

Violences Causing Negative Impacts in the Sahel Countries between the 19th and 21st Centuries

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Abstract

The Sahel is a vast African region that has suffered from many forms of violence before, and after decolonization. These may be caused by nature (climate and drought, for example) or by human action: lack of political sensitivity, military dictatorships, the impact of various religions, etc. Traditional life changed rapidly with the presence of colonial powers, and since decolonization there have been no improvements for the population, except for those individuals who belong to the social elite. This essay deals with some of the forms of violence that have occurred in the Sahel in the last two centuries, but one of the most current forms of violence is not addressed: emigration from various Sahelian countries to Europe and other parts of the world, as this aspect would make this essay exceed its scope.

Keywords

Sahel, History, Colonialism, Decolonization, Natural Violence, Ideological Violence

1. Introduction

Unfortunately, the countries of the Sahel have long suffered violence caused by various phenomena and reasons: climatic, historical, social, religious, political, economic, colonial, military, and others of lesser size.

In principle, the states that make up the Sahel are Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan, and Eritrea, although this reality responds to certain areas of these nations. The surface occupied by the Sahel exceeds five and a half million km². Some studies add northern territories of other nearby countries such as Guinea, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, and

Ethiopia. There are geographers who argue that the soils make up the Sahel respond to only six nations: Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. And in any of the conceptions, the Niger River is the most important artery and the one that has supplied people and animals for centuries. Along with this channel, its most important tributaries have fulfilled the same task. We have reported on these details in more detail a few years ago (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

The Sahel is a region with many problems, but there are positive aspects in economic and social development. Despite material poverty, countries have made progress in economic aspects, although this is insufficient: the United Nations Human Development Index shows that progress in the Sahel has tripled the world average in the last thirty years (United Nations, 2023-2024). Among the improvements are health care and life expectancy, which has increased from 49 years on average in 1990 to 61 years in 2018 (United Nations, 2024). Per capita income has also improved, and the extreme poverty rate has decreased from 75% in the 1990s to 41% in 2018. In other words, the growth in wealth has also benefited the poorest. Despite these improvements, most Sahel countries are among the bottom thirty according to the latest Human Development Index ranking (United Nations, 2024). Undernourishment affects one in five people, and malnutrition affects one third of children under five (Acción contra el hambre, 2023). Education rates have fallen significantly: only one in two young people is literate, compared to an average of more than three in four in Africa, and only one in three students completes secondary education (UNESCO, 2020).

2. A Little History

Between November 15, 1884, and February 26, 1885, a conference of European countries was held in Berlin, at the initiative of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, whose debates were to have the goal of dividing up Africa (Robinson et al., 1965: p. 175). This *official* decision between the European imperialisms of the 19th century, heirs of those of the 15th century in an effective way, decided the fate of the African continent, proving a stronger presence of the Europeans, especially in the interior that was still unknown (Shillington, 2005: p. 301).

The European influence in the Sahel began in the 15th century when its Atlantic coasts began to be visited by Portuguese sailors. Contacts with the native populations were quickly combined, and embassies and small trading factories appeared. These centers were set up at the mouths of rivers, and at specific points that had good geography to prove a port where ships could dock (Newitt, 2005).

European merchants then requested certain goods: gold, ivory, honey, wax, gum Arabic, and slaves. The latter were an excellent commodity after the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Since modern slavery was instituted, Westerners not only controlled trade, but also became leaders of Sahelian life, as they imposed cultural models on coastal populations, which recipients transmitted to inland societies, which were the ones that supplied people destined for trafficking. The

direct influence was on the coast, and the indirect influence was in the African interior, still unknown to Europeans, but not to local, and regional leaders who functioned as intermediaries with other Aboriginal groups (Junquera Rubio, 2020).

The most sophisticated weapons of the time were introduced into Africa, especially firearms. This commodity was highly coveted and was a tool that had the capacity to strengthen the local and regional power of its buyers. Metal instruments, beads, furniture, alcoholic beverages, and European clothing appeared in African landscapes. Obtaining these goods forced a readjustment of all traditional commercial activities. Cultures usually produce a series of elements aimed at trade and export, and the most lucrative economic activity was the sale of slaves. It does not matter now that this was a repugnant activity, nor that there is much literature against it, since racism and xenophobia activated their impulses so that some Europeans subjugated Africans (Junquera Rubio, 2020).

The slave became the key piece of the entire economic system and as a commodity, it favored the insertion of the activity into the globalization of that time (William, 2011; French, 2021). This aspect was nothing more than the continuation of an exchange whose origins were in force centuries before, when the Arabs and Imazighen settled in the Sahelian landscapes. The only change now is that a much wider and more lucrative field of application was available. The states settled in the interior of Africa became predators of their societies, to supply the slave trade. The clearest example is found in the different Senegambian kingdoms. The effects of the slave trade offer two general and various aspects: 1) an enormous and immoral human cost; 2) a progress towards the establishment of more complex social forms between white and Black societies (Taylor, 2018).

Likewise, to the extent that trade with the Europeans was controlled by the regional warrior aristocracies, they stood out because they achieved strength against less favored communities. In this context, merchants, and the *marabouts* themselves, involved in various economic activities, also increased their social and religious prestige¹. For those interested in the *marabouts*, their culture and development in Islam, I recommend reading the contributions of María Dolores Vargas Llovera, who perfectly explains their birth, evolution, current situation, and international projection thanks to emigration (Vargas Llovera, 2011: pp. 205-222; Vargas Llovera, 2012: pp. 35-58; Vargas Llovera, 2021: pp. 333-352).

I add that some current discontent has its origin in the decisions taken as a result of the first European presence; especially, in the groups destined for agriculture, whose *marginalized* situation has always favored them being suitable elements to be recruited by the networks established by the leaders of the *jihad*, a Muslim movement that decides to wage war against those considered enemies and

¹The word *marabout* is used in Muslim countries to refer to individuals who are spiritual guides. It is derived from *murâbit*, which is usually translated as hermit, since individuals considered as such reside in a *râbida*. In modern times, the word *marabout* is also used (Al Ashqar, 2003). *Râbida* indicates the place and the building in which the corresponding hermit resides.

infidels, but also provides the model that a believer must live to remain faithful to the Koranic principles (Bonner, 2006: pp. 58-59).

This relative development of a mercantile economy was also the result, from the beginning of the 19th century, of the disappearance of the African slave trade to America through the Atlantic Ocean. This nefarious activity reached its peak in the 18th century, a curious century since it is called by several names: 1) Century of Enlightenment; 2) Century of the Noble Savage; 3) Century of the Enlightenment. What also happened is that legislation began to be passed against slavery and in favor of freedom, and this occurred in the 19th century, when the question of whether the slave trade and everything related to it should be ended was strongly questioned, especially if we consider the volume of the native African population displaced by this cause (Austen, 1979: pp. 23-75).

The acquisition of slaves on the West African coast and their sale in the American markets was incompatible with Christian ideals, which were universalist; Furthermore, the Enlightenment could not tolerate such a business, which in some countries, such as Spain, continued until the end of the 19th century (Lahoz Finestres, 2014: pp. 231-233). On the other hand, in more pragmatic terms, slavery proved to be an institution with serious limitations in terms of economic development. Undoubtedly, plantations specializing in commercial crops, in which slaves worked, could often be a good business for their owners and for state tax collectors; but, looking at all possible situations, it turned out that the slave model had ceased to be profitable due to the low productivity achieved by free labor (Perdices de Blas & Ramos Gorostiza, 2017: pp. 1-41).

Slaves showed an understandable hostility towards the capitalist system, which is why they conducted their activity in a defective manner when they had no one to supervise them. This behavior affected the quality of their work and made it difficult for them to perform skilled tasks. To this incorrect *procedure*, one must add the cost itself each time, one had to be bought on the market. The slave system was also not very flexible in everything related to what we understand today as human resources.

The slave worked well or poorly but could not be fired nor could the master get rid of him except by selling him again. The sale to move them from one plantation to another fulfilled a disciplinary role, since, often, a kind of tacit consensus between owners and those in chains acted, since those who did not cause problems would not be sold, nor, therefore, separated from their own. Certainly, slaves could be rented to other owners; but this custom occurred in economic areas with little diversification, since it was not likely that there would be many demands since each economic unit was usually self-sufficient with its own labor force (Schwartz, 1992).

An economy based on slavery would play a predominant role but would meet great difficulties in developing and in achieving greater social complexity. It would be confined to the role of supplier of goods with little added value, such as a mining or plantation economy, which would sanction it to a progressive dependence on other regions with more diversified economic structures. Given such limitations,

resorting to wage labor seemed, in principle, clearly preferable once the proper conditions for its establishment could be set up.

