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Jihad in Sub-Saharan Africa

Challenging the Narratives of
the War on Terror

A World Policy Paper
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Beyond the Clash of Civilizations

Despite extensive media coverage, jihad is not the main threat to human security in sub-Saharan Africa. Each year, malaria and traffic accidents kill many more people than terrorist acts on the continent.

The fact that state security forces are generally more lethal than the insurgent groups they fight challenges the dominant discourse on the extent of jihadist atrocities. Indeed, government armies possess far superior firepower. Insurgence followed by a more deadly state response is found in almost all the civil wars of the 20th century, not just in Africa.

Terrorist violence is the subject of excessive media coverage because challenging the state is dramatic. It sells better than stories about malaria or traffic accidents. Yet by increasing the visibility of insurgent groups, the media finds itself playing into the hands of terrorists who want to create panic and present themselves as more powerful than they actually are. As a result, the media feeds the public's fear, which, in turn, influences policymakers seeking to meet the demands of their electorate. No matter how democratic or authoritarian they are, African states' reaction to terrorism has been consistently disproportionate.

The extent of violence afflicting the Sahel today is not unprecedented. In the 1970s and 1980s, the region experienced far greater number of deadly conflicts as struggles for independence in Eritrea and Western Sahara, the numerous civil wars in Chad, Sudan, and Somalia, the clashes against Libya, or even the terrible repression of a Marxist dictatorship in Ethiopia plagued the region. The difference is that these conflicts did not seem to develop in the name of a revolutionary Islam, which made them more acceptable and understandable to Westerners. As a result, we forget that foreigners were already being kidnapped or executed, like the French Major Pierre Galopin in Chad in 1975. We also forget that long before Operation Serval in Mali in 2012, regional turmoil had resulted in French military interventions, such as that in Mauritania in late 1977 against the Polisario Front following the abduction of engineers working in an iron mine in Zouérat.

The alarm caused by jihadists today is reinforced by our lack of understanding of regional politics. During the Cold War, many analysts had sympathy for the revolutionary and cathartic violence of Marxist liberation groups who were seen to be replicating the social and nationalist struggles of

industrial Europe in the Third World.[1] In contrast to today's jihadists, they were seen to share values with them. In Africa, Islamist insurgent groups are now examined through the lens of clash of civilizations theory, with an Arab and Muslim world in the North and black Africans evangelized by Christian missionaries in the South. These misconceptions permeate the analyses of countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, Chad, and Nigeria, which lie on the so-called Sahelian "front line" between the two great religions of the Book.

Of course, reality is more complex. Christians, for example, are a minority in southern Sudan, which for a long time was engaged in a battle against Khartoum's Islamist dictatorship, before becoming independent in 2011. As for Muslims, they sometimes constitute a majority of the population in areas located south of the Sahel. According to the 1998 national census, 75 percent of the Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire live in the southern part of the country, including Abidjan (20 percent of the total), where they were attracted by the economic opportunities of a commercial and maritime hub. In the south of Côte d'Ivoire, the proportion of Muslims is in fact slightly higher (35 percent) than that of Christians (33 percent) (Lasseur 2013, p. 505). Such a distribution of the population does not correspond to what some imagined to be the religious roots of the civil war that took place between the "Muslims in the North" and the "Christians in the South" until the arrest in 2011 of President Laurent Gbagbo, who is now detained and being tried by the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

In Nigeria, perceptions about the political, economic, and land conflicts between Muslim herders and Christian farmers in the central Plateau region, around the city of Jos, are just as skewed. In a country that was developed unevenly by British colonizers, the obscurantism of feudal Muslims in the North is seen as opposed to the dynamism and modernity of Christians on the Atlantic coast in the South. However, the megacity of Lagos, jewel of the continent's largest economy, was once a Muslim city in Yorubaland, where Islamization may have started as early as the 18th century. Before the arrival of the colonizer in the mid-19th century, half of its inhabitants were Muslim; this proportion still amounted to 44 percent of the 32,000 residents officially surveyed by the British in 1891 (Balogun 2013, p.31). This historically rooted presence is reflected in the fact that, since independence in 1960, the elect-governors of Lagos have all been Muslims: Lateef Jakande in 1979-1983, Bola Tinubu in 1999-2007 and Babatunde Raji Fashola in 2007-2015. The only exceptions being Michael Otedola in 1992-1993 and Akinwunmi Ambode since 2015.

