
Reversing inter-disciplinary rifting in eastern Africa: towards integrative fieldwork

Jean-Renaud Boisserie*^{†1,2}, Jean-Baptiste Eczet³, and Inter Tek

¹Centre Français des Etudes Ethiopiennes – Éthiopie

²Laboratoire de paléontologie, évolution, paléoécosystèmes, paléoprimateologie [UMR 7262] – Université de Poitiers = University of Poitiers, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique – France

³Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale – École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Collège de France, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique : UMR7130, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique – France

Résumé

From its very beginning, one of the main goals of the GDR Grand Rift Africain was to foster interdisciplinarity between Earth sciences, evolutionary sciences, environmental sciences, and social and human sciences. Differences in data acquisition and analytical tools, in vocabulary, and in disciplinary practices constitute obstacles to such an integrative work, even when a common topic of interest is identified. One option to overcome these issues is to develop common field research. Integrative fieldwork should generate a better mutual understanding of disciplinary differences and particular challenges. Interdisciplinary synergy could emerge bottom-up from combined data acquisition practices. Indeed, this step remains open to reflexive considerations that enable methodological dialogue while still in formation – well before results are shaped by each discipline and become much harder to reconcile. For this, we needed to identify a field ground with concrete research questions interweaving fields of knowledge and different approaches, as well as with an history of pre-existing research involving CNRS-related expertise. The Turkana Depression, a region of strong interest for all components of the GDR, appeared to fit well these criteria. It is an important segment of the Rift, connected to the Main Ethiopian Rift and to the Kenyan Rift. It bears tremendous fossil, prehistoric, and paleoenvironmental records for the late Neogene, as well as for older time intervals. It hosts different biomes and several national parks protecting its biodiversity. It bears impressive cultural and linguistic diversities, especially in its northern part. Considered by the central governments of Kenya and Ethiopia as a marginal region, it is also a target for economic development through exploitation of its natural resources (land, water, oil) and through creating new connecting routes. For all these reasons, a group of researchers, now fully integrated within the GDR, are elaborating a project of Long Term Ecological Research for the Turkana Depression. At the heart of this project, supported by the Direction Europe and International of the CNRS, we focus on the interplay between geological settings, biological and cultural heritages, resource exploitations, and local to international policies, in the particularly broad time perspective of the local human evolutionary history.

Mots-Clés: Interdisciplinarité, Afrique orientale, Turkana, patrimoine, terrain, structuration de la recherche

*Intervenant

[†]Auteur correspondant: jean.renaud.boisserie@univ-poitiers.fr