

Archive of the Republic of Niger at Boston University

OPENING CEREMONY SPEECHES, JULY 25, 2015

The [Archive de la République du Niger](#), or AREN, held a grand opening in April 2015. President Mammadou Issoufou of Niger participated in the ceremony. AREN is a new archive in the African Studies department at Boston University dedicated to storing Niger-related media, giving easier access to a wide variety of materials dating back more than 50 years.

The Archive of the Republic of Niger at Boston University (AREN) is designed to serve not only as an archive but also as a bridge between Nigerien and American stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic.

The full text of five of the speeches delivered during the opening ceremonies follows.

- [John Hutchison, Boston University](#)
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SPEECH – DR. JOHN HUTCHISON, BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Professor Emeritus at the African Studies Center at Boston University.

The Story of AREN

[Hausa language] Welcome to Boston University to see the opening of the Archive of the Republic of Niger. My name is John Hutchison, or Malam Tijani. I am extremely grateful for the arrival here of S.E.M. the Pres. of Niger, Issoufou Mahamadou. Welcome! I also want to greet the new Ambassador from Niger Prof. Hassana Alidou. We at Boston University are extremely happy to receive all of you who have gathered here today.

[French language] Why an archive of Niger in the US at BU? I will explain. In 2012 we established AREN at BU together with Maman Sidikou, Ambassador, Beth Restruck, Librarian, the Friends of Niger, and the BU African Studies Center. This archive is still in its infancy, and it is evolving. It is little. The space can be small and the archive large. There is a Kanuri proverb that I often cite which says: “No matter how small it is, sit down on your seat!”

There is a relationship which dates to the 1960s between Niger and the US, thanks to the Peace Corps, and dating back to the 1980s between our two universities, due to our BU study abroad linkage. We have a history together, and we have, above all, partners that have grown out of our history; partners who work with and for Niger.

If possible, through AREN, we envisage with Niger, collaborative projects of archiving and digitization. Our librarians can help facilitate the acquisition of inter-institutional funding with the possibility of shared open access. We could, for example, propose such a collaboration in digitization between our two libraries, between our African Studies Center, the West African Research Association, FLSH (Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines), IRSH (Institut de

Recherche en Sciences Humaines), and CELHTO (Centre d'Etudes Linguistiques et Historiques par la Tradition Orale), among others. We all have documents and recordings endangered by time and climate.

- Let me introduce you to some of AREN's partners. One of the most important is the Embassy and the Ambassador, who facilitate our collaboration with Niger and our contact with Nigeriens in the diaspora.
- Also the Friends of Niger, the former Peace Corps Volunteers. I invite the former Peace Corps volunteers present among us to please stand up. Please hold your applause.
- Meet a group of BU students who studied in Niger between 1987-2011.
- CONUSA, the Council of Nigeriens in the USA, was established by Professor Hassana Alidou in the 90s – she served as president as well. Please meet Saley Tahirou, current President of CONUSA and Rabiou Yari in charge of investments and education on the Board of Directors. Both Saley and Rabiou also serve on the Board of the Friends of Niger.
- From BU, Mark Lewis, Director and Frank Antonelli of the Geddes Language Center at BU. Extraordinary archivists who help to preserve documents in Nigerien languages, recordings and even films of the Yazi Dogo Theater Troop. Their knowledge will be vital as we consider collaborative archiving projects.
- Meet Bess Palmisciano, Founder of the non-profit RAIN for the Sahel and the Sahara. Agadez Learning Center for educating children from rural areas.
- Lifebox is organizing a project that will outfit every government hospital operating room in Niger with essential monitoring equipment, with training for all Nigerien anesthesia providers. Please meet Janet DeWan who is an RPCV from Niger and is working with Dr. Alex Hannenberg, Lifebox Board member, anesthesiologist at Newton Wellesley, and past President of the American Society of Anesthesiologists; Dan Flatley, Trustee of the Flatley Foundation. The Flatley Foundation has provided the funds to support the Lifebox project in Niger, including 270 pulse oximeters, and training for the anesthesia providers.
- Myself I work with John Ashworth, Architect et Jon Rothendler, Electronic Engineer from Engineers without borders. On a voluntary pro bono basis they have designed a computer lab classroom with 42 work stations to be built on to a Nigerien primary school, and powered by solar energy. The classroom serves the community in the evenings and on weekends, functioning also as a community technology and archiving center for the village or town. We are working in collaboration with the Nigerien NGO Fille Femme et Développement.
- Also, I want to introduce my colleague/friend, the Ambassador from Gabon, a graduate of BU who also taught Hausa here at the ASC, Ambassador Michael Moussa-Adamo.
- A new partner, Sani Mahamadou Abba, student at the Fletcher School at Tufts and son of S.E.M. le Président.