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[1] See for instance Davidson 1981.

[2] Observations by the author and his colleagues from the Trans-Islam Project at IFRA (Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique). See http://ifra-nigeria.org/research-programmes/transislam/

Besides the fact that it draws an imaginary line between Muslims and Christians that is impossible to precisely demarcate on the ground, the clash of civilizations theory neglects successful examples of peaceful coexistence between different religious communities—for, as everyone knows, happy peoples have no history. It should be noted, however, that Senegal, a majority Muslim country, was for a long time run by a Christian, Léopold Senghor. There are also examples of Muslims running so-called "Christian" countries, including Elson Bakili Muluzi in Malawi from 1994 to 2004 and Thomas Boni Yayi in Benin from 2006 to 2016. The latter being a Muslim who converted to Protestantism before his election. In Gabon, a predominantly Christian but very sparsely populated country, President Albert Bongo embraced Islam and changed his first name to Omar, without sparking religious conflict. Another case is that of "Emperor" Jean-Bedel Bokassa, in Central Africa, who briefly changed his name to Salah al-Din to please Muammar Gaddafi and obtain Libyan financial aid in 1976: his conversion only lasted three months, after which he went back to Catholicism. Furthermore, the clashes in Central African Republic, which today pit Christians of anti-Balaka militias against the Seleka rebel coalition, whose fighters are predominantly from the country's Muslim minority in the North, hinge on power struggles and not on matters of religious beliefs. Similarly, the geopolitical tensions between Julius Nyerere, the president of socialist Tanzania at independence, and the Muslim minority of Zanzibar Island, annexed in 1964, should be interpreted as territorial, rather than religious, conflicts. Also, in the case of Uganda, when the Christian majority rejected Idi Amin Dada, it was not because he was a Muslim, but mostly because he was an uneducated bloodthirsty dictator.

A materialistic reading of the clashes between Muslims and Christians in Africa should not overlook the spiritual aspects that may spur the mobilization of combatants or, more rarely, structure insurgencies that carry a religious agenda, like the Christian fundamentalist Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda or the jihadist movements across the Sahel. Yet the clash of civilizations theory errs because it places in opposition blocks that are not monolithic. Since World War II, there have been more armed conflicts globally between Christians than there have been between Muslims, or between Muslims and Christians (Fox 2004). Jihads, in particular, are first and foremost wars within Islam or, more accurately, clashes between different movements claiming to represent the global ambitions of Islam. Reducing them to their hostility toward Christianity is misleading. Such an essentialist understanding of cultural differences could also lead to a true war of civilizations by irrevocably enclosing Muslims in the ghetto of obscurantism, perceiving them as unable to modernize and live in democratic regimes.

Contrary to common preconceptions about the spread of Islam, sub-Saharan Africa has actually converted to Christianity at an impressive rate. It is estimated that in 1900, 14 percent of its inhabitants were Muslims and 9 percent were Christians, compared to 29 percent and 57 percent respectively in 2010 (Lugo, p.i). It is true that the number of Muslims has developed faster than population growth. But the spread of Islam in Africa has taken place at the expense of traditional religions and at a much slower pace than that of Christianity.

Historically, colonization strengthened Muslim settlements. Islam in the Sahel region has been less of a resistance factor than an ally to the European rule, which needed emirs to collect taxes, maintain order, conscript soldiers, and control "pagan" societies with no chiefs. As a result, wrote Jean-Claude Froelich, Islam "progressed more in fifty years than in ten centuries thanks to the development of roads, security, communications, trade and military service" (1962, p. 74). In economies based on trading posts and plantations, coastal development also prompted inland Muslims to settle down on a coastline whose trade they already controlled in East Africa. It is estimated that in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the proportions of the population that was Muslim went from under 10 percent to almost 40 percent in the 20th century. Similarly in Tanganyika, after the Maji-Maji peasant uprising against German colonial rule in 1905-1907, it is believed that the percentage of Muslims increased from 3 percent to 25 percent between 1914 and 1924, continuing up to 35 percent or 40 percent for the whole of Tanzania today, due, among other things, to the annexation of the Omani Sultanate of Zanzibar (Loimeier 2010, p. 292).

