137 structured interviews—98 in Hausa and 39 in French—including 127 with Nigeriens and ten with foreigners of six nations, conducted during two visits to Niamey: one of six weeks from May to July 2005 investigating preparations, and one of four weeks in December 2005 and January 2006 attending the 12-day Jeux and considering its immediate aftermath. Although I did not use random sampling techniques, several periods of fieldwork in Niamey since 1988 informed my decisions and allowed me to select a reasonably representative sample. The paper also relies on long discussions with the leading organizers, informal conversations with dozens of international visitors, and participant observation in six street corner conversation groups—the most important institution of public culture in Niamey (Youngstedt 2004). In addition, I monitored state and private media coverage before, during, and after the Jeux.

The African Impetus for Global Francophonie

In an unusual twist reflecting the unpredictability of flows of culture in modernity, Presidents Hamani Diori of Niger, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, and Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, acting together in 1960, were the first to propose the establishment of a formal institution to consolidate and promote international Francophonie cultural and linguistic identity, solidarity, dialogue, and cooperation among newly independent nations wishing to pursue continuing relations with France. The Francophonie movement was formally institutionalized by 21 signatory nations who established the Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique (ACCT) at a meeting held in March 1970 in Niamey led by Diori, Bourguiba, Senghor, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Kampuchea. In 1998, the organization adopted the name Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), and the motto “Egalité, Complementarité, Solidarité.” Today the 56 member nations of the OIF pursue four key objectives: “(1) the promotion of the French language and cultural and linguistic diversity [including ‘the elimination of illiteracy in national languages’]; (2) the promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights; (3) the support of education, training, higher education, and research; and (4) the development of co-operation to the service of durable development and solidarity” (OIF 2006).

The Comité International des Jeux de la Francophonie (CIJF) is charged to address each of these missions through organizing the Jeux every four years in collaboration with the host nation. The CIJF is explicitly devoted to building a “multilateral and interdependent Francophonie” emphasizing “North-South co-operation” (CIJF 2006). It has committed to holding at least every other Jeux in the “South” in order to show that poor countries can organize “an event of scale whereas the near total of the international competitions proceed in the affluent countries” and to allow “participants to discover ways of life distant from their own culture” (CIJF 2006). Through five specific objectives, the CIJF hopes to leave a legacy of sustainable development through sports and arts for the organizing country—especially its youth—by working: “(1) to better structure national federations with the support of international federations... (2) to carry out synergies in cultural networks, (3) to [deliver] equipment for the elite, but also for the greatest number, (4) to allow the country to acquire a know-how usable for other national and international objectives, and (5) to [ensure] that the population is identified with the event” (CIJF 2006).

The Politics of Francophonie

Francophonie offers the image of a geopolitical community that extends over five continents. The Francophonie concept has inspired diverse interpretations and lively debates around the world, particularly since the 1990s.² The Jeux offered the Nigerien state and citizens an arena consider its relationship with and the value of Francophonie.

The Francophonie concept is polysemic and can be divisive despite its imagined community ideals. Scholars typically emphasize that it can be defined in three ways: “by the use of the French language; by membership of a formal, organized community of nations; or by the acceptance and promotion of a set of values and beliefs” (Ager 1996:xi). The third definition is

the most complex and nebulous since it involves “not exclusively a geographic nor even linguistic, but cultural approach—an attitude, a belief in a spirit, an ideology and a way of doing things, inspired by French history, language and culture but not necessarily using French, aware of and responsive to the nature of the modern world” (Ager 1996:1). Emily Apter argues that Francophonie also means a “planetary cartography, a postcolonial ontology, a linguistic platform not a place...a multiplicity of linguistic life-forms...a condition of untranslatability...[and] a new comparative literature,” among other things (2005:297). Ager reviews the central problems facing Francophonie, including “the identity and culture associated with the French, threats from English and other languages, the opinion of many that France’s [meddling in the affairs of former colonies and] continuing overseas possessions are little more than the world’s last colonies, [and] the disparity between North and South in economic terms” (1996:IX).

By the time Niger had secured the right to host the Jeux in 2000, the Nigerien state had promoted the Francophonie concept for 40 years. Nevertheless, most Nigeriens held only vague notions of the idea if any at all. A massive public advertising campaign over five years inspired much discourse among Nigeriens. Many people wondered what Francophonie community or identity could possibly mean for Niger since only 20% of Nigeriens speak French. One woman outlined the contours of the reservations about Francophonie shared by many Nigeriens:

The Francophonie could not represent an identity for us Africans from the moment when the French language was forced upon us while not spoken by the majority of our population. In fact, for me, it is nothing but a continuation of colonialism, this time linguistically... The Jeux is not bad, it is even interesting, but may we insist less on the language as a sort of union and more on the cultural diversity and exchange that constitute an advantage for the country’s youth.

Diverse views among Nigeriens sometimes correlate and sometimes do not correlate with linguistic aptitude. As indicated through interviews, French-speaking Nigeriens generally approved of and appreciated the Jeux more than non-French speaking Nigeriens. However, Francophone Nigeriens were among the most vocal opponents of the Jeux, including a local French language teacher who declared, “The Francophone world is, in my view, an implicit neocolonialist pursuit. The role of the Jeux is to first and foremost spread France’s values and ideology.”

Some Nigeriens focused their critique on global inequality, or as one woman put it, “My final opinion is that Francophonie is only foolish doubletalk because the children and their mothers who live in African countries do not have work; it is necessary for Francophonie to study and fight poverty in Francophone African countries, not just organize foolish Jeux.”

While Nigerien discourse interrogating the value of Francophonie reflects concerns articulated around the world, 75% of people in my interview sample—including 70% of non-Francophones—thought that Francophonie was a valid form of global community identity for Nigeriens, at least for the duration of the Jeux. That is, for many Francophonie and the Jeux were conflated. Comments such as “Francophonie increases friendship and solidarity between French-speaking countries, and also promotes the French language. Francophonie creates unity, you see we would not understand other countries without Francophonie, now we know about

other countries as well as their people,” and the use of the idiom of kinship to capture this feeling, “The Jeux brought people together in solidarity as if they all had one mother and one father,” were representative of this perspective. Finally, a trader, sounding like a government minister declared, “Niger should be thought of as pillar of the Francophonie organization for organizing these beautiful Jeux.”