These circumstances were summed up in the existence of a large reserve group, which would allow for the promotion of low wages, also counting on public institutions that would discipline this workforce, which, on the other hand, had to be protected by guaranteeing it minimum resources in periods of unemployment and a well-developed market for consumer goods, logically supplied by a large group of companies dedicated to this purpose. Thanks to these contexts, workers could use their wages, received in currency, to buy what they needed to live. Furthermore, technical improvements could now allow greater labor productivity in certain sectors, making the enormous exploitation of slave labor less necessary in terms of business profitability. Slave labor was completely defenseless against the decisions of his master, making him preferable to wage laborers, who, even under the worst conditions, had certain resources at their disposal, such as emigration or the beginning of self-organization. Finally, the reduced long-term exploitation of wage laborers could allow the development of new commodity production to satisfy their own demand, an eventuality that was particularly likely in the context of a progressively more diversified economy.

Once all these processes had developed, the old financial models, partly self-sufficient and in which the owners exercised broad political tasks, would no longer have a reason to exist. Precisely, capitalist development in both Europe and America had been creating all these conditions and thanks to them, the construction of a different economy was now going to be possible. For example, the great migration, mainly European, to the Americas in the 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrated how a huge amount of cheap labor could be obtained without having to resort to the forced importation of slaves.

This new context also proved another fact. Although the living conditions of many of these immigrants could be terrible, perhaps even worse in some cases than those of the slaves themselves, it was also true that the new arrivals were inserted into a much more dynamic economy than that existing in any plantation model; what is more, they came to be considered a key factor in its development. Hence, their living conditions could improve over time and, in the meantime, some of them managed to rise socially with relative speed. And these expectations were basically forbidden to slaves. And with this, the frontal opposition between producers and owners was softened, with the latent threat of bloody rebellion that it could bring with it.

In these new contexts, it is not surprising that slavery began to be progressively frowned upon. Nevertheless, it was still highly functional and profitable in a very restricted area, but of great strategic importance, and there were also many vested interests around it. All this decided that its abolition was a slow and costly process. First, the slave trade was prohibited, although it survived illegally for decades; that is, reality surpassed fiction, since it was necessary to wait decades.

The progressive decline of the slave export business favored a reorientation of

the economic activities of the Sahelian aristocracies, including some of Maraboutian origin, who had also excelled in this task, as occurred in the territory of the imamate known as Futa Yalon². The change consisted in the use of slaves on the ground, since an agrarian economy was created based on plantations dedicated to crops destined for export: cocoa, coffee, peanuts and palm oil mainly (Barry, 1997; Loimeier, 2013).

These products had to satisfy the growing demand for them in the European markets, thanks to an improvement in the standard of living of its population, which, increasingly, could afford these small luxuries (McGowan, 1981: pp. 245-261). Several of the new African exports also bought strategic importance for the growing European industry, such as peanut and palm oils, which were essential lubricants for industrial machinery.

All these crops, except the last one (palm oil), were of foreign origin. Their acclimatization in Africa meant that, for the first time in history, many regions of this continent now had a product to trade with, apart from slaves. In principle, this was a positive development; but these beneficial effects were partly cancelled out by the new situation of economic dependence that this implied. Once again, local inhabitants were reduced to the condition of suppliers of primary services with low profitability in the market (Barry, 1992).

Also, in the shortest term, the generalization of these crops gave a phenomenal boost to slavery, which, in fact, survived for almost a century after the disappearance of the Atlantic slave trade. The change that took place in the African world was quite remarkable. The plantation system of America and elsewhere was now reproduced in Africa and with this change the slave was subject to the imperative of achieving the maximum economic benefit for his owner and this applied a much harsher context than the one that had developed in American lands. In this sense, we can say that while traditional slavery was ending in America it was gaining strength in Africa (Reader, 2002: pp. 393-433).

The final incoherence was that the polemic against slavery in Africa became one of the reasons to justify colonization by the Europeans; the same ones who, curiously, centuries before went to the African coasts to obtain slaves to sell them in America. The control of African interior territories came from political, economic and social interests in which no ingredient was precisely philanthropic. At most, the colonizing phenomenon of the 19th century was a response to the transition from a commercial and mercantilist capitalism to an industrial capitalism in its entirety, and it was instituted by only seven European powers (Darwin, 1997: pp. 614-642; Minawi, 2016).

In the first case, the main source of income was commercial profit, often made possible by the monopoly control set up over certain exotic products with a

²Futa Yalon, Futa Yallon, or Futa Jalon, was an imamate that can be considered a state, because it had all the ingredients for one. It is named after the mountain massif of that name, which was rich in gold and diamond mines (Robinson, 2016). It was created in the first quarter of the 18th century thanks to a *jihad* of Fulani shepherds, who had abandoned animism, and embraced Islam because of migrations from present-day Mali that had religious influence (Rodney, 1968: pp. 269-284).

significant demand from solvent groups with monetary funds. It was a control achieved with political agreements, imposed, between native producers and European competitors, frequently using military force for this purpose. Armies were important for pacifying and colonizing (Mackenzie, 1983).

Such a model presupposed a merely external and superficial relationship with the suppliers of such products, who could generate them within the framework of non-capitalist relations. Thus, an articulation took place between the incipient capitalism, primarily commercial, and a series of traditional and pre-capitalist social formations. We thus find ourselves before a hybrid global system, which included several subsystems organized in a quite separate way from the way the local aristocracies and the European colonizers were organized. Capitalism did not manage to organize the entire system, but it controlled the final dynamics and especially the commercialization of production (Amin, 1986: pp. 258-270).

This was the model that supported relations between Europeans and Africans for centuries. Meanwhile, in the Americas, another differentiated mixed procedure was increasing. The issue surfaced with the implementation of the entire machinery at the service of a capitalist organization, based on private property and an orientation toward capital accumulation, with forms of labor exploitation different from wage labor. I am referring to the employment of African Black people as slaves and the different forms of work imposed on Indigenous people (Klein, 1986; Del Rey & Canales, 2014).

On the other hand, in this context, a strong political and state restriction appeared, which was needed for the proper functioning of the system. In this way, the union between two hybrid and quite different models, one in Africa and the other in the Americas, developed within the framework of a global pattern of commercial and mercantilist capitalism. In this regime, the complicity between private capitalists and state officials overlapped a particularly important strategy for operating. However, the overall logic of the system did not only support the desire for commercial gain, but also the search for other benefits, linked to procedures that were not strictly capitalist, such as political advancement or increasing social prestige.

These heterogeneous or composite models favored characteristics and practices within the framework of a regressive process of capitalist relations, thanks to scarce progress due to the lack of productive energies, which were weak. However, support came from technology, since when this increased and had capitalist networks, the result was to develop as never before imagined; what is more, all barriers were overcome.

However, you look at it, despite what might be thought to be positive, the reality is that the disadvantages of slavery were much greater than the benefits that could be achieved by supporting it. On the other hand, the pre-capitalist societies present in the African geography were sufficiently anchored in their reality that it did not seem that they would evolve in the short term towards a capitalism capable of

supporting itself and sustaining itself in the long term.

Along with the destruction resulting from the slave trade, the model was based on the elaboration of various products by applying an antiquated and uncompetitive technology. To this, we must add that the Europeans tried to capture the good will of the local leaders through gifts and military pressure. This strategy required added costs, which could only be compensated with the profits obtained by marketing the few products obtained, which were not many, moreover; what is more, the transport was not adequate because the roads were not right for moving from one place to another. Another considerable difficulty was that the Sahel was in the hands of the local chieftains who had the little military power that existed.

Global capitalist development was going to require a greater demand for products, which could not be satisfied while the outdated methods that were still in force continued to be used. The context called for change, and for this to have the ability to increase production and for this to be sufficient to supply the market. Changes can be induced by one person, but they require the support of their society.

In order to have a profitable model, it was necessary not only to have products but also agents with the capacity to market them, suitable communication channels and political and military deployment to defend the new achievements; at the same time, real or potential enemies who resisted the new changes had to be eliminated, appeasing possible regional revolts and liquidating the endemic conflict that was one of the greatest impediments to establishing profitable economic development. The new model had to work, or it had to be withdrawn because it could not satisfy little or nothing of what was expected (Rindos, 1984).

Direct political control would also authorize the entry, in the context of the global capitalist economy, of a considerable territorial surface that had previously remained outside the circuits of exchange. The lack of a state organization prevented territories and societies from using the major trade routes, which is why many products were still unknown. One fact to bear in mind and in favor of the Europeans was that, thanks to this penetration, European medicine encountered tropical diseases, which from then on had scholars who found the antidotes and reduced the deaths of both natives and newly arrived foreigners (Low, 1935: pp. 715-717; Boronov, 2008).