There are other AREN partners. We add new ones regularly. For your information, the Nigerien NGOs with which we cooperate are shown in the AREN brochure distributed today.

Myself, today I am professor emeritus of African Languages & Linguistics at BU where I taught for nearly 30 years.

50 years ago in 1965, I arrived in Niamey with Operation Crossroads Africa, organization founded by Pastor James Robinson; his exchange organization apparently gave John Kennedy the idea for the Peace Corps. As one of 10 university students, we worked as volunteer manual workers on the construction of a reception building in a Youth Center in Niamey. After university, my Peace Corps service then led me to a doctorate in linguistics and a dissertation on the Kanuri language.

I met Yazi Dogo in 1978. He was teaching in the first Hausa language school of Niger in Zinder. I was inspired. In the 70s and 80s I worked in educational reform and on the documentation of Nigerien languages to prepare them for use as medium in the education system. Many of the documents I gathered from this work are now part of AREN.

On leave of absence from BU in 1984-85, I worked as a Fulbright Prof. in the Letters & Human Sciences Fac. of the University of Niamey (Abdou Moumouni) in linguistics and the Kanuri language. Among my students in linguistics were two women, twins, by the names of Hassana and Ousseina Alidou. They are of course here with us today. They represent extraordinary role models for girls and women of Africa. Together they have their own NGO working in girls and women's education and leadership.

After that year in Niger, a 3-year program of exchange of professors between our 2 universities in linguistics and education ensued. Prof. Karen Boatman, from our School of Education (who couldn't be here today) is the one who had the vision and foresight to propose Niger as a site for a professional international linkage program. She brought the first BU students to Niger to the CFCA in 1987, and the program lasted until 2011.

Today we are pleased to congratulate S.E.M. le Président Issoufou Mahamadou and the government of Niger on the choice of Prof. Hassana as ambassador. Her remarkable path and her career fall directly in the domain of education, language and culture. Her contribution to literature in African languages as an international functionary and academic is enormous. We hope that the story of this family may one day be part of AREN.

While a PC volunteer, I had a small tape recorder with me, and I recorded various storytellers. One day in my village, a child, Ali Abdoui, had heard the tape recorder and approached me to say: "Monsieur John, I would like to get inside of your radio!" I recorded him. He was happy.

This is what we wish for the future of AREN – we want everyone to get inside of the radio and we want their voices to resonate. AREN is an archive that will tell our stories and inspire our hopes. We are together!

SPEECH – LARRY KOFF, Friends of Niger

Treasurer of the Friends of Niger

Your Excellence, Monsieur Le President, Professor Ambassador Alidou and honored guests,

My name is Larry Koff, a former Peace Corps volunteer and Treasurer of the Friends of Niger. I, and members of the Board of the FON, as well as representatives of our membership who are present, wish to welcome you.

No greeting can be as impressive as what we experienced as volunteers; a local griot, beating of the drums, horsemen, a large, crowded audience of curious local citizens, and the high pitched ululations of the women.

Nevertheless, we want to assure you that we are extremely pleased that you are here at Boston University. Your presence to honor the groundbreaking work undertaken by various departments at Boston University and to inaugurate the opening of the Archive of the Republic of Niger is most appreciated. Mun gode. (mun gode = we are appreciative/we thank you)

The Friends of Niger organization embodies the spirit of service and dedication of the more than 3000 volunteers who were fortunate to have served in Niger beginning in 1962 for 49 consecutive years. We are reminded by your presence that the Peace Corps goals are even more significant and important today to both the USA and the Republic of Niger than when the Peace Corps was initially established in 1962.

These goals are:

To foster development, to promote international cooperation, and to contribute to the education of America and to more intelligent American participation in the world.

We wish to inform you, Monsieur Le President that the Friends of Niger FON is undertaking new forms of collaboration and communication by including representatives of CONUSA on our Board and by expanding our funding of local NGO's in education, health and economic development.

We sincerely hope that your visit will enable you, Monsieur le President, your most competent Ambassador Professor Hassana Alidou, and staff, to identify new ways of collaboration and communication with the various departments at Boston University, new ways of collaboration and communication with the Board members and representatives of the Friends of Niger, and new ways of collaboration and communication with the citizens and government of the USA.

Finally, it is our wish that our past and current achievements can be continued, as shown by your visit today, to fulfill those goals set out by the Peace Corps some 50 years ago.

SPEECH - PEARL ROBINSON, TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University.

Mr. President, Honored Guests, Colleagues, and Friends of Niger:

We are defined by the PEOPLE in our lives. For me, many hundreds of those people are Nigeriens.

In 1968, I arrived in Niger as a Peace Corps public health educator. Attached to a rural clinic in Madaoua, I worked closely with the medical staff, and did monthly home visits. My caseload was 204 babies. And I got to know each and every one of their mothers.