Niger Emerges from Global Shadows to Serve as the Host Nation

Contesting conventional globalization theories, anthropologist James Ferguson (1996:14) challenges the idea that globalization promotes economic, political, and cultural convergence between Africa and the rest of the world, arguing that “the networks of political and economic connection do indeed ‘span the globe,’ as is often claimed, but they do not cover it. Instead they hop over (rather than flowing through) the territories inhabited by the vast majority of the African population.” Globalization processes, Ferguson (1996:41) emphasizes, efficiently create “forms of exclusion, marginalization, and disconnection.” Niger is a prime example.

Niger has long been a desperately poor place, and conditions are deteriorating. By 2005, Niger was deemed the least developed nation on earth by the United Nations Human Development Index (UNDP 2005). Niger has largely avoided serious ethnic conflict and civil war even though it has faced the range of historical conditions that have all too frequently contributed to violent upheaval in Africa.³ As expressed in lyrics of a prize-winning song at the 1983 national festival, “Niger may not be land of material wealth [*arziki*], but our wealth is peace [*zaman lafiya*]” (Miles 1994:296-97).

“Nigergate” challenged Nigerien pride in their culture of peace as it attracted more international media attention than any issue in Niger’s history (Youngstedt 2003). As part of the justification for their invasion of Iraq, the U.S. and British governments, using crudely forged documents, falsely accused the government of Niger of illegally selling uranium to Iraq in order to exaggerate the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. Although these lies were quickly exposed, many Nigeriens fear that observers around the world will continue to link Niger with this accusation.

Due to a complex and toxic mix of factors—drought and locust invasions, poverty, global neoliberal policies, state mismanagement, grain hoarding by local merchants, and the indifference of the international community—Niger suffered a horrible famine in 2005 (Youngstedt and Grolle 2005). Remittances sent by Nigeriens in diaspora, late arriving international aid, and the completion of a relatively good harvest in September temporarily alleviated the problem before the Jeux began while failing to address key structural issues and sustainable development.

Finally, Niger’s difficult history of hosting international events needs mentioning. The only other large-scale, international gathering hosted by Niger is the Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA) or the “International Festival of African Fashion.”⁴ Many protesters, representing various Islamist groups, picketed the first edition of FIMA, held in Agadez in 1998. During the second edition held in Niamey in 2000, protests turned violent and deadly and spread to other cities, particularly Maradi, leading to the decision to move FIMA out of Niger. Islamist speech was often and directly addressed at efforts from “the West” to undermine Nigerien cultural norms, as defined by reference to “Islam.” “Islamic nationalist” discourse

cited FIMA's pairing with bars, cinema houses, satellite dishes, and United Nations programs as evidence that the West has a detrimental agenda for Islamic Niger.

After a failed attempt to hold the third edition in Gabon in 2002, FIMA returned to Niger in 2003 and 2005. There were no reports of organized protests or violence during the 2003 Festival. The 2005 FIMA was held in Karey Gorou, just 16 kilometers from Niamey, from November 29 to December 2—just days before the Jeux opened on December 7. Months before, the Comité National des Jeux de la Francophonie (CNJF) attempted to persuade organizers to postpone the FIMA, fearing that it might again be targeted by protests and that these would spill over into the Jeux. Indeed, about 10% of Nigeriens interviewed—including Islamists and mainstream Muslims—objected to the Jeux on religious grounds. They viewed the Jeux as a trivial or dangerous distraction from serious religious responsibilities, fearing that it would attract loose foreigners to corrupt the local population through the indiscriminate mixing of men and women. An Islamist preacher complained, “The problem of the Jeux is that they [foreigners] will do sinful things like drinking alcohol, and they will do lots of it in our country.” However, the FIMA and the Jeux were held on schedule and without public demonstrations.

Nigeriens, like many Africans, are increasingly seeking to emerge from “global shadows” to make claims of “worldly connection and membership”—to be identified as “citizens of the world” (Ferguson 2006:22,23). The Jeux offered an exciting and irresistible opportunity to make such claims, and forge global economic, political, and cultural connections. Before the Jeux began, one man succinctly summarized hopes shared by most Nigeriens, “Francophonie will increase the global prestige of Niger; it will strengthen our prestige because guests will have a great time. Nigeriens will take good care of the guests, because if the guests feel happy they will return again to Niger. When they go home they will tell their friends how great Niger is and they will not forget Niger.”

The Nigerien State and The Cnjf: Remaking Images of Niger

In spite of or perhaps because of its dire poverty, in October 2000 Niger was able to appeal to Hamani Diori's influential role in the foundation of Francophonie and the CIJF's commitment to regularly hold the Jeux in the “South” to secure the rights to be the host nation. Still smarting from Nigergate and reeling from the famine of 2005, Niger desperately needed some good news and an international image makeover. The state and many private citizens anticipated accruing substantial benefits. A Nigerien sociologist summarized these, “The Jeux constitutes a great cultural and athletic event for Francophonie youth, profit for Niamey, new infrastructure, and important financial offshoots.” Niger provided \$6.5 million, or 53% of the total conventional budget of \$12.2 million (CNJF 2003:6-7). France contributed \$2.9 million (24%); Canada added \$2.2 million (18%); and the CIJF pitched in \$647,000 (5%). In addition, the Village de la Francophonie—a complex for athletes and artists with housing, administrative offices, grocery markets, restaurants, nightclubs, pharmacies, and a bank mosque, post office, cyber café, and gymnasium—was constructed with \$56 million of private financing, while private hotel and tour operators invested \$8.8 million. A combination of public and private investors financed urban improvements at \$8 million, and sports and arts facilities' renovations at \$3.1 million.

The timing of the Jeux in the wake of famine sparked diverse discourse. The private press was highly critical. *Le Républicain*, Niger's most important independent weekly opened with a blaring headline, "The Opening of the 5th Jeux: Tandja invites the Famine to the Francophonie!" Meanwhile, the lead headline of *Le Canard Déchainé* read "Niger, The Food Crisis, and the 5th Jeux."

In contrast, others believed that the Jeux might attract development support to Niger, or as one man put it, "The Jeux will allow people to understand the living conditions in Niger, to understand our suffering."