In short, the global capitalist expansion supported the next colonial adventure. This task was favored by the appearance of supporters of colonization, of pressure groups in which businesspeople, intellectuals, religious people, journalists and politicians predominated (Miegue, 1975; Fieldhouse, 1977).

Despite the possible evidence, a merely mechanical relationship between capitalist development and colonial adventure cannot be set up. The existence of a close relationship between both concepts is evident, as is the creation of colonial empires that will seek to make numerous resources profitable to favor open industries in the metropolises, the direct investment of businessmen and a long

etcetera, are aspects that do not allow an open conclusion of this relationship.

On the one hand, together with the interests strictly linked to capitalist development, colonialism also promoted other interests in an obvious way: it strengthened the different states present in the landscape, supporting some against others, because of divide and conquer. Tribal disputes were used to advance territorial dominance and then impose European criteria (Smith, 1983).

Colonialism in Africa had a very negative impact on local economies, and on the exploitation of the continent's natural resources. European powers plundered Africa's natural resources—gold, ivory, diamonds, and other minerals, for their own benefit. Economic exploitation generated social inequalities, marginalization in local communities, and perpetuated an unjust economic model. In addition, the introduction of forced labor systems on plantations, and in mines led to the exploitation of African labor under inhuman working conditions. This economic, and labor exploitation left its mark on the economy and social structure of Africa, as it established a new inequality that was unknown until the 19th century in the Sahel countries, and still persists in local communities (Fieldhouse, 1984; Ceamanos, 2024; Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2017).

The colonization of Africa offered new opportunities for careers, since large groups of professionals saw in this action the possibility of securing a present and a future. Military personnel, colonial officials, impoverished aristocrats, merchants, day laborers eager to buy land of their own, and a long etcetera of groups, accepted the colonizing action with pleasure. The interests of these groups found firm support in metropolitan public opinion and in the leaders. Journalists did their job as “good” patriots. The criticisms, which also existed, were based on a wide range of doubts, but they did not go beyond that.

3. The Sahel under French and British Colonial Control

Knowledge of the Sahelian landscapes is recent for cultures other than those of that area, including European ones. Two colonial empires, France and the United Kingdom, shared the Sahel among themselves, and this happened in the 19th century, mainly because they had been settled in the region for a long time. Time and economy made it easier for these two countries to have many social, and commercial relations with the local African aristocracies; however, given the vastness of the territory to be occupied, the process was complex.

In the French case, we must start from certain coastal supports available in present-day Senegal to which ships arrived and departed. In 1830, France began the occupation of Algeria, and this meant having entrances and exits from the Mediterranean coast. Arrival inland began from points considered as auxiliary. The planned objectives were since these maritime locations should facilitate movement into the interior and establish direct communication between all the French settlements. The army served to support any penetration; in fact, some of the primitive barracks have become the nation's capital after decolonization, as is the case of Niamey, on the right bank of the Niger River, which gives the country its

name (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2017).

In the case of the British, we know that they had enclaves in Gambia since the 17th century, but this territory became sterile for British interests as soon as it was surrounded by French Senegal, so it could not be a support point for penetrating into the interior. Another more southern support was in Lagos, on the Nigerian coast, where slaves were trafficked, and from 1861, it became an indispensable center for incursions into the interior. In 1882, the United Kingdom had new possibilities, since Egypt came under the control of British foreign policy. Given that much of Sudan was then under effective Egyptian control, the British had to take advantage of this situation, and eliminate the so-called Mahdist state, which was the only problem.

Sudan was a territory of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad bin Adullah, better known as Muhammad al-Mahdi, triumphed militarily by defeating the Egyptian forces, and establishing his sovereignty until 1898. He chose the city of Omdurman to be the capital and government residence. His revolt coincides in all respects with a *jihad* against the Ottomans established in Khartoum. The importance of his movement was realized when he defeated two military expeditions sent to capture him, which is why his religious, and social prestige increased throughout Sudan. The British sent General Charles Gordon to put an end to this movement, but he failed, and was killed by the Mahdists, so that they were able to impose a regime based on Islamic law until 1898, when the British regained control of the situation (Holt, 1970; Searcy, 2011).

Over time and during the 19th century, the two colonial empires began to seize land and, using different access routes, advanced as far as they could into the interior of Africa. At some point, the two advances crossed paths, and this contact caused a conflict, which did not escalate into anything serious, as is known in history books: the *Fashoda Crisis* at the end of the 19th century, and whose summary is as follows: French troops wanted to keep the course of the Nile as it passed through South Sudan, and the British responded with an ultimatum to vacate the place; and so it was. The reason was that the Anglo-Saxons were planning to establish a railway linking Cairo to Cape Town, that is, to link the north to the south, and the French were planning to do the same, but connecting the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The two nations resolved the crisis peacefully, as the French withdrew. The French side was led by Jean Baptiste Marchand, and the British by Horatio Herbert Kitchener (Saucier, 2013).

By this time at the end of the 19th century, both powers were following the guidelines of the Berlin Conference of 1884, since the European nations had decided to occupy the African territory as quickly as possible, without having previously delimited it since what was awarded to each one still lacked precise borders. The desire to advance territorially is what raised the Fashoda Crisis, and the fact itself came from that desire to dominate the land, so that the neighbor could not take it over. When the 20th century began, the Sahel was practically entirely

occupied, although in many places, the European colonial presence was not effective (Ceamanos, 2024).

In short, observing the course of events, we already detected that in the 1850s the French began to penetrate from Senegal. This action served to thwart the project of El Hach-Omar who wanted to consolidate a maraboutic state in the area. The French encountered Islamic theocracies, which they had to confront and gradually liquidate. They gradually defeated the Futa Toro, an imamate based in the interior of the Senegal River, and others controlled by Wolof, Serer and Mandinka leaders (Hanson, 1996; Klein, 2005: p. 541; McDougall & Scheele, 2012). These maneuvers did not end until the end of the 1880s; that is, the military operations lasted for forty years and during that time French settlers arrived to establish themselves with the sponsorship of their government and the endorsement of French troops.

These four decades served to reduce the traditional aristocracies and to make their slave warriors, the Cheddo³, disappear, together with the Marabut, and their followers, who were physically eliminated or forced to submit. A significant part of the old ruling elites disappeared, while another went on to play the role of intermediary between the colonial authorities and the local populations. The process has its difficulties, as rebellions were frequent. Aristocrats who had initially collaborated with the French ended up taking up arms against them, especially at times when they understood that French control was excessively reducing their interests (Boulegue, 2013).

This period included the maraboutic uprisings, highlighting that of Futa Toro; that is, the one that took place in the bastion of the movement initiated by El Hach-Omar. These instabilities took on an intensely millenarian character, with the appearance of figures who proclaimed themselves the Mahdi, or representatives of Allah (Coulon, 1981). This phenomenon is of no interest to millenarian criteria, as the foreign presence could be interpreted as a telltale sign that the end of times was approaching; moreover, the suffering of many of his compatriots made it easier for others to become receptive to these chimerical messages (Levtzion & Pouwels, 2000).

The French troops were extremely fortunate that their action had been preceded by that of the El Haj-Omar movement. The ancient and powerful states of Kaarta, Ségou and Massina were destroyed and the Omarian state erected on the ruins of the was holding up with great difficulty because of its weakness. This context decisively facilitated the French advance. When the Omarian state was conquered in 1893, Ahmadu, the son of El Haj, took refuge with numerous followers in the Caliphate of Sokoto, where he died in 1898. These movements were understood as replicas of the hijra, or Hegira; that is, an imitation of the Prophet's emigration from Mecca to Medina to escape the oppression of the infidels at that time. The French journey then continued eastwards, finishing off Rabah in Bornu, and subduing Wadai and Baghirmi, as well as numerous populations considered to be

³The Cheddo are also known as Ceddo, Tieddo, Tyeddo, etc. (Clark & Philips, 1994). Their mission was to defend their chief, collect taxes and ensure peace in his territory.

tribal or pre-state (Roberts, 1987).

Among these ethnic groups were the Teda, Tuareg, Bambara and others. Further south, the last jihadist enclaves, such as those of Fode Keba and Samory Turé, were also eliminated. As for the Mossi kingdoms, they submitted peacefully, which allowed their sovereigns to remain on the throne, but subject to France (Robert, 1980). In short, the French occupation took place, depending on the case, either peacefully or violently. The former was instituted where the natives assumed the material impossibility of resisting the overwhelming military superiority of the occupier. When this was the case, the colonial authorities tended to respect the local authorities, which they so greatly needed.