It is important not to overgeneralize. While part of the Muslim population in the hinterlands was leaving for coastal urban developments, Christian civil servants, engineers and traders moved to inland provinces to find jobs because they were more educated, thanks to mission schools. Due to the arrival of qualified migrants, along with demographic growth and the conversion of "pagans," the number of Christians in the Muslim-dominated northern region of Nigeria, for instance, went from half a million in 1953 to nearly three million in 1963, and over 30 million in 2014, a third of the population (Tibenderana 2003, p.220; Mulders 2016, p.13). As for the proportion of Muslims in northern Nigeria, it went down from 57 percent to 53 percent between the censuses of 1921, 1953, and 1963—the only ones in the country that surveyed the population's religious affiliations (Aluko 1965, p. 374; Ostien 2012). Combined with the rural exodus and the expansion of the desert in the Sahel, the power of attraction of the fertile lands in the South and the modernity of the cities of the Atlantic coast certainly played a role in this process. In Lagos, however, Muslims also saw their proportion decrease in an increasingly cosmopolitan capital.

The Demographics of African Islam

In sub-Saharan Africa, the major demographic changes of the religions of the Book have not taken place through mass conversions since the last pockets of animists were reduced during colonization. Available surveys also show that neither Islam nor Christianity develop to the detriment of the other. Indeed, interreligious conversions are marginal, although very publicized on account of the fear they elicit. The main objective of jihadists is not to kill or force Christians to convert. It is, first and foremost, to fight and "excommunicate" (*takfir*) so-called "bad Muslims." In Africa, al-Qaeda is essentially the only movement that advocates targeting Christians and Westerners first: unsuccessfully so, judging by the death tolls of Jihads taking place in Muslim land and killing mostly Muslims. With his Wahhabi references, however, Osama bin Laden followed a puritan tradition that, initiated by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, was first designed to fight against bad Muslims, rather than against tyrants, social injustices, or peoples of other faiths (Dallal 2010, p.112). Even today, some al-Qaeda strategists actually do not consider Christians as enemies, as long as they do not try to evangelize Muslims and do not collaborate with Crusaders and Zionists. Abu Mus'ab As-Suri, who hails from Syria, recommends for example avoiding killing their women and their children, and even considers granting them civil rights and a protection status (*dhimmi*) within the limits of Sharia law (2004).

In this regard, attention should be paid to the misconceptions of the Western war on terror when it aims at curbing the alleged spread of Islam in Africa. To focus only on the protection of Christians violates the international humanitarian law and the philanthropic values of humanists that prohibit discriminatory distribution of aid based on the victim's faith. When it comes to aiding refugees, for example, making selections based on religious criteria would play into the sectarian hands of jihadists and would create the conditions of a clash of civilizations. Another drawback is that preconceptions about the Islamization of Africa cloud our understanding of uprisings, which are too often reduced to their opposition to Christian and Western modernity. For example, many observers misunderstand, and thus worry unnecessarily, about the success of the *hijab*, useful against the desert sands, and the proliferation of mosques, which, rather than signaling an expansion of Islam, reflects a fragmentation of an African Islam beset by numerous schisms. In reality, the size of a mosque mostly indicates its patron's need for munificence. It does not inform about the number of its worshippers. In the same vein, an imam's affiliation does not say much about the popularity of his doctrine, because mosques are usually attended by neighbors and people who just pass by.[2]

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[2] Observations by the author and his colleagues from the Trans-Islam Project at IFRA (Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique). See http://ifra-nigeria.org/research-programmes/transislam/

Speculations about the number of Muslims or Christians reflect religious tensions that pit the fear of Islamist peril against the jihadists' obsession with a presumed Western conspiracy. For example, the magazine of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, *Dabiq*, suggests in a 2015 special issue on Sharia in Africa that it is possible to impose Quranic law throughout Nigeria because Christians supposedly make up less than half of the country's population. The jihadist propaganda holds that Islam must win and constitute a numerical majority. In 2009, Boko Haram insurgents said the same thing when they promised to spread their rebellion outside of the Borno region in order to Islamize the whole of Nigeria and "ensure the rule of the majority Muslims" (*Vanguard* 2009). These statements about a victorious Islam are also uttered by all kinds of fundamentalists met by the author, from Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, a Nigerian Shiite Sheikh, to Hassan el-Turabi, a Sudanese leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, the argument of the majority rule helps them to frame in a democratic way their demand of a Sharia-based theocracy.