Many international and Nigerien observers suggested that Niger had neither the management skills nor the infrastructure to host a festival of this magnitude. Their doubts were not entirely unfounded. Allegations of corruption and ineptitude led to the sacking of the Directeur Général, Almoustapha Soumaila, in February 2005. As late as July 2005, the CIJF was still contemplating moving the Jeux to Ouagadougou or Tunis while the Village was only about one-third complete.⁵ Nevertheless, the CNJF led by new Directeur Général Dr. Sériba Mahaman Lawan, convinced representatives of the CIJF that Niger was up to the task.⁶

Working in close collaboration with the CIJF and with President Tandja, the CNJF faced a wide range of responsibilities, most importantly: (1) organizing all logistics and (2) defining Niger for international and local audiences. First, the CNJF was responsible for: offering receptions for foreign guests; organizing the construction of the Village (incorporating beautiful Sahelian architecture at international standard); building a new Martial Arts Complex and National Wrestling Museum, and substantially renovating all sports and arts facilities; building a major new road and re-paving key roads; providing security, a medical department, and insurance; and creating a workable schedule for the Jeux with enough busses to transport athletes and artists to and from the Village and competition sites.

With national honor at stake, Niger rose to the occasion. It is not at all clear that these objectives could have achieved under the leadership of Soumaila. Virtually from the moment Sériba assumed the post of Directeur Général in February 2005, rotating shifts of construction workers worked 24 hours a day until just days before the Jeux began to finish. Due to the CNJF's relentless efforts, all events took place on time. Nigerien technicians performed competently to ensure that very sophisticated sound and lights systems operated precisely according to specifications of dancers and musicians. With justification, "work, courage, determination, and discipline" were the key words used to punctuate having hosted the Jeux as a grand event in the history of Niger and to praise the work of Sériba at a CNJF meeting on 22 December celebrating their success (CNJF 2006).

Second, the CNJF enjoyed the unique opportunity to define Niger for both international and local audiences. The CNJF appropriated symbols of a marginalized minority—the Tuareg—for constructing the Nigerien nation-state, just as the Australian Olympic Committee exploited Aboriginal imagery during the 2000 Summer Olympiad (Godwell 2000, Meekison 2000). The Tuareg Cross of Agadez was superimposed upon the OIF logo—an oval consisting of five colors representing dynamism and Francophonie unity across all continents—to serve as the primary logo for the Jeux. Dr. Abdoulaye Maga, an archaeologist and the Directeur of the national Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines (IRSH) chose "Jobaria"—an 18-ton dinosaur that once lived in the Nigerien Sahara as the official mascot. Maga explained that Jobaria was the

mythical ancestor of the Tuareg. Friendly-looking cartoon caricatures depicting the prehistoric dinosaur performing in all of the sports and arts disciplines were printed in magazines and on souvenirs such as t-shirts and baseball caps. Interviews with Tuareg revealed mixed reactions to having their symbols used to represent Niger: some expressed pride, a few were deeply offended, but most barely noticed given the long history of the use of the cross of Agadez as a national and political symbol.⁸

Through media—including websites, newspaper, magazines, brochures, and television and radio broadcasts—the CNJF defined Niger as a democracy, proud of its peaceful history and harmony in cultural diversity, filled with picturesque Sahelian and Saharan landscapes, and equipped with a modern tourist infrastructure allowing visitors to explore and enjoy the wonderful hospitality of its people.⁹ CNJF productions were filled with rich historical and ethnographic detail and beautiful color photographs and film, highlighting cultural diversity, regional festivals, Islam and Islamic festivals, the skill of Nigerien artisans, and individual and team profiles of Nigerien and international athletes and artists.

The CNJF, reflecting Tandja's wishes, chose not to include a single mention of the famine of 2005 in any of its media. Indeed, throughout 2005 Tandja and state media consistently denied that Niger was experiencing famine in addressing local and international audiences. Faced with stinging criticism at home and abroad for this stance (which included an unwillingness to distribute free food in order to protect local markets), Tandja was determined to successfully host the Jeux, convinced that it was crucial for reviving his political popularity. He feared that highlighting the famine would only jeopardize Niger's right to host the Jeux to show off the best of Niger, and calculated that the Jeux could bring many visitors and positive attention to Niger, enhancing the chances for long-term international development partnerships.

Decisions by the OIF and the CNJF regarding the organization of the Jeux provoked much discourse on the interplay of global and local politics, including passionate critique of inequality and segregation. Ordinary Nigeriens realized that hosting the Jeux offered Niger an important opportunity to emerge from global shadows, but many felt betrayed and left in the shadows of the Jeux in their own nation. Their most widely articulated complaint concerned ticket prices for competitive events—which typically ranged from \$.60 to \$2. This was far too expensive for most Nigeriens as per capita daily income in Niger is about \$1, leading to crowds of disappointed people standing outside ticket booths and low attendance at a number of events. A wrestling fan explained that this, “was not suitable because in Niger everyone knows the country is one in which people do not have work. They should have had one symbolic, token price—for example 100 CFA [\$.20—so that quite a few more Nigeriens would be able to attend the Jeux.”

Policies designed to create a “clean and dignified” event and isolate guests from hosts in Niamey were seen as heavy-handed violations of the spirit of the Jeux by many Nigeriens. Dozens of small-scale merchants were disturbed by government orders to disband their informal tables and stalls along major roads most likely to be traveled by foreigners. Many others were dismayed by the arrests and detentions of street corner beggars, including young children and elderly residents with disabilities. International guests were largely segregated from their local hosts, as athletes, artists, coaches, their families, and hangers-on stayed in the Village and were provided with busses to take them to all competitions and for sight seeing tours. Only about 300 Nigerien workers and business operators were permitted access the

Village, leading one trader to conclude, “The Jeux is not working...If people are to make friendships with visitors and also benefit from them, it is necessary that some of the visitors stay in the Village, while the rest stay in the city so that they can understand the people and understand Niamey.”

Keeping visitors at the Village ensured their safety, even though it inhibited face-to-face intercultural dialogue and community building—the central goal of the Jeux. The CNJF reasoned that having crime or chaos at the Jeux would have been worse than losing their right to host the Jeux. Unusually friendly and helpful Nigerien security forces were a ubiquitous presence throughout the city.

Only a few ordinary Nigeriens positioned themselves to benefit financially from the Jeux, including CNJF staff: thousands who found work, particularly in construction; and a few arts traders and private businesses, particularly those who had permits to operate within the Village or the National Museum. Most hotel and restaurant operators in Niamey were extremely angry (Ait-Hatrit 2006). Many lost a lot of money or did not reap the profits they had anticipated—recall that they invested \$8.8 million in preparation for the Jeux.