Violent resistance was mainly the work of certain marabouts, who, based on their previous ideology, initially found it more difficult to submit to an *infidel* power. This situation was since fighting was a tool to fight against themselves, since it was a way of recruiting new support, joining the already traditional fight against the evil Muslims, and the *pagans*. Even so, they also had to finally opt for surrender. On the other hand, the roles of the resisters and the collaborators often turned out to be interchangeable over time (Robert, 1980).

Those who initially faced the European advance had to resign themselves in the short term and agree to collaborate with the invader. Likewise, certain local rulers, who had initially agreed to cooperate with the colonial power, changed their minds when it adopted some measure that they considered too burdensome for their interests. It should not be forgotten, in this regard, that the implementation of the colonial regime had to be modified gradually.

At first, the French presence could be scarce and, therefore, bearable, being reduced to the signing of some formal agreement. The same could happen with the European commercial agents, with whom it could be convenient to come to an understanding. The deployment of troops on their territory already introduced a first change, and these soldiers were also agents of cultural change. In cases where these troops could be small, and limited to maintaining a peace that was beneficial to all, major problems were absent. Later, however, they could become more imposing and combined with a direct expropriation of political functions, which ended up pushing for rebellion (Ferrando-Durfort, 1989; Lewis, 2022).

The case of Lat Dior, the last sovereign of Cayor, is instructive in this regard. Over the course of two decades, he fought against his rivals for the crown and opportunistically made pacts and fought with the French, just as he did with the Marabouts. Finally recognized as king by the French authorities, he broke with them after estimating that the construction of a railway network that would cross his territory, necessary to allow the export of peanuts, would deprive him of control over his kingdom. He ended his days in 1883 at the hands of the colonial army, to be, over time, idolized by Senegalese nationalism as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance, which is a manifestly biased interpretation of historical facts (Wade, 2022).

The important thing, when trying to understand all these behaviors, lies in the decision-making of all these leaders, who acted much more motivated to achieve their own personal benefit and that of their families, than to bring some happiness to their subjects. In an environment so deeply marked by the clashes between rival groups, which is what traditional Sahelian society offered at the time of the arrival of European colonialism, it was more important to protect one's own group, and harm the adversary, than to show any other solidarity (Wade, 2022).

Depending on how the relationships between successive colonial development, and these interests in taking advantage of strangers were raised, they would then interpret their decisions in one way or another. Control over the newly conquered territories required the colonial authorities to be willing to decide based on maintaining a relationship with the elite of native intermediaries. These mediators agreed to collaborate motivated by the following criteria: 1) take advantage of the moment for their own benefit; 2) forced to act because of their relations with the new foreign masters; 3) driven by the hope of being able to improve the situation of their subjects in some way.

In social contexts marked by the mediation of several intermediaries, who were also rivals, and conflicting, not getting along with the new masters of the situation could mean giving ground to an enemy faction, which could then take advantage of its temporary influence to end up harming them. As far as the French authorities were concerned, it was not always easy for them to find the right intermediary and, in practice, they had to make several attempts. For example, after the conquest of the Umarian state, a member of the Yarra clan, descendant of the dynasty that had ruled the Bambara kingdom before it was conquered by the Futanke, was placed in charge of Ségou. For some, this was a conciliatory measure towards this population, which allowed the occupants to present themselves to them as liberators from the yoke previously imposed by the Fulani (Sy, 1967; Sanankoua, 1990; Robinson, 2004).

Another much harsher measure was also revoked, namely the deportation first, and then the return to Futa Toro of a large part of the Futanké settlers, who had been transferred to their country of origin in inhumane conditions; however, the new Bambara ruler did not satisfy the French authorities, due to his tendency to act in favor of his own interests, and not those of the colonizers, so that after a year he was executed. Finally, the decision was made to resort to various Futanké figures, including Agibu, a son of El Hach-Omar himself (Hurst, 1898; Robinson & Triaud, 1997). All this took place in a climate of marked distrust and resentment, not only between the French authorities and the colonized, but also within the latter, and between the different factions and ethnic groups.

Within the Fulani of Mali, there was a major conflict between the so-called Massinanké and the Futanké, but there was also a similar one between those who were willing to accommodate themselves to the occupiers and those who, on the

other hand, remained hostile towards them. These differences divided many families, and people who had been related until then, as many traditional ties were broken (Robinson & Triaud, 1997).

The British penetration and conquest advanced in a similar way to the French from Egypt, and from the Nigerian coast. The first advance had as its main objective the destruction of the Mahdist state. Once it was crushed in 1899, other regions could be dominated. The second march was made from the Nigerian coast and began by subduing a series of populations located beyond the geographical limits understood as Sahelian, since Yorubas, Ibo and Edo, for example, do not belong to the Sahel, although they reside nearby.

The British soon reached the domains of the Sokoto Caliphate⁴, which was easily subdued in 1903. Attahiru, the Caliph, and last descendant of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio and Bashir, son of Ahmadu, revoked their decisions in the face of the situation, and assumed the hijra again. Shortly afterwards, they died fighting in Burmi along with several hundred of their supporters, and the survivors fled to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, where descendants remain today. This rapid, and easy conquest of what was apparently a truly imposing state, was not only due to British military superiority, but also to the support of factions of the ruling classes who swept over to their cause, submitting peacefully, thinking that by allowing themselves to be subjugated they would survive better (Johnston, 1967; Stilwell, 2004; Lofkrantz, 2012).

Precisely at that time, the Satyru movement was developing in their territory, which took its name from the town where it originated. It was a Mahdist movement, which challenged the power of the local aristocracy. We could consider it, to a certain extent, as a kind of revitalization of the original principles of the Caliphate, which had been lost in the framework of the well-known pragmatic accommodation to the real and colonial world. This was, on the other hand, a common process in these historical, and social contexts. The policy of pragmatic accommodation can generate discontent among some of those affected; and it can even be taken as a betrayal of the principles that originally governed the movement itself; but it can also happen that this accommodation itself entails certain problems that no one had previously thought of (Nobili, 2020).

In the cases we have been examining, it did not cease to suppose, time and again, an assimilation of the theocratic state to the previous aristocratic, and dynastic model, deeply oppressive for the common people. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that many thought that their real sufferings were just the logical result of such an abandonment of the original principles, so it was necessary to return to them. In a certain way, the movement led by El Hach-Omar in Futa Toro had shown these same characteristics, those of a revitalization of a previously de-vitalized process, which we might add is watered down today (Hanson, 1996; Klein, 2005).

The Satyru movement could perhaps have taken the same turn, but its rapid

⁴This caliphate then occupied territories that today belong to Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria (Lofkrantz, 2012: pp. 385-401).

crushing by British forces aborted this possibility (Lovejoy, 2005: pp. 317-353). As had happened in the French Sahel, once the initial resistance had been defeated, pacification was achieved with relative speed. The fact is, to a certain extent, striking, since it implied the destruction of the set of Muslim theocracies established over more than a century of efforts and bloody battles. This submission to a Christian power could be considered, in principle, a truly aberrant and scandalous act, which would require continued resistance or emigration to territories where divine law still prevailed. However, only a small minority opted for either path, or the decades of colonial rule were relatively peaceful (Conklin, 1998: pp. 419-442; Lovejoy, 2016).

There were rebellions, but they soon became localized, and most of the clashes did not occur between natives and settlers, but between indigenous groups fighting each other. This problem was aggravated when the colonial power was inclined to favor a specific group, and then the fight was more violent. On occasions, the colonial authorities acted as mediators and peace was reestablished (Last, 1967; Hall, 2011). In a short time, many opponents of the foreign, and colonial presence became collaborators. The local elites were integrated into a relatively indirect system of government and tended to maintain good relations with the European settlers and the authorities (Anyangwe, 2012).

This happened even despite their profound rigorism and their rejection of foreign cultural influence, all of which also constituted their traditional source of legitimacy before the population, especially due to Islamic religious criteria that rejected all foreign and Christian influence (Sanneh, 1989). One compelling reason for the British presence was that it was perceived as an opportunity to achieve a profound improvement in the material conditions in which people previously lived (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012: pp. 46-54). This was especially the case since colonial agrarian policy favored maintaining a large part of the land as a public good administered by traditional authorities, to their great benefit, although such a policy may have discouraged the development of an agrarian bourgeoisie in the most classical sense of the term and, therefore, may have ultimately blocked the capitalist development of the entire region (Shenton, 1986).

Likewise, as the Muslim territories became increasingly integrated into the colony of Nigeria, competition with other ethnic groups, especially with the Ibo and Yoruba, developed as progressive and intense. These southern societies had the advantage of greater material, and institutional development. In a short time, the policy adopted by the northern authorities consisted of a strengthening of ties with the colonial authorities.