Three years later, fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation on the Role of Traditional Chiefs in Nigerien Politics served as my entrée into the political life of the country. I was welcomed by the research community at IRSH, developed life-long relationships with Djermakoye Abdou Aouta

of Dosso and Sarkin Gobir Agada Nagogogo of Tibiri. And for 13 months I observed and interviewed the politicians, citizens and subjects of President Diouri Hamani's one-party state.

I returned in subsequent years to study political participation under the military regime of General Seyni Kountché – when he set up the Société de Développement. With the notable exception of Colonel Adamou Moumounie Djermakoye – who would eventually serve with distinction as Niger's ambassador to the United States – the soldier-politicians posed MANY research challenges.

In 1991 I had the privilege of being designated an International Observer at Niger's Sovereign National Conference. As an American, and as a scholar of political interest representation, being there as Nigeriens discovered and debated the meaning of citizenship was, and remains, a highpoint of my intellectual life.

In 2003, after an 8-year absence, I returned to Niger for a new research project: Islam and Female Empowerment among the Tidjaniyya. The Jamiyat Nassirat Dine is a mass Muslim women's movement led by the charismatic Saïda Oumul Khairi Niass, who is affectionately known as "Mama Kiota." The JND has 200,000 members in Niger, with branches in 6 other West African countries.

In addition to religious education, the association promotes female literacy, fights poverty, addresses public policy issues, and advocates peace as the route to sustainable development.

Working with the Nigerien filmmaker Moustapha Alassane, I have produced a Hausa-language documentary about Mama Kiota – with the aim of making the movement and its goals widely known in West Africa. I invite all who are present to assist with the dissemination of these women's message.

Thank you.

SPEECH – JENNIFER YANCO, WEST AFRICAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

US director of the West African Research Association (WARA).

Monsieur le President, Professeur l'Ambassadeur, and honored guests

I am thrilled to be here today at the inauguration of AREN at Boston University. This archive will be a key resource for current and future generations of researchers. During the many years I spent in Niger, I collected a wealth of materials that bear testimony to Niger's trajectory during the latter part of the 20th century.

They are dear to me, but in my own private collection, not accessible to others who might benefit from them. How wonderful for all of us who have amassed these private collections to now have a place where these historic archival materials can be safely kept and made available to the wider research community.

I am here today not only as a contributor to the archive, but as the US director of the West African Research Association, or WARA. WARA has strong relationships with Niger and with our many Nigerien colleagues.

In 2011, together, we organized and hosted the third international Saharan Crossroads conference in Niger, a conference that brought together scholars from more than ten countries in West Africa, North Africa, and beyond. I see AREN as an opportunity to deepen relationships in the region through gathering and sharing our rich stores of materials on Niger.

I am also here today as someone with deep personal connections to Niger, a country that has had an enormous impact on my life. From the moment I set foot in Niger in 1975, I had a sense that I had arrived in a very special place. For more than 15 years, Niamey was my home.

During those 15 years, I served in many roles: I was a Peace Corps volunteer, teacher trainer and advisor, researcher, and university professor. I traveled by road—*hanyar gardarda*—to every city and town in Niger that had a secondary school; and in Niamey, I conducted my doctoral research on bilingualism in Hausa and Zarma.

I learned a great deal during those years, as everyday people generously made time to share their stories and experiences with me, as officials at the local and national level so kindly facilitated my work, and as elder scholars like the late *Djioulde Laya* and my students and colleagues at the university welcomed me into their vibrant intellectual circles.

Early on in this trajectory, I met two amazing young women who were my students in linguistics at the university of Niamey—*Ousseina Alidou* and *Hassana Alidou*. Later, we worked as colleagues in a Hausa summer language institute in Niamey. And it is a high point of my life that our paths have continued to intersect over the years. Both *Ousseina* and *Hassana* are here today.

Each of them has gone on to accomplish remarkable things; Professor *Ousseina Alidou* is the Director of the Center for African Studies at Rutgers University; she has published widely on women in Islamic societies in Africa, and provides critical guidance to the scholarly community of Africanists through her service on the board of the African Studies Association.

Her sister, Professor *Hassana Alidou*, has an equally impressive list of accomplishments, the most recent being her appointment as ambassador of the Republic of Niger to the US. It is my pleasure and great honor to introduce her today: *Ambassador Alidou*.

SPEECH – EMILY NOLAN

[\(“Damana”\) Fulbright Scholar who was introduced to Niger through the Boston University study abroad program.](#)

“Votre Excellence Monsieur le Président, Professeur *Hassana Alidou*, Messieurs-Dames. Bienvenue, *Fonda Kayan*, *Sannu da Zuwa*, Welcome.

Ay ma Emily Nolan amma Nijer ra, ay ma Damana. Ay to Niamey handu septembre ra, lokacin kaidiya, yadin ga, Yazi Dogo ne ay se mayo Damana.