Public Ceremonies: Global Ideologies, Nationalism, and Branding

Analysis of the opening and closing ceremonies and the wrestling festivities is informed by the growing literature on “mega-events” such as the Olympics. Godwell (2000:246) summarizes the central dynamics of balancing global ideologies and the branding of host cities for the Olympics,

The biggest challenge for the modern Olympics...has been to distinguish the same “product”...every four years as being a unique offering from each respective host city...Geography is co-opted, architecture symbolized, national values reframed to reinforce Olympic ideals, national politics suspended to fabricate nonpartisan support, and cultures essentialized to serve every occasion.

Historically, ceremonials are the key sites through which host cities and nations seek to address these challenges. Some scholars are highly critical, arguing that Olympic ceremonies amount to nothing more than “jingoistic hypocrisy” or are exploitative in the ways they co-opt marginalized or indigenous cultures as the Australian Olympic Committee did with Aborigines in the 2000 Summer Games hosted by Sydney (Tomlinson 2000:181, Godwell 2000, Meekison 2000, Tomlinson 2000). Other scholars heap praise on “the worth and the uniqueness of Olympic Ceremonies”, as spectacular venues for communicating “the Olympic message”, facilitating “intercultural exchange”, and promoting peace (Zweifel 1995, Carrard 1995, MacAloon 1995, Takac 1995).

If the “Olympics” are replaced with the “Jeux” in all of the above, we get a sense of the challenges faced by Niger and controversies generated by the choices made in organizing the opening and closing ceremonies. The Nigerien state clearly valued the opportunities presented in staging these spectacles. They were the only elements of the Jeux funded entirely by Niger.

The Opening Ceremonies: A Multinational Spectacle Highlighting Niger’s History

Within the constraints of the protocols established by the CIJF, the distinctive cultural elements of the opening ceremonies were defined by the CNJF in collaboration with a multinational team of experts and by the mass participation of Nigerien artists and audiences. The CNJF chose Guinean Souleymane Koly—a pioneer in contemporary African arts policy and production—to organize the opening and closing ceremonies. El Hadj Alougbine of Cote d’Ivoire and Were Were Liking of Cameroon supervised the selection of decorations and costumes. Li Lu and Wu Dianceng of China, experts in grand events, were commissioned to choreograph the dances of 800 Nigerien students.

An overflow crowd of roughly 50,000 people enthusiastically filled Stade Seyni Kountché—a gift from China some 20 years ago—and was delighted to see that it had been renovated to meet international athletic standards and now featured a brand new jumbo video screen. The audience was thrilled that no entrance fee was required, only tickets of invitation however, the process of distributing tickets was mysterious—they seemed to flow from CNJF members to their friends—and thousands of disappointed Nigeriens were left standing outside of stadium entrances). Reflecting the OIF’s mission, dozens of Nigerien youth sporting distinctive black t-shirts and working for the Control Arms campaign circulated the arena soliciting signatures for the Million Faces Petition designed to pressure members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to sign a binding international treaty to prohibit the trafficking of weapons to help build peace and security in the region.

The opening ceremonies—following rigid CIJF guidelines—began with a counter-clockwise procession around the track by participants in the alphabetical order of the official names of their countries ending on the football field. Participants stopped to greet the members of “cabin of honor,” including: President Tandja; Presidents Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria; the Prime Ministers of Togo and Chad; the Vice President of the African Union; the Secretary General of the OIF, Abdou Diouf; and Jean-Francois Lamour, the President of the CIJF and France’s Minister of Youth and Sports, among others. Athletes and artists from all countries received extremely warm receptions. The largely Nigerien audience cheered the loudest for the flamboyant Chadian contingent who included acrobats in their procession; the Vietnamese, wearing their distinctive conical straw hats reminiscent of those made by nomadic Nigerien Wodaabe; and the Lebanese, many of whom broke out of their procession to greet the audience with waves and blown kisses to celebrate their selection as the host nation for the 2009 Jeux.

Following this, precisely timed speeches—largely scripted by the CIJF—by Nigerien ministers and the President of the CIJF were concluded by President Tandja’s proclamation of the opening of the Jeux. Next, the official flag of the Jeux was raised, accompanied by the playing of its anthem. A representative of the Nigerien delegation then delivered an oath—also written by the CIJF—promising to uphold sportsmanship and honor cultural diversity, followed by the Nigerien state brass band’s rendition of the national anthem. The participants left the center stage and proceeded to fill their seats of honor in the grandstands in order to observe ceremonies designed to symbolize peace and unity.

This cultural spectacle opened with traditional, neo-traditional, and modern performances by 163 Nigerien dancers, acrobats, instrumentalists, and vocalists highlighting the concept that

the unity of Niger is found the respect for its mutually enriching cultural diversity. Next, 800 Nigerien students joyously performed perfectly synchronized dances of welcome.

The grand finale centered on music and dance in honor of the legendary Sarauniya Mangou, concluding with an extravagant 30-minute fireworks show. Sarauniya Mangou, the Queen of the Arewa of Lougou at the turn of the century, earned fame as a national heroine for her resistance to colonial domination. Known as fierce warrior and inspirational leader, she withstood a Tuareg invasion from the north and efforts of the Sokoto Empire in the south to convert her people to Islam. But she distinguished herself most prominently by courageously refusing to surrender to French forces led by Captain Voulet who attacked her country in April of 1899. Captain Voulet's soldiers, far more brutal than previous French invaders, committed horrific atrocities across French West Africa including massacres of thousands of people in Sansanne Haoussa and Birnin Konni (Niger) that same year. Sarauniya Mangou's most famous form of resistance was religiously inspired. As the moral and spiritual authority of the Arewa, she used magic to inspire her people and terrorize the French garrison. Indeed, Captain Voulet's logs reveal that he retreated in fear of the Queen's magical powers after months of stalemate and countless deaths.¹⁰

CIJF rules specify that this short ceremony should focus on peace and unity. Clearly the Nigerien state and the CNJF took creative liberties with the script. Whereas the first three hours of events focused on Francophonie, the state chose to conclude by reflecting on the history of Nigerien resistance to French colonialism led by a woman wielding non-Islamic local spiritual powers.