What has been expressed up to this point in this essay responds to the elements that must serve as a basis for developing subsequent events up to the present. European colonial imperialisms introduced a wide range of structural changes in indigenous African societies, and when decolonization came, after 1960, the internal approaches of each resulting nation still lack the capacity to propose lasting stability for the region; rather, what we still have is enormous instability.

4. Climatic Violence: The Agent That Creates Vulnerability in the Sahel

The action of the climate is natural. No government or person has the capacity to control rain, drought, wind, storms, or to guess at what time of day or night any of these phenomena may act. Nature is above man, and its forces are powerful and uncontrollable. The Sahel is in an area of the world that we can call hot, and with high temperatures throughout the year. The result of this phenomenon is that it offers heat and aridity, although this is not the case 100% throughout its entire extension, since within this enormous geographical surface there are many ecosystems.

Drought and famine are a well-known binomial in the Sahelian landscape, and its effects have often been seen as plagues that cannot be dealt with using traditional means. If things go as normal, the Sahel has a suitable climate for living, as it can provide agricultural crops and pastures for livestock. Crops and livestock are the most traditional economic bases, and societies settled in different places depend on them.

Climate change has been considered a topic of daily discussion for about 40 years. The importance comes from the fact that its negative actions can cause instability where they affect the environment. The consequences it produces can be economic, social, environmental, political, health, etc. The Sahel witnesses prolonged droughts that affect the environment, and those who depend on it, especially people, animals and pastures, since without water they are doomed to die, because without this natural resource there is no life (Junquera Rubio, 2024).

In the absence of this element, the United Nations schedules periodic meetings to discuss its management, since it will become increasingly scarce. If we consider that this international organization issued a Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, it was not until 1972, on the Stockholm Conference, when world authorities began to worry about water, given the scarcity that was already detected then. Since this year, the UN has dedicated many international meetings to addressing water scarcity and considering how it should be managed and administered to prevent the problem from becoming greater than it already is (Junquera Rubio, 2024). World politics has prepared a general speech warning of the need we have to safeguard this resource, which is key to life (United Nations, 1977).

Despite the decisions of the international community to moderate the consequences of climate change, these do not seem to be mitigated, as temperatures continue to rise, frozen ice in the Arctic and Antarctic continues to decrease to the point that by 2050 it is possible that the waters of these two oceans will be totally navigable, at least those in the northern area (Junquera Rubio, 2022, 2023a, 2023b: pp. 88-110). As regards the Sahel, the situation will worsen in general terms, as global warming will decrease water, reduce agricultural harvests, cause livestock farming to disappear due to lack of pasture, increase emigration to other

parts of the world, greater foreign military interference will appear, and problems will have to be resolved that we have not yet had the need to raise. The future is unpredictable, but social, political, religious and military conflicts will increase, but we do not yet know in which directions these confrontations will act (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

The most Sahelian countries are Senegal, Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania. Of these, the first and the last are governed by presidential regimes, and the other four by military juntas with a dictatorial tone. Since 1960, the year in which these countries emerged as independent from France, military coups have been an ingredient to consider in the social life of each of them (Junquera Rubio, 2021: pp. 57-74).

Whether a democracy, a presidential system or a military junta govern, what is clear is that none of them has the capacity to stop global warming; what is more, in these nations the average temperature has increased by just over one and a half degrees Celsius compared to the rest of the world, influenced by the proximity of the Gulf of Guinea to the south, and the Sahara desert to the north (Criado Hernández, 2007; Rojas Díaz, 2019: pp. 121-176). In this context, the lack of water will be a problem that will not have a solution in the short term.

If we extrapolate the same issue of drought, and lack of water to other regions of the world, we detect similar problems, but with better contexts; that is, the average temperature rises less violently on the thermometers. This does not mean that uncertainty disappears, but what we find is that climate changes in the Sahel are more violent than in other territories to which I have also dedicated studies (Junquera Rubio, 1999: pp. 153-176; Junquera Rubio, 2002: pp. 85-110; Junquera Rubio, 2019). Given that in 2024 there are between 800 and 1 billion people who still lack access to drinking water, and that the little water they have poses constant conflicts, what we must evaluate is the degree of temperature, and at what point it becomes a threat to a particular society or to several, whether they are close in the landscape or far away (United Nations, 2015; Junquera Rubio, 2024).

Traditional Sahelian societies have been dedicated to livestock farming for millennia; moreover, the economic base on which all of them depend is centered precisely on livestock farming rather than on agriculture, since the latter responds more to the impacts of European colonization than to traditional African ones. Most of the livestock farming is centered on cattle and goats. Other animal species, such as horses and donkeys, are understood more as auxiliaries for transport, than as destined for family consumption or exchange with other people or groups. Cows represent the greatest dependency for all people. The Sahel cannot be understood without pastoralism in any of its contexts (Pastor Martínez & Junquera Rubio, 2008, Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

Curiously, floods should not seem to be a cause for alarm in arid areas, and yet they are phenomena that arise regularly. In this sense, it is equally curious that excessive rainwater has a direct relationship with the desertification of a

certain place on the globe; and yet it does and is an almost *sine qua non* manifestation (Junquera Rubio, 2002: pp. 85-110). These meteorological events create conflicts, since they usually produce natural disasters that affect state policies, and how these are planned will lead to better or worse understanding (Junquera Rubio, 2002: pp. 85-110). In the case of the Sahel, the poor management of a natural disaster increases terrorism throughout the region, which, in this respect, is also a hot zone in the world, especially in Africa (Junquera Rubio, 2016: pp. 43-62).

Meteorology and Administration in the Sahel

It is noted that the most traditional economy of the Sahel is based on livestock. In this sense, in the interior of this vast region, and in the centuries prior to the European presence, which is after 1830, the greatest conflicts between shepherds arise from the control of pastures, and especially in times of drought, when the grasses to be consumed are reduced. Violent changes in the climate generate hardship, famine and deaths of people and herds (OECD, 2022).

Today, there are Sahelian areas that offer a high rate of human births. The birth rate, for example, in Niger, which has 1,267,000 km², has an official population of 25,357,000 inhabitants, which gives a density of 20 inhabitants per km². Well, the number of births per woman is an average of 7.5 for each woman, which places the country at the top in this figure, and among the most fertile in the world in this regard, although the other side of this coin is that infant mortality corresponds to 73 deaths per 1000 births in the first hours of life. The problem is that water resources only provide 0.02%, and this figure becomes a very difficult problem to solve, if not impossible to solve. These data are taken from the report of the Spanish embassy in Niamey (Government of Spain, 2024).

Having said that, I must add that the entire Sahel is in a situation of population explosion, which does not seem to have precedents. This figure directly affects the resources available, especially those of land intended for crops and pastures. When a farmer wants to expand his area, he will do so at the cost of reducing the area intended for pastures. The most normal thing is that they must confront shepherds, and this will produce an immediate conflict (Higazi, 2016: pp. 365-385; Mora Tebas, 2017a; Fernández Arribas, 2023: pp. 49-74).

Global warming is responsible for prolonged droughts that have had a very negative impact on agriculture, on the scarcity of grasses, and on livestock dependent on the latter, and reducing the surface area destined for crops (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

As a concrete example, but not the only one or isolated, Niger, which is noticing an unstoppable population increase, is also requesting to increase its cultivation areas to meet the demand for food. This, in turn, forces a reduction in pastures, since agricultural products are traded especially in the large cities, among which Niamey stands out, which in less than a century has gone from being a barracks for colonial troops to the capital of the nation (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez,

2017). This context forces a strong competition with the shepherds, and ranchers who depend on their livestock to live.

On the other hand, it must also be considered that after 1960, influences other than those of France and Britain appeared in the Sahel. Mainly, but not exclusively, North Americans, Russians, Chinese and Vietnamese have made an appearance in the military and mining sectors, mainly because certain minerals are required to consolidate industries in their countries. Likewise, the so-called *Lords of the Gulf*⁵ have chosen certain areas, with permission from the leaders of each of the countries, to go and hunt wildlife species that are shot down with state-of-the-art weapons. The international presence has favored the increase in internal conflicts and, in this case, farmers and ranchers, who see their rights trampled on, increase their confrontations (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

The richness of the soil has evaporated due to internal and external causes. Among the former, it is worth mentioning the sterility of the landscapes, since the wrong technique has been applied by farmers and ranchers. Among the latter, I mention as important that foreigners act without respecting traditional local customs, and practices. In this complicated context, the traditional life of the Sahelian populations has been altered in the following aspects: 1) agricultural expansion slows down livestock activities that also depend on the environment; 2) agro-pastoral functions are affected because certain obstacles (mainly agricultural and mining) prevent free transit along traditional routes for the flocks on which shepherds have depended for millennia (Junquera Rubio, 2016: pp. 43-62).