But such a discourse intentionally obscures the historical and demographic reality of an Islamic world that has lost much of its influence due to the spread of Christianity. Moreover, it ignores the power relations that lead jihadist movements to spread in areas where Islam is the majority, instead of defending Muslim minorities in central or southern Africa. The latter would have reasons to take up arms because they are often stigmatized. But this is rarely the case. Irredentist or separatist groups in Kenya, Ethiopia, or Eritrea are exceptions that confirm the rule because they live on the edge of Muslim Africa. As for the Islamists in the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda or in the Coloured townships of Cape Town in South Africa, they primarily followed the local agendas of self-defense militias when they emerged in the mid-1990s.

Christians are not the main targets of current jihadist groups, especially in the Sahel. In fact, the insurgents operate in territories that are already Islamized and where, according to them, Muslims have gone astray.

Their chief goal is to re-Islamize the community of believers (*ummah*) and to excommunicate (*takfir*) sinners, who are relegated to the rank of infidels or apostates. Their wish to reconvert, purify, and go back to the origins of Prophet Muhammad's disciples (*ansar*) is made even stronger by the fact that African Islam is considered to be syncretic, superficial, and full of animist traditions and beliefs in witchcraft and invisible forces. Each in their own way, al-Qaeda in Mali, al-Shabab in Somalia, or Boko Haram in Nigeria are rooted in a revival movement that, for the sake of convenience, Western scholars generally refer to as "Salafism," in reference to the "ancestors" (*salaf*) who lived in the beginning of the Hegira, even if these fundamentalists identify themselves more as modernists and reformists (Lauziere 2010, p. 381).

From a doctrinal point of view, African jihadists share common "values" with their Arab and Asian counterparts, namely: a scriptural and literalist approach to the prophetic tradition; a binary vision—Manichean and sometimes millenarian—of a world hopelessly divided between the House of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) and the House of War (*Dar al-Harb*); a sectarian, puritanical, and xenophobic intolerance, together with a hatred of infidels (*kufr*) and apostates (*murtadd*); the rejection of idolatry (*taghut*) and animism (*shirk*) to affirm the absolute principle of monotheism (*tawhid*); a fervent proselytism (*da'wa*) based on a resounding profession of faith (*shahada*); the consecration of the virtues of tradition (*sunna*), conformism, and consensus (*ijma*), as opposed to the division (*fitna*) of the Muslim community (*ummah*); an obsession with apostasy (*ridda*) and anathema (*takfir*); a taste for martyrdom (*shahid*) and hymns (*ansashid*); religious legitimation of social struggles; the demand for justice through a sharia that is not confined to criminal law (*al-'uqubah*) and which is supposed to guide the believer from birth to death; the condemnation of evil and heretical innovation (*bida*) rather than that of modernity as a whole; the rejection of scholastic thought and theology rooted in the belief that the Quran is the Book of Revelations and does not need human interpretations; the veneration of Islam's ancient times and of the first four centuries of the Hegira, called the period of interpretation (*ijtihad*) of Prophet Muhammad's lessons, made unalterable since then by the emergence of the four main schools of law: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i,

and Hanbali.

African Jihad is Less Exceptional than Generally Portrayed

On the military level, African jihadists' mode of operation is rather classical when it opposes guerillas against regular troops. Obsessed by the exceptionality of religious fanaticism, terrorism specialists have forgotten the lessons learned from counterinsurgency strategists. Yet current jihads do not fundamentally differ from past asymmetric wars. Other rebel groups in Africa have engaged in abduction, rape, forced recruitment of children, looting, and various atrocities against civilians. The attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam are certainly not limited to booby-trapped cars or suicide bombings. Members of al-Qaeda in Mali, al-Shabab in Somalia, or Boko Haram in Nigeria have also fought battles against military forces. Moreover, decapitation and suicide bombings are not the preserve of jihadists. In 1900, it was French soldiers in Chad who went in Borno to behead Rabeh, a Mahdist warlord. The British colonial master, who did not use the guillotine, then legalized Sharia and approved sword executions in Nigeria and Sudan. As for suicide bombings, they are not a jihadist exclusivity either, as shown by Japanese kamikazes or Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. Indeed they are first and foremost the weapon of the poor in asymmetric wars against an enemy that is more powerful, better armed, and greater in number (Pape 2006).