Different people interpreted this message in different ways. One Canadian official concluded that the focus on the Sarauniya appropriately addressed the gender equity sub-theme of the Jeux by highlighting that women are just as capable as men of creating miracles despite the Nigerien belief that women should stay at home. Virtually all Nigeriens—encountered through interviews and public street corner conversation groups—were enormously pleased and proud of the ceremonies up to the grand finale, but a substantial majority found the Sarauniya Mangou segment inappropriate. Three themes are evident among those who expressed objections. First, many people were offended by the complete lack of attention to Islam as central to Niger's identity. For them, the inclusion of a "pagan" rite in honor of a "pagan" who had resisted conversion added insult to injury. Second, and often linked to first theme, many men were upset that a woman was chosen as the representative of the nation. Third, many men and women expressed their concern that the glorification of Sarauniya Mangou compromised the responsibility of the nation to serve as good hosts for their French guests. Indeed, many expressed their commitment to redouble their efforts to be excellent hosts.

In summary, the opening ceremonies served as key entry point through which global, national, and local players performed and negotiated all of the key themes of the Jeux. The ceremonies were, by definition, multinational as they involved participants representing the nations of the OIF. Moreover, the planning was deliberately and creatively multinational. A Guinean, a Cameroonian, and an Ivorien played key roles in directing how Nigeriens would present Nigerien cultures. Stade Seyni Kountché, a gift of the Chinese, and the hiring of two Chinese choreographers represent in concrete and figurative ways the growing influence of

China in Niger. Most of the events within the opening ceremonies explicitly celebrated Francophonie unity and peace, while the Queen Mangou segment expressed pride in Niger's distinctive history of resistance and a call for gender equity. That is, the Nigerien state communicated its desire to be an equal partner with other nations in global Francophonie, on its own terms, sparking lively debates regarding definitions of Niger's identity in modernity. Modeled loosely after modern Olympics ceremonies and held in a newly modernized stadium, the opening ceremonies also paid homage to the rich diversity of "traditional" Nigerien music and dance—insisting that tradition deserves a place in modernity.

Wrestling With Tradition and Modernity

African wrestling was included in the Jeux as a feature event for the first time due in large measure to the impetus of Sériba, Directeur Général of the CNJF. The celebration of the sport of wrestling—and the ways it addressed the several of the core missions of the Jeux—was every bit as compelling as the competition. This was evidenced in: (1) its inclusion as a discipline, and the value afforded to cultural exchange through wrestling; (2) the inauguration of Niger's National Museum of Traditional Wrestling; and (3) the sportsmanship and hospitality expressed in wrestling.

A brief sketch of the modernization of this indigenous sport will help to situate its place in the Jeux. Wrestling matches are traditionally held on village market days and to celebrate harvests throughout Niger. Wrestlers grappled for honor in rural communities, their strength and confidence bolstered by magic, music, clowns, and enthusiastic audiences.

While wrestling in traditional contexts remains enormously popular, President Seyni Kountché mobilized wrestling in the mid-1970s as a means of promoting Nigerien nationalism. The Nigerien Federation for Traditional Wrestling introduced formal written rules, professional referees, and prizes that symbolize traditional power and ethnicity as well as modernity. The national champion earns a beautifully harnessed horse in a style ridden by traditional local chiefs; a grand *boubou* ("an elaborately embroidered flowing gown"), a turban, and sandals as worn by nobles; a Tuareg saber symbolizing both force and peace or security, now known as the "National Saber"; and an envelope of money "allowing him to meet his responsibilities as a king" (Koudizé 2005:26). Today the cash prize is about \$4,000. In addition, private supporters of the champion typically provide him with an automobile, airline tickets for a pilgrimage to Mecca, money, land, and jewelry.

The first national championship was held in Tahoua in 1975. Since then, nationwide interest in wrestling has exploded. Each of the eight administrative regions of Niger has constructed beautiful wrestling-specific arenas—each affording 5,000 to 10,000 spectators excellent, close-up views of the combat—allowing them to rotate as hosts for the national championships. Annual national championships are now sponsored by national and multinational corporations, and are broadcast live on local television and radio stations. Backed by sponsors and now earning cash prizes at the national competitions and other important periodic matches, some wrestlers hire professional trainers and devote themselves as full-time professionals in the sport.

Similar wrestling traditions are practiced throughout West Africa as well as parallel professionalizations of the sport, particularly in Senegal where star grapplers occasionally earn more than \$100,000 per match performing before audiences of 60,000 people at Dakar's main football arena, Stade Léopold Sédor Senghor. Six African Championships—involving primarily Francophone West and Central African nations—have been held since 1995. Niger and Senegal have dominated, each winning thrice.

West African wrestling is largely unknown outside the region. Though some football fans disagree, wrestling is Niger's "national sport."¹¹ The very inclusion of African wrestling in the Jeux was a source of great pride for Nigeriens. Nigeriens relished showing off their wrestling spectacle; that is, their whole complex of wrestling accompanied by music, song, dance, magic and entertainment.

Spectators enjoyed learning about traditional wrestling forms of peoples of Canada, Sudan, France, and elsewhere through daily demonstrations almost as much as the formal competition. Wrestling by indigenous Canadians drew the most attention. This form of wrestling is seldom practiced today, though interest in it was resuscitated at the recent Arctic Winter Games (Canada 2005). Four Inuit—Dennis Raddi and Lucky Pokiak from the Northwest Territories and Tony Eetuk and Joseph Nakoolak from Nunavut—attended the Jeux, proudly demonstrated their wrestling style, and invited Nigerien and other African wrestlers to join them. Their coach, Steven Baryluk explained, "as a former wrestler, I am interested to see other wrestling traditions. These Games will bring many of them together in one place. It's an incredible opportunity" (Canada 2005).

Niger and the CNJF strategically chose the auspicious occasion of the Jeux to inaugurate its National Museum of Traditional Wrestling. The Museum—filled with pictures and artifacts of Niger's celebrated wrestlers, wrestling musicians, singers, clowns, and wrestling broadcasters—was designed to commemorate wrestling history, declare wrestling as a core element of Nigerien cultural identity, celebrate the inclusion of African wrestling in the Jeux, and mark Niger's affiliation with the International Federation of Wrestling Associations (FILA).