Another aspect to consider is the political instability generated by the drought. Clashes and conflicts have increased greatly after 1970. Global warming causes a reduction in agricultural, and livestock resources. This reduction generates scarcity, and when there is not enough food, populations protest to their leaders, who are not the best nor are they usually elected by voters, because under military regimes what we find are dictatorships, and tyrannies (Junquera Rubio, 2021: pp. 57-74). It must be clear that, in general, the military consumes a lot, and produces little or nothing. Sahelian populations say that their leaders live far away, far from real problems and that, in addition, as social managers they are quite inept.

Conflicts between farmers and ranchers have increased due to global warming, and even this phenomenon not only impacts the sterility of the soil, but also develops a distrust in government institutions. Shepherds feel powerless in the face of policies that favor agricultural expansion; moreover, they distrust the Ministries of Agriculture because their officials decide without asking any of the beneficiaries or the aggrieved, whether real or potential, about what they should decide. This distrust affects the psychology of people, making them more friendly or negative towards coexistence (Higazi, 2016: pp. 365-385).

⁵The expression *Lords of the Gulf* should be understood as applied to the leaders of the so-called Persian Gulf countries, who are powerful in wealth, and money.

Discouragement is general among Sahelian societies, who hope to be able to change, and improve their situation by emigrating to any of the countries of the European Union, especially France and Belgium, where they have significant support in the French language, which they think will help them to integrate into this new situation. Local institutions play a large role in this decision-making, which are incapable of offering any satisfactory alternative.

One measure, perhaps mistaken, deployed in recent times is that certain Sahelian societies decided to create *ethnic militias* to cope with government abandonment, and as an aid to cope with social despair. An added problem is that these militias often operate in border areas where national armies have little influence. The power vacuum is exploited by these groups that were born, according to them, to combat Al Qaeda terrorism, as we will see later (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021: pp. 4-26).

Global warming, in addition to acting on the specific meteorology of the region, aggravates the crisis, and generates conflicts because it forces a change in the traditionally seasonal rainfall regime, and now drives an unpredictable irregularity for that model. When long periods of drought are overcome, and the much-desired rains arrive, it turns out that they cause floods, and the dry soils lack the ability to absorb the required moisture.

These situations, far from solving social problems and eliminating conflicts, aggravate them, and affect the relations between farmers and ranchers, which is one of the additional reasons for the emergence of armed groups. The image of a shepherd carrying a Russian or Ukrainian-made machine gun, the AK-47⁶, on his shoulder is striking. This image is seen among shepherds in remote places, such as in southern Ethiopia (Pastor Martínez & Junquera Rubio, 2008), but also in areas of Mali or Burkina Faso, for example (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016). Without a doubt, it is not just an image, but it is a true novelty in Sahelian pastoralism in recent times.

Even if we are clear that global warming is important to detect various changes that are also recognized as complex, it turns out that we are still lacking solutions to specify and organize the puzzle. Undoubtedly, I believe that a holistic vision is required that considers environmental, social, political, military, religious factors, foreign impacts, and the search for other worlds in emigration to Europe, America or South Africa.

If the short-term policy is to analyse and elucidate the issue of the effects of global warming in depth, to mitigate others that require a prior detailed analysis, which will allow for strategies to reduce conflict in the Sahel region, then we must manage the logical consequences, because the context is accentuated by the vulnerability of geopolitical, and socio-economic events. In this sense, the effects of warming must have a multiplying scope, because the threats are many, and cause an increase in conflicts, as well as the emergence of armed groups without state control in any of the countries in which they operate.

⁶The AK-47 is named after its inventor, Mikhail Kalashnikov.

In fact, there is a relationship between the consequences of climate change, the emergence of ethnic militias, and the intensification of fighting. The multiplication of tensions has as its primary source a combination of existing risks, already mentioned here, as well as the effects of global warming, which are considered a multiplying ingredient of these threats (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2009: pp. 71-81).

A series of negative factors favor the emergence of terrorist organizations that take advantage of climatic impacts to manage an environment of insecurity, and a constant confrontation with the state of each of the Sahelian nations; even those that are not, but are a short distance from the geographical border, which does not coincide with the conventional one established after decolonization.

The strong emergence of Al-Qaeda, and jihadist groups has created, where it has a certain territorial control, that the native populations settled in those places become more vulnerable than they already were by tradition. This religious-military impact favors the degradation of the soil, and the environment and makes it more prone to the decision of jihadist groups (Thurston, 2020).

This example is clear among Malian populations, for example, dedicated to agriculture. Farmers had received land to cultivate after decolonization and had also received all the guarantees required for them to keep it as their own. With the recent arrival of the jihadists, it turned out that these farmers became frustrated, as the terrorists became more supportive of the nomadic groups, once they detected that the farmers did not want to comply with the religious wishes imposed by them, as state agents are unable to establish the required order.

The rise of terrorism, and the intensification of conflicts are also produced by socio-economic weaknesses, by economic and geopolitical factors related to global warming. In this sense, the loss of livelihoods caused by the climate can increase existing tensions, generating opportunities for groups that have the capacity to recruit farmers, and allocate them to terrorist activity. The farmer, due to his conditions of extreme poverty, has no choice but to submit to the jihadists, since they previously push him to look for food, and money in exchange for protection that is nothing more than chimerical (Thurston, 2020).

In these contexts, jihadists consider rural communities to be areas where they can recruit people to become terrorists, who will act in this way by convincing them, if they are not already, to join their ranks because that is the will of Allah. These terrorists take advantage of the tensions, and instability caused by global warming, as well as the weakness of the state in these peripheral areas. The terrorist manages to impose himself by taking advantage of the lack of state authority. The natives of these areas, in the absence of other incentives, swell the terrorist ranks in the absence of other opportunities.

I add that climate change can also favor migration due to the scarcity of resources, and this situation can also be exploited so that jihadists decide to recruit those who are deprived of material goods by offering them to support any change, even violent ones (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016). Sahelian populations, who are in some of the stages of vulnerability, will be prone to enroll in

emigration to Europe. This is another adventure that can sometimes go well, and sometimes die in the attempt. What is clear is that they leave their homes, and their areas of birth in search of host communities on the other side of the Mediterranean. Some lucky ones may find residence among the *Lords of the Gulf*, but they will be the minority on the other hand (Junquera Rubio, 2016: pp. 155-190).

In this sense, climate change may be the first to initiate modifications on the daily lives, and traditions of farmers and shepherds, drastically reducing their economic possibilities, data that are taken advantage of by the jihadists to act next, and present themselves as liberators, abusing the moment to recruit followers, and increase the vulnerability of already unstable areas.

To conclude this section, we can assure that there are relationships between the impact of global warming and terrorism; even that the climate can indirectly favor conflicts. This is not to say that climate change is terrorist or that it creates terrorists; rather, what happens is that underlying socio-economic, and geopolitical factors favor the rise of both. In this sense, I believe that climate change is not directly responsible for the rise of terrorism, but it contributes to the creation of conditions conducive to its increasing power.

5. Religious and Military Violence

For a few years now, terrorism has become a daily sight throughout the Sahel. It is true that this action is more striking in some places than in others, but all nations suffer from this reality, and it does not seem likely to end in the short term, even though it affects millions of people. At the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, the region is one of the most affected on the African continent by instability (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016; Gallego Gordón, 2018: pp. 103-144).

The rise of this phenomenon has certain peculiarities that help its development and expansion: 1) the complicated geographical typologies that complicate the control of conventional borders that arose with decolonization, and especially in the middle and western area bordering the Sahara desert; 2) the absence of cultural, and religious homogeneity, although it is apparently thought that Islam is the dominant belief; 3) a poor economy, and numerous social challenges, which lead populations to a certain despair; 4) the pandemic called COVID-19 produced its negative impacts on the various societies, although many Sahelians said, when asked, that it was a product of the whites; they even expressed that it was a “mania of the whites”⁷.

These elements and others favor that this region is a fragile environment and these circumstances support that its geographies are prone to terrorist groups acting with total impunity (Blanco Castro, 2019). The European colonial powers withdrew from the region after 1960; but, like it or not, France, for example, has

⁷The French expression was: “*COVID-19 est une manie d’homme blanc.*” And that is why they were not protecting themselves as much as they should have.

continued to support the different Central banks⁸ until today so that the national currencies of each country could have a certain value and recognition (Le Gouriellec, 2015: pp. 85-122).