J’ai étudié à Niamey en 2009 et 2010 avec le programme de l’Université de Boston. Après le premier semestre, le Niger m’a manqué tant que j’y suis retournée pour un deuxième tour. J’ai eu l’opportunité d’étudier la culture et société du Niger, le développement, et les langues nationales, tous avec des professeurs magnifiques nigériens et américains. On a voyagé à *Konni* pour rester avec des volontaires du Corps de la Paix et aussi à *Dogondoutchi* pour loger dans les familles Hausa. Chaque étudiant est resté avec une famille nigérienne à Niamey aussi. Ma famille

nigérienne sont des peuls qui habitent à Kirkissoy à Harobanda. Pour aller la-bas, je devais aller au petit marché et dire aux taximans « ay ga ba ay ma koy Kirkissoy, pompo do. »

En plus des études et des voyages, tous les étudiants ont travaillé dans la communauté de Niamey. On apprenait comment fabriquer les batiks, sculptures, et bijoux avec les artisans au musée national. J'ai travaillé avec des ONG nigériennes, Valpro et Aiki Yanke Talauci et aussi l'ONG anglaise, Save the Children. Avec Aiki Yanke Talauci, j'ai assisté aux réunions et aux formations des femmes. Elles faisaient une tontine traditionnelle, et j'étais tellement intéressé. Quand je suis rentrée aux Etats Unis, j'ai lu tout ce que je pouvais trouver sur le microcrédit.

En 2014, grâce à une bourse de Fulbright, je suis revenue une troisième fois à Niamey pour mener un projet de recherches sur les services financiers pour les femmes au Niger. Je suis allée aux réunions des groupements féminins pour voir comment se déroule leurs activités. J'étais témoin de leurs petits commerces. Ma mère nigérienne est membre de deux groupements féminins et elle fait plusieurs petits commerces. Elle est élèveuse et elle fabrique le fromage et le jus pour vendre. Sa sœur fait « dey da nera » ; elle achète des hijabs pour les revendre. Toutes les femmes que j'ai rencontrées ont au moins une activité génératrice de revenu. J'ai appris que les femmes nigériennes sont pleines de ressources et d'initiatives, et qu'elles feront tout pour soutenir leurs familles. Elles sont tellement « mata masu k'arhi » ! J'ai appris beaucoup au Niger et je le considère comme mon deuxième pays, et Niamey ma deuxième ville. Je suis chez moi au Niger.

Ina son k'asar Nijer da mutanen Nijer sosai da sosai. Ina son in koma nan da nan. Na gode muku, Merci.”

English Translation:

“Your Excellence Mr. President, Professor Hassana Alidou, Ladies, Gentlemen, Honorable Guests: Welcome (French, Zarma, Hausa, English).

My name is Emily Nolan but in Niger, my name is Damana. I arrived in Niamey during the rainy season, therefore Yazi Dogo gave me the name Damana (Zarma).

I studied in Niamey in 2009 and 2010 with Boston University's study abroad program. After my first semester, I missed Niger so much that I went back for a second semester. I had the opportunity to study the culture and society of Niger, development, and the national languages with amazing Nigerien and American professors. We traveled to Konni to stay with Peace Corps volunteers and to Dogondoutchi to stay with Hausa families. Every student also stayed with a Nigerien family in Niamey. My Nigerien family are Fulanis who live in Kirkissoy in Harobanda. To get to their house, I used to have to go to the Petit Marche and find a taximan by saying “ay ga ba ay ma koy Kirkissoy pompo do” (I want to go to the water pump in Kirkissoy).

In addition to our classes and trips, each student also did community placement internships in Niamey. We learned how to make batiks, sculptures, and jewelry from the artisans at the National Museum. I worked with the Nigerien non-governmental organizations (NGO) Valpro and Aiki Yanke Talauci and the English NGO Save the Children. With Aiki Yanke Talauci, I attended meetings and trainings of women who participated in a traditional tontine (rotating savings and credit association). I was extremely interested in this and when I returned to the US, I read everything I could find about microcredit.

In 2014, I received a Fulbright research fellowship to return to Niamey for the third time and conduct a research project on financial services available to women in Niger. I attended women's group meetings to see how they function. I witnessed their income generating activities. My Nigerien mother is a member of two women's groups and conducts many income generating activities. She raises animals and makes cheese and juice to sell. Her sister conducts "dey da nera," or buying and selling. She buys hijabs and resells them for a profit. All the women that I met had at least one income generating activity. I learned that Nigerien women are extremely resourceful and will do whatever it takes to support their families. They really are "mata masu karhi" (strong women)! I learned so much in Niger and consider it to be my second home.

Hausa: "I love the country of Niger and the people of Niger. I hope to return very soon. Thank you."