This celebration on 14 December was presided over by President Tandja who cut a ceremonial ribbon, President of the National Assembly Mahamane Ousmane, Prime Minister Hama Amadou, Minister of Youth and Sports Abdoullrahamane Seydo, and many other important government members. Seydo praised wrestling as Niger's national sport, highlighting the value of "fair play" in wrestling. Niger's most famous wrestling singer, Elhadji Sagolo, came out of retirement to perform with Mamane Sani Léko, also known as Kourégué de Zinder, Niger's most prominent wrestling drummer. Nigerien spectators were particularly thrilled by the attendance of the majority of their national champions of the previous 30 years and a grand champion Senegalese wrestler, Ambroise Sarr. Daniel Robin, a delegate of FILA, commented on the global universality of traditional wrestling, praised Niger's distinguished history of wrestling, and presented a FILA plaque to Tandja. Tandja seized the opportunity to present himself as a man of the Nigerien people by recalling his experience as a wrestler in his youth. Tandja then officiated two symbolic demonstration matches lasting just a few seconds each, one between Kadadé Zambo (a great Nigerien wrestler of the 1970s) and Balla Kodo (Niger's national champion in 1981); and one between Salma Dan Rani (Niger's national champion in 1976 and 1979) and Ambroise Sarr (whose career peaked in the 1970s).

The Jeux provided a spectacular forum to prove the superiority of Nigerien wrestlers before a global Francophonie audience. Nigerien wrestlers outperformed a strong Senegalese contingent at the Jeux, delighting local fans. Niger earned the team gold medal as well as four individual medals (two gold, one silver, and one bronze). Senegal secured the team silver medal, and four individual medals (one gold, one silver, and two bronze). However, winning was not everything in the Jeux.

On the first day of the competition the French team led by their traditional musicians, was graciously welcomed into the arena. In fact, they received more sustained applause than any team, even the Nigeriens. The French experienced the misfortune of drawing Niger in the first round. Within seconds of the first match in the lowest weight category a Nigerien grappler lifted his French opponent high into the air and threw him head first to the ground. A hush fell over the crowded arena, as many people feared that he had broken his neck. To the relief of everyone, he arose and respectfully congratulated his foe. The largely Nigerien audience warmly greeted the brave French wrestler when he returned to compete the following day.

This single thrashing was perhaps the most discussed issue in the entire wrestling tournament, rivaled only by Nigeriens' proud discourse on the superiority of their wrestlers. Within hours, many private radio stations and street corner discussion groups were commenting. They emphasized that it was extremely bad form to treat guests so harshly—that the Nigerien wrestler should have shown mercy.

Nigeriens were thrilled by the very fact that France chose to participate in African wrestling. One avid fan's words captured the feelings of many Nigeriens, "The Jeux helps people come together as one. The gathering increases ties of friendship and solidarity between different kinds of people. Francophonie creates knowledge, for example seeing White, Christian Europeans wrestling. This was very surprising; wrestling is not a European custom. We were happy, we laughed, that Europeans wrestled." This was highly appreciated and was interpreted as an unexpected demonstration of respect for African tradition. For throughout the history of contact between France and Africa, cultural diffusion has largely been asymmetric. Frenchmen have assiduously avoided letting Africans see them physically toil, but here they were courageous and sweating in an intimate meeting of bare-chested bodies on dusty Nigerien sand.

The Closing Ceremonies: Reinventing Tradition For The Nation And Francophonie

For the closing ceremonies, the CNJF chose to transform and adapt local pageantry traditions to serve a particular construction of Nigerien nationalism and Francophonie. Variations of this ritual complex involving noble cavalry processions with music have been practiced on both sides of the Sahara for centuries. French colonial explorers witnessed similar events, from North Africa and the Sahara (where synchronized rifle shots are featured) to Sahelian states such as Borno. They used the term "*fantasia*" to describe them. Thus, the CNJF labeled the closing ceremonies of the Jeux a *fantasia*, rather than using a local term, such as the Hausa *hawwan dawaki* ("the mounting of the horses"), the Arabic *harqqa barooda* ("moving gunpowder games"), or the Hindi-Urdu *darbar* ("royal gathering") as it is known in Northern Nigeria due to British imperial history.

To appreciate the ways by which the CNJF reworked the fantasia requires an understanding of its traditional functions and practices in Niger and Northern Nigeria. Fantasias are designed to celebrate Islam, to demonstrate allegiance to Emirs, and to foster community solidarity (Apter 2005:173). Fantasias undoubtedly incorporated some elements of the equestrian and pageantry traditions of local pre-Islamic and non-Islamic communities, but for centuries have been organized primarily to mark the culmination of the great Muslim festivals, *Eid al Fitr* and *Eid al Kabir* (or *Karamar Salla* and *Babbar Salla*, respectively, in Hausa—the lingua franca of the region). Local chiefs and nobles symbolically proclaim their loyalty to Emirs during fantasias through saluting them with raised swords, praise singing, and the circulation of symbolic capital. Gifts are offered to the Emir who may reciprocate by bestowing titles or with larger or smaller gifts to express his relative favor. This tradition of well-staged statecraft also serves to unite different local ethnic groups within an overarching state.

Salla days begin with early morning prayers at communal grounds on the outskirts of town, followed by processions of splendidly adorned horsemen, camel jockeys, warriors, dancers, musicians, praise singers, body guards, jesters, and standard bearers to the public square in front of the Emir's palace. Here each village takes their assigned place before the Emir arrives last of all with his magnificent retinue. Then the action begins as groups of horsemen and camel riders race across the square at full gallop, swords drawn, polished and glinting. They charge to within a few feet of the Emir before pulling up their mounts abruptly to salute him with raised swords. Dancing, drumming, singing, and feasting continue throughout the day and into the night.

While traditional fantasias remain important, during the past century various actors have reworked them to serve other functions. Colonial powers, heads of secular states, and various imagined communities reinvented tradition by replacing Emirs with their own representatives in the position of power while keeping the script intact. The British Raj modified *darbars*—court rituals of Mughal emperors roughly analogous to fantasias—by inserting English officials as Indian rulers in what became “the colonial ritual *par excellence*” (Apter 1996:457-58). The term “*darbar*” was “transplanted from India to Africa through none other than Lord Lugard himself” (Apter 1996:458) who grew up in British Colonial India. Soon after witnessing the fantasia, “Lugard staged his first African *darbar* [in 190⁰ to inaugurate the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria...[and]...Thirteen years later, a *darbar* held in Kano marked Lugard's appointment as Governor-General of Nigeria” (Apter 1996:458). Later, *darbars* were staged to honor British royalty, including a *darbar* in 1925 in Kano in honor of Edward, Prince of Wales, and another in 1956 in Kaduna to pay homage to Queen Elizabeth. Independent Nigeria has continued to stage *darbar* to honor visiting heads of state, including Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi of Libya.