The disappearance of the colony did not mean total withdrawal. In recent years, some Western countries have deployed troops to the Sahel to fight, and neutralize terrorism, which is still in force. Russian mercenaries are also in the area, known in the media as the “Wagner Group”, a name that comes from the identity of their leader, who died in Russia under obscure circumstances: Yevgeny Prigozhin. In the case of the Sahel, the support of these mercenaries to local armies does not seem to make terrorism disappear in the short term at least. With another view of the subject, it can be said that this fight involves Russian atheism against Islamic fundamentalism, which is an old issue (Kabunda Badi, 1993: pp. 161-183). On the other hand, the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine has also moved to the Sahel, since Ukrainian troops are supporting the Tuaregs of Mali.

5.1. Manifestation of Terrorism in the Sahel

The term terrorist is polysemic, and much discussed, as it is subject to an explanation that can be individual or collective; furthermore, while some condemn a group for the use of confusing violence acting against a backdrop that can show objectives that are indistinctly economic, political, social, and religious, for example, others consider these individuals as heroes of freedom. Then the ways of understanding their actions are very different.

The terrorist has a final objective: to pressure and intimidate the general opinion on a specific issue. This does not prevent it from manifesting itself in different ways: 1) by the geographical environment that can be regional, national or international; 2) by its objective that ranges from the ethno-nationalist, through its political ideology, its economic criteria, its religious beliefs, etc.; that is, the range of motives is very wide (Sagardoy Foundation, 2005). In this sense, we can say that each terrorist is different from the others. In the media, when an individual acts alone, he is often called a “lone wolf” (Arias Gil, 2019).

The case of religious terrorism has very specific peculiarities. The action to be carried out by the terrorist convinced of his faith goes beyond political criteria, since what is involved here is satisfying what is interpreted as divine will; that is to say: the fanatic, because that is what a religious terrorist is, understands that there is no possibility of dialogue with anyone, which is why he is going to act, and it does not matter if he dies in the attempt.

This criterion quickly implies that it is not a local type of action, but rather that what is of interest is to develop the action at an international level. Messianism is

⁸There is currently a rejection of the French presence, which is being frowned upon by various leaders, especially in countries governed by military juntas. Its disappearance from the area is being covered up mainly by Russia and China (Colom Jaén, 2021: pp. 48-53; León Cobo, 2022). The new situation will have to wait a while so that we can rigorously evaluate the results, which we hope will be positive for Sahelian societies, which have long been waiting for some social, and economic redemption.

the driving force of this activity, and self-immolation to become a martyr is its most eloquent argument, since it will serve so that others will collect the inheritance and increase it. Martyrdom is presented as the maximum act of surrender to the divinity in which one believes, and this must be expressed in the corresponding ideology; moreover, the martyr becomes a hero whose actions must serve to enlighten those who act after him.

Naturally, when the intention to act has been detected, the fundamentalist looks for enemies where he believes that these are followers of Satan, and not of Allāh: *“With God’s permission we urge all those who believe in God and want a reward for fulfilling his will to kill all Americans, and seize their money wherever, and whenever they find them. We also call upon religious scholars, their leaders, their youth and their soldiers to launch the attack against the soldiers of Satan, the Americans, and against all those followers of the devil who are allied with them, to defeat all those who follow them, so that they will not forget it”* (Wright, 2007: p. 91).

The Western world has obstacles to confront these threats, because it has understood the world in a secular way for centuries. However, in the nations where these groups proliferate, religion personifies the nation, the values that each person must manifest in daily life and the model to constantly follow. In Islam: the individual is religion, and religion is the individual. Islamic religious terrorism flourishes as a response to colonialism, and the practice of *soft power* in Islamic cultures, which has been reinforced by fundamentalism to avoid any weakness (Akhthar, 2009).

5.2. Reflection on Terrorism in the Sahel

Available population data indicate that the Sahel is home to more than 400 million people, most of whom follow Sunni Islam. The entire territory is immersed in a deep crisis that shows negative economic, political and social impacts, since it is one of the poorest demarcations in the world, with several points in a situation of extreme vulnerability (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Crespo Romero et al., 2023: pp. 1-24). The environment deteriorated with the fall in the price of raw materials, especially mining, which represents about 90% of its exports. Numerous crises of all kinds prevent economic development that reaches the entire society (Mesa, 2022).

Insecurity has spread since the attacks in 2004 in the Borno area, in Nigeria, which is a border area with Cameroon and Chad. Those responsible for these acts were the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram (Aluede, 2023: pp. 9-26). Terrorist activity has expanded thanks to the directives of the leaders of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), who are based in northern Mali, eastern Mauritania, Niger, and western Chad. These situations have facilitated the birth of an unprecedented demographic crisis, causing more than 4.2 million people to be displaced, and more than a million to be unable to find employment. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that by 2050, more than 85 million Sahelians

will find a way out by emigrating (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016; Malakooti, 2020).

Most terrorist attacks occur in two large, shared border regions: 1) the first corresponds to the territories of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger; 2) the second corresponds to regions of Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. The borders drawn by decolonization are more of a problem than a solution, since they respond to a European imposition that did not respect the tribal, and ethnic reality of many regions, forcing and creating nations where there were none, and with which their inhabitants do not feel identified (Aznar Fernández-Montesinos et al., 2018). This reality was reflected in the Sahelian countries, especially in Mali, exposing the fragility of the entire region from the beginning (TetziAff, 1994: pp. 41-60).

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) has divided the entire Sahel into *katibas* (branches): 1) Yahia Abou Ammar Abid Hammadu, which is based in Tunisia, southern Algeria, and northern Niger; 2) Tarik Ben Ziyad controls Mauritania, part of southern Algeria, and northern Mali (Herrero & Machin, 2015: pp. 189-200). The first is famous for being more *terrorist*, while the second is more *criminal*. The difference between both branches, if we can say so, is in the use of greater or lesser cruelty and it seems that the first acts without consideration or contemplation because its followers act in accordance with takfirism; that is, being at war against bad Muslims, who are considered almost as infidels (Fierro Bello, 2008: pp. 327-360).

Now, how can it be detected that a Muslim is a bad believer? This is where denunciation comes into play; that is to say, a believer denounces another, accusing him of not following Allāh enough, of being lazy with his religious obligations, etc. If the complaint is successful, the terrorist authorities act against that bad believer. This accusation against someone is called *takfīr*, an Arabic word that we must translate as infidel. Takfirism understands that action against bad believers must be rigorous, or they will be killed or enslaved (Maíllo Salgado, 1995: pp. 23-34).

On the other hand, this doctrine is legal in the sphere of the two great Muslim branches: Sunnism and Shiism. A few years ago, when the Taliban triumphed again in Afghanistan, television around the world showed images of *ruthless believers* shooting women in the head in the street for the simple sin of walking with their heads uncovered, and such actions were carried out without any prior trial or court order. The slogan can be applied to women: *either you cover your head, or if you leave the house with it uncovered, you die*.

Terrorists gain control of a territory through prior negotiations, and once it is subdued, they establish the rules as they understand them. In this sense, once they have gained an area, they organize their settlements, their training places to prepare their next attacks. The formula they use to get money is to first kidnap those they think are rich, who must pay their ransom, and in this action, they usually kidnap non-Islamic people, who are settled in the area or who are simply occasional tourists, since liberation is a way of humiliating the West. Al-Qaeda leaders

constantly urge their subjects to kidnap, and Western media reports of many kidnappings in recent years (Napoleoni, 2016).

Unlike a criminal organization, the money is not for the personal enrichment of the group's members, but to continue financing terrorist activity, and this requires several actions: buying weapons and loyalties, paying for travel, etc. There is not much information on the recruitment method, but at first it is by imposition rather than by conviction. To join the organization, there is no requirement for a previous age, since anyone is eligible, nor is there any rule that regulates whether a man is preferable to a woman, or vice versa.

The geographical, and sociopolitical characteristics of the ecoregion have forced AQMI to perfect its capacity for adaptation. Thanks to this possibility, a subdivision called Boko Haram emerged, which is demonstrating that a fixed settlement from which to act is no longer required; they understand that it is better to establish semi-nomadic criteria, imitating shepherds, to camouflage themselves better and so that the military of each country cannot finish them off (Torregrosa López et al., 2016: pp. 67-79).

Likewise, Islamic terrorists have modified their strategies to act against the West. When they started, they proceeded against individuals, but now they do so against the properties of international organizations mainly or against government infrastructures of any of the countries of the Sahel, or of others if that is how it is understood.

Al-Qaeda in the Sahel, and the Maghreb has been subdivided into several branches. This decision was taken so that the components act without knowing each other, since in case of being captured by troops loyal to the military, they will not be able to betray any comrade. Terrorist activity has been high, with attacks averaging around 70% per month in 2019, and the number of deaths being high but difficult to determine numerically because secrecy is instituted so as not to be violated (Loimeier, 2012: pp. 137-155). The COVID-19 epidemic halted activity from 2020 onwards.

Terrorism has generated a lot of political, social, and economic insecurity; what's more, these actions produce poverty, as investors do not go to unstable areas. As is the situation in the Sahel, we can assure that the great region has always been in the hands of underdevelopment, and in that context the only practical way out for citizens is emigration, whose circuits are also in the hands of some of the many mafias present in the area (Junquera Rubio & Pastor Martínez, 2016).

The Western group most punished by Al-Qaeda terrorism is that of journalists. It is rare to find an Islamic, and Sahelian country that does not count European, North American and Asian journalists among its dead. Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and others provide examples of violent deaths against journalists, and television employees. For the jihadists, any person or institution that is detected as an enemy must be eliminated (Fuster Leal, 2021: pp. 177-208).

One of those enemies that needed to be suppressed was Chadian President Idris

Déby Itno, who was assassinated on April 19, 2021, by the *Fighters of the Front for Change and Concord in Chad*. This fact has increased the already existing instability in the region. This president had been fighting in the three decades prior to his death against terrorist groups, which, in this case, had emerged in Libya in 2016, since that country was then in turmoil after the disappearance of Muammar Gaddafi (Pargeter, 2012).

With the disappearance of its president, popular protests arose in Chad, and the response of the army has been to shoot indiscriminately at the protesters. The protests come from the fact that Chadian citizens understand that their sad history was repeating itself, and that they were returning to the year 1999, and that the nation's constitution was once again being violated. The Chadian army had announced the formation of a Transitional Council, which would remain in place for 18 months, under the leadership of Mahamat Idriss Déby, the son of the former president. The problem is that his father, in 1999, created the same political body, and promised the same thing, but nothing was fulfilled. The Transitional Military Council suspended the Constitution, which establishes, in its Fifteenth Title, that the transnational president must be the president of the National Assembly (Robles Pigver, 2005).

Chad's situation is key in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. The country is in a strategic location. The withdrawal or weakening of troops on the country's borders poses a great risk for Chad, and its neighbors, as bordering countries will be exposed to violent attacks by terrorist groups, as this country has the largest joint military force in the entire Sahel, the so-called G5, created on 16 February 2016 to promote stability in the Sahel. It has now been dismantled (Dacoba Cerviño et al., 2019; Sidikou, 2019: pp. 103-116; Camara, 2020). However, the numerous problems, and external influences, especially Russian, have ruined this organization, and currently only Mauritania and Chad provide troops, but insignificantly. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have withdrawn from this coalition (Zongo, 2016).

In a way, we can say that Chad is the stabilizing country in the region. In the east, it controls Sudanese political instability, and prevents it from spreading. In the south, it has been the new home of more than 500,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, a nation that is also managing a huge migration crisis. In the west, it mainly counteracts the forces of Boko Haram, which are active in Niger and Nigeria. In the north, it contains the Libyan rebel groups, because, although Libya is not part of the Sahel, it is a neighbor and its tottering resonates strongly in the region, since the country is the new center of operations for terrorist groups in the Sahel, as the death of former President Gaddafi seems to demonstrate. The country, on the other hand, has become the launching pad for terrorist groups in Africa, which intend to impose their will on the entire continent (Mora Tebas, 2017b: pp. 102-119).

Right now, no one is arguing about Libya's international borders, but this fact could arise at any time given that the country has two parallel governments. The

situation is not easy. In mid-April 2024, the United Nations Special Representative for Libya, Senegalese Abdoulaye Bathily, resigned from his post due to the inability to find a way out of the crisis. Currently, the American Stephanie Khoury assumes the position of interim head of the United Nations Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)⁹.

5.3. The West Intervenes in the Fight against Terrorism in the Sahel

Al-Qaeda terrorism, in its various forms, has been responded to, or at least attempted to be responded to, with some institutional initiatives to undertake regional tasks jointly, such as the G5 Sahel group (made up of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad), which had various supports while it was in force: the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Bank, among others.

There has also been international aid for the entire region, mainly from France, and the European Union. Since 2013, at the request of the Malian government, the French government launched Operation “Serval” with the aim of expelling terrorist groups operating in the north, but present in other Sahelian nations. This was followed a year later by Operation Barkhan, which focuses on assisting the G5 Sahel member states, seeking to provide the necessary resources, and training for these countries to be able to manage their own security independently (Comolli, 2015; Camara, 2020).

This operation also involves armies from other nations: Germany, Spain, Estonia, and the United Kingdom. In 2020, Task Force Takuba, composed of French and Estonian special forces, was launched in the Sahara-Sahel belt. France has deployed 5100 soldiers, trained more than 7000 G5 Sahel soldiers, carried out 750 training or combat support activities, and had up to 75 cooperation officers in the region (Ministère des Armées, 2019).

France has also led the international intervention in the Sahel. In 2012, the United Nations Security Council promoted Resolution 2085 to underline the need for international assistance in the region. In 2017, France was the forerunner of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), created under Resolution 2391 to assist the government of Mali in stabilizing its country. It has more than 15,000 civilian, and military personnel providing logistical and operational support (Pérouse de Montclos, 2020).

The European Union has also been involved through three main missions within the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP): 1) European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mali; 2) EUCAP Sahel Mali, and 3) EUCAP Sahel Niger. The first was created in 2013 to train and advise the Malian armed forces. It also cooperates with G5 Sahel member states to improve border control. The other two are civilian missions whose aim is to train the police, gendarmerie, and national guard, as well as advise the national government on

⁹UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya).

security reforms (Pérouse de Montclos, 2020).

The EUCAP Sahel Niger was created in 2012 and appears to be still in force. As for the EUCAP Sahel Mali, it was created in 2014, and has been extended until 2023. In addition, France, and the European Union also contribute financially to the region. Last year, the European Union contributed 189.4 million euros to the region. France contributed around 3.97 billion euros during 2019-2020 (Pérouse de Montclos, 2020).

However, the uncertainty over Déby's death has reshaped local perceptions of Western intervention, mainly French. The protests that have taken place in recent weeks in Chad have also been an accusation against France for supporting the military council against the will of the people. Together with the African Union, and the European Union, Macron declared at Déby's funeral that "France will never be able to make anyone question (...), and threaten, neither today nor tomorrow, the stability, and integrity of Chad", following Mahamat's promises to "stay faithful to the memory" of his father. These statements were understood by Chadians to mean that Mahamat will continue his father's leadership style, and that France does not care about the oppression suffered by the people for decades (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

It is at this point that France risks only worrying about the stability that Chad brought to the region, especially in its geopolitical interests concerning Libya and West Africa in particular. Perhaps this is why Macron felt the need to clarify his words a week later: "I will be very clear: I supported the stability and integrity of Chad when I was in N'Djamena. I am in favor of a peaceful, democratic and inclusive transition, I am not in favor of a succession," he said (Les Echos, 2023).

However, the Sahelians are getting tired of being puppets in Western games, as has been demonstrated in Mali with the protests of the inhabitants against the French military presence in the country. The West must show its real commitment to promoting human rights by pushing for a democratic transition while maintaining its fight against terrorism.

In conclusion, Islamist religious terrorism has been growing in recent years as a counterpoint to power. The Sahel is one of the predominant scenarios for these activities, as it is an area with pre-existing political-economic instability that terrorists have taken advantage of. Terrorism is changing its ways of acting, showing its adaptability in terms of geography, methods of action, and acquisition of resources.

France has proven to be the leader of the Western initiative in the region and has made progress in it. However, the West, especially European countries, must begin to pay more attention to the causes of the problems in this region, collecting data, and knowing its reality. Only then will they be able to address these problems effectively, helping existing regional institutions, seeking long-term solutions that satisfy the population. Now, it seems that France is withdrawing, and in the military field its place will be taken by Russia. In months we will see if the change produces more happiness or increases the problems.

6. Conclusion

In an essay of this style, there cannot be a single conclusion, since the context forces us to cite several; and we may even run the risk of falling short. First, the Sahel, like many other realities in the world, is a changing region. The latest international event occurred on July 7, 2024, when three presidents of three neighboring nations: Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, all of them military, created the Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States, and we do not know whether the rest of the countries will join or not; we will have to wait. The first objective is to plan the fight against the jihadists operating in the region, an aspect that is supported by Togo and Chad. It is not yet clear, but it seems that all three want to abandon the CFA franc currency. For the moment, the organization will be chaired by Asimi Goita, president of Mali for a period of one year. The first step in this direction took place in December 2023 when these three countries expressed their desire to leave ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). On August 14, 2024, the three countries decided to remain in ECOWAS. The overall context of the Sahel invites us to wait for developments to occur before we can speak clearly.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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