President Obasanjo and the modern, independent, capitalist, petro-state of Nigeria mobilized the *darbar* in 1977 to serve the interests of Pan-Africanism and the Nigerian state by using it project pride in indigenous culture and an image of “national unity out of ‘ethnic’ diversity” (Apter 1996:457). He hosted a grand *darbar*, including participants representing most ethnic groups of Northern Nigeria, 4,000 horses, 500 camels, and 2,000 dancers and musicians that functioned as the closing ceremony of the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). In addition, a huge *darbar* was performed in 2004 to celebrate the 200th

anniversary of the Sokoto Caliphate, and attended by many heads of state, including Tandja of Niger. Finally, a number of nations, particularly Morocco and Cameroon, have marketed fantasias to attract international tourists.

The fantasia is not as widely performed in Niger as it is in Northern Nigeria or the Maghreb. For example, fantasias have not previously been staged in Niamey, as it is a new city that is not part of a traditional Emirate. In contrast, Damagaram—Tandja's home—enjoys the historical reputation of hosting the largest fantasias in Niger. Furthermore, unlike other nations, Niger has little history of mobilizing the fantasia for nation-building or tourism promotion. One exception is the performance of fantasias during *Cure Salée*—a traditional festival that has, in some respects, been nationalized by the Nigerien government, and marketed to international tourists.¹²

The fantasia for the Jeux was held at the old Hippodrome on the outskirts of Niamey. A highly animated audience of about 60,000 people stood four hours in the blazing mid-afternoon sun in an enormous flat field, while a few hundred dignitaries—Tandja, visiting heads of state, OIF, CIJF, and CNJF officials—enjoyed seating on plush couches under a small, tiered, shaded pavilion. The prelude featured a amplified music performed by Mamar Kasey, currently Niger's most internationally famous Afro-Pop-Jazz band. They were an ideal choice given the CNJF's desire to emphasize a Nigerien nationalism rooted in harmony through diversity as Mamar Kasey fuses Hausa, Zarma, Fulani, and Songhai performers, rhythms, and instruments as well as electric bass guitars with western jazz, Moroccan, and Latin influences.

Athletes and artists led the Fantasia's processions—funneled through a ceremonial gate with Nigerien and Francophonie symbols. They received loud, sustained cheers before taking comfortable seats under the pavilion. In contrast to the opening ceremonies that included the full contingents of all countries, only about 250 performers representing a dozen nations participated. Then, Tandja declared the official closing of the Jeux in a very brief speech.

The Fantasia continued with the entrance of 200 Tuareg men from Tahoua wearing elaborate costumes, carrying Nigerien flags, and riding splendidly adorned camels. More than 500 dancers, musicians, and clowns—typically in troupes of one to three dozen—representing all ethnic groups of Niger, followed them. Among the highlights were a contingent of fifty beautifully dressed Tuareg women who rode in on decked-out donkeys, and a group of Wodaabe women who carried painted calabashes overflowing with cooking utensils and grain—a traditional symbol of bounty—atop their heads. Herds of goats and sheep decorated with colorful cloth and mirrors dangling from their horns joined the festivities. Next, 300 mounted horsemen—led by a Kanuri contingent from Diffa and a Hausa group from Northern Nigeria—entered the main arena. Many men and their horses were adorned from head to toe in silver armor, while others in sported vibrant, colorful, traditional clothing. Many equestrians doubled as musicians, playing a wide variety of drums and horns. The ceremony concluded with camel and horse charges toward President Tandja, visiting dignitaries.

The CNJF modified three core elements of the fantasia while retaining its essential script and vibrant pageantry. First, the fantasia was secularized. The procession moved from a vacant field to the hippodrome's pavilion, not from Muslim prayer grounds to the Emir's palace. Second, representing a secular republic, Tandja occupied the position of power rather than an Emir. Third, this modern fantasia addressed national and global Francophonie communities,

instead of a local Emirate. Like the opening ceremonies, the fantasia represented the honoring of cultural diversity as the heart of Nigerien nationalism and the value of cultural relativism for Francophonie.

While the opening and closing ceremonies shared a multicultural vision, they differed in important ways. In contrast to the opening ceremony's limited seating, amplified music, jumbo video screen, fireworks, and emphasis on OIF scripted speeches staged in a modern stadium in the city center; the closing ceremony featured unlimited standing room, traditional music, and dust in an old, not particularly well maintained, hippodrome in a poor, outlying neighborhood. Furthermore, the audiences were very different. Whereas virtually all foreign athletes, artists, coaches, and visitors attended the opening ceremonies, only about ten percent made their way to the fantasia. Indeed, it seemed that the CNJF anticipated that foreign guests might avoid standing in an open field in the midday sun or would have begun returning to their homes before the closing ceremonies, and therefore designed the fantasia, with Tandja at the center, primarily for Nigerien consumption. In any case, Nigerien spectators were thrilled, and Niamey buzzed with excitement for weeks afterwards as people reflected on the fantasia and watched televised reruns. The fantasia clearly emerged as the most popular event of the Jeux among Nigeriens.

Conclusion

In her opening address to Canadian athletes and artists, Chef de Mission Madeline clearly articulated the core aims of global, national, and local participants in the Jeux:

These Jeux are also a symbol of fraternity and solidarity between people. This goal is particularly significant this year, as Niger is recovering from a food crisis. In the current circumstances, it is important to show solidarity with this country and to participate in the Jeux in the spirit of the founders. Apart from the challenges and how important it is for Niger to host this international event, the experience has allowed this country to acquire the infrastructure necessary for hosting the Jeux. The 5th Jeux should also serve as a springboard for the country's development. If for no other purpose than to put Niger on the map and to allow Nigeriens to rise to the challenge with dignity and pride, the 5th Jeux are worth the experience. If the only thing we accomplish is to participate in this gathering with Sahelian Africa and to become better citizens of the world, then these Jeux will have achieved their goal Duchesne (2005).

Using Duchesne's benchmarks, the Jeux was successful in many ways. Remarkably, the world's least developed nation hosted more than 4,000 visitors from 44 nations in a well-organized gala promoting Francophonie cultural dialogue and unity through the superlative performances of world-class athletes and artists who demonstrated exemplary sportsmanship and tremendous respect for the aesthetic expressions of extraordinarily diverse cultures. During the Jeux a transformed Niamey buzzed with excitement and movement. Most Nigeriens were honored to host guests, and were pleased that the Jeux offered their nation the opportunity to be recognized as a vibrant culture and place in the modern global imaginary. If nothing else, for two weeks the global Francophonie community joyously celebrated being together and their most noble values, setting aside often strained or ambivalent relations between the French metropole and former colonies, as well as divisions between Muslims and Christians. Nigerien

hospitality highly impressed international visitors. Virtually all foreign nationals (interviewed by me or quoted by the Nigerien or international media) expressed only effusive praise for Niger and Nigeriens. This achievement should not be underestimated, even if it is unclear whether the Jeux contributed to long-term Francophonie cooperation and solidarity or sustainable development in Niger.

The Jeux provided Nigeriens a key space for creative reflection, engagement, debate, and response to: the Francophonie concept and its value for Nigeriens; competing definitions of Niger's national identity; the political economy of global and local inequality; and the nature of articulations between tradition and modernity. While the first three sets of concerns continue to be negotiated, the interests of the Nigerien state and Nigerien citizens converged in the celebration of traditional Nigerien cultures — proudly asserting their validity in global modernity. The CNJF did not privilege popular Nigerien rappers, Niger's burgeoning mobile phone industry, or another marker of modernity. Rather, they chose — to the delight of most Nigeriens — to highlight traditional pageantry, music, dance, and wrestling.

Notes

1. I sincerely thank the West African Research Association (WARA) for generously granting me a Post-Doctoral Fellowship for this project. I gratefully acknowledge the extensive, critical suggestions offered by the Editorial Committee of *African Studies Quarterly* and two external reviewers. I thank colleagues Ousseina D. Alidou, Susann Baller, Bruce Deacon, Djibrilla Garba, and Cheiffou Idrissa for their very helpful comments. I am also indebted to Saginaw Valley State University students Sarah Holdwick and Terry Coffey for help with translating interviews and statistically analyzing them, respectively.
2. Nigeriens and French speakers around the world continue to grapple with Francophonie. Since the Jeux, divisions have reached a boiling point as a multinational group of famous authors who write in French published a manifesto in *Le Monde* in 2007 declaring that their proposal to “Uncouple the language from France and turn French literature into ‘world literature’ written in French” will serve as “death certificate for Francophonie” (Riding 2007). Nicolas Sarkozy, who shortly thereafter became the President of France, responded in *Le Figaro* by declaring “Francophonie is not dead” and that the global prestige of the French language is “intact” (Riding 2007). Abdou Diouf, former President of Senegal and now the Secretary General of the OIF, meanwhile accuses France of lacking interest in Francophonie and of perpetuating condescension toward Francophones. In a similar vein, author Laila Lalami (2008) wonders “how many native-born Frenchmen identify themselves as ‘francophones.’ We all know it’s a term for The Others.”
3. These include: an exploitative colonial regime that intentionally manipulated ethnic rivalry, three decades of one party or military rule, recurring droughts, a long series of ineffectual and sometimes damaging development programs implemented by international donors, grinding poverty exacerbated by Structural Adjustment Programs, and a valuable natural resource—uranium.

4. Founded and directed by the world famous Nigerien fashion designer, Alphadi, FIMA “was supported by the United Nations Development Program as an effort to support the fashion industry and artisanal workshops in Niger...the festival’s stated intention was to create jobs, attract tourism by televising Niger’s exotic landscape globally, and to raise money for Niger’s development” (Cooper 2003:491).
5. Soumaila was selected as the CNJF Directeur Général in 2000. He was contracted to remain in this post until the completion of the Jeux. In July 2005, the CNJF was printing advertisements in *Le Sahel*, the daily newspaper of the state, asking private citizens to volunteer to rent rooms in their homes to accommodate visitors.
6. After earning his Ph.D. in Sports from the Université de Clermont-Ferrand (France), Sériba worked for Niger’s Ministry of Youth and Sports. He has produced and directed two films on wrestling: *20 Ans de Lutte Traditionnelle au Niger* (1997) and *The Kings of Arena* (2000). After the 5th Jeux he was named Directeur des Jeux de la Francophonie by the OIF.
7. The cross of Agadez was used by French colonial officials, as the badge of UN military observers in Western Sahara, and today “the government of the Republic of Niger uses the cross of Agadez as the centerpiece for the National Order of Niger pendant...as part of insignia for government projects, on postage stamps, and in currency designs” (Loughran and Seligman 2006:259). Its presence in Niger is ubiquitous; appearing on sculpture in traffic circles and public parks, as an ornamental motif on walls and wrought iron fences, and as the design on state manufactured soap bars. Furthermore, the cross of Agadez enjoys fame as one of the most recognizable symbols of Africa, as it is available for sale in hundreds of markets in West and North Africa, Paris, Florence, and New York as well as more than 100 websites (Loughran and Seligman 2006:261).
8. Tele-Sahel, Niger’s state channel, and two private stations—Tal and Ténéré—provided extensive television coverage. In Niger and in Europe, French channels TV5 and Canal+ also provided television coverage; while Radio France International and the BBC offered radio broadcasts.
9. Nigeriens have recounted various versions of this history to me. On 26 May 2006 Niger’s Ministère de la Culture, des Arts et de la Communication submitted an application to UNESCO seeking recognition of Lougou as a World Heritage Centre (UNESCO 2006). They proposed to include sacred monuments and sites, the cemetery of queens, the site of the battle of 1899, and the residence of the current Sarauniya.
10. While there are several ways of defining “national sport,” I argue the wrestling is Niger’s given its indigenous status, mass audience appeal, and Nigeriens’ recognition of their superiority in the discipline—even though many more Nigeriens participate in football.
11. *Cure Salée* literally means, “Salt Cure.” Once a year, toward the end of the rainy season, thousands of nomadic Tuareg and Bororo gather in the region of Ingal and Teguida N’Tessoumt—famous for its rich salt and mineral deposits that are crucial to the health of their livestock. The gathering is one of the few occasions where so many nomads meet in one place to celebrate community identity and discuss social and political concerns. The Nigerien government recently began determining the exact date of the

festival—though this is not always respected by nomads—in order exert its power and facilitate the attendance of tourists.

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Reference Style: The following is the suggested format for referencing this article: Scott M. Youngstedt, "The 5th Francophonie Sports and Arts Festival: Niamey, Niger Hosts a Global Community," *African Studies Quarterly* 10, nos. 2 & 3: (Fall 2008) [online] URL: <http://africa.ufl.edu/asq/v10/v10i2a6.htm>