In this regard, emphasis should be placed on the local balance of power that determines the development of jihadism in very diverse countries: predominantly Muslim in Somalia and Mali; plural in Nigeria, where about half the population is Christian. Many observers attach too much importance to competing allegiances to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State in sub-Saharan Africa. On the ground, these do not alter the firepower and modus operandi of terrorist groups that thrive primarily on the ruins of fragile states. Controlling territory is not exclusive to the Islamic State: In 2012, al-Qaeda ruled in northern Mali, and al-Shabab took power in southern Somalia in 2006, yet continued to swear allegiance to Osama bin Laden and his successors. Moreover, jihadism in Africa cannot simply be compared to transnational terrorist groups without a social basis. In Nigeria, for instance, Boko Haram mainly attack regions where the sect has recruited youths and established sleeper cells.

The need to analyze local politics and agendas also suggests going beyond the similarities between various jihadist movements. Resemblances in their modes of operation, their rhetoric, and their iconography do not prove the existence of a central command or of an embryonic coordination among armed groups. In sub-Saharan Africa, members of al-Shabab in Somalia, who have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, are geographically closer to the Arabian Peninsula and are thus more likely

to be influenced by the Wahhabi model. In Mali, the heirs of GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), now AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), were originally Algerian jihadists and are therefore in direct contact with the Maghreb world. However, this is not the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria. In practice, the diversity of these groups prevents us from making undue generalizations about the roles played by Arab influences and transnational revolutionary models. Indeed, "Sharia politics" in sub-Saharan Africa are first and foremost "local in their origins and orientation"(Kendhammer 2016, p.216).

From Dissent to Rebellion, and Vice-versa

Jihadists do not constitute a united front. Internal dissent comes from doctrinal disputes as much as from personal rivalries about commands, tactics, the choice of targets, or the distribution of the spoils of war. Paradoxically, the more global Salafism claims to be, the more likely it is to break up into different trends and factions. On the doctrinal level, their differences mainly revolve around the use of violence, their relationship to the state, the implementation of Sharia, and the excommunication of "bad Muslims." Extremists differ also from other non-violent fundamentalist groups who prefer the "greater jihad," that of the inner spiritual struggle to resist impiety, rather than the "lesser jihad," that of the holy war against unbelievers.

Salafiyya Ilmiyya quietists, for instance, refuse to implicate themselves in a modern and necessarily corrupt state. They prefer to live away from the depravity of the contemporary world, even it means getting closer to the model of Sufi hermits. For them, it is not for the state to Islamize society, because a government cannot be virtuous if its people are not. As a result, the purity of the doctrine is more important than the nature of the regimes in place. Some even acknowledge the intrinsic futility of a political Islam condemned to failure due to the structural contradictions between the ideal of God's absolute power and the secular pragmatism required to run the city. In this they differ not only from jihadists, who consider legitimate the use of force to impose their vision of heaven on Earth, but also from the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Salafi reformists from the Awakening Movement (*Sahwa*) or the People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings (*Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah*), who advocate an infiltration strategy to urge the representatives of modern states to obey the requirements of the religion.

In Africa, the so-called Izala "eradicators" in Nigeria and Niger thus fight innovation (*bida*) while they encourage their followers to vote for Muslim candidates in the elections. Such a position, however, is challenged by extremists who do not want Sharia to be under constitutions that are written by men and that often grant religious freedom in multi-religious societies, despite the fact

that apostasy is proscribed in Islam. These fundamentalists could never be satisfied by the political compromises of Islamic republics established in Comoros, Mauritania, Sudan, Gambia, and Somalia, nor do they accept that the Saudi monarchy or the Afghan Taliban regime have asked to be recognized by a secular organization like the United Nations. The caliphate's theocracy is their only model. In a treatise published in 2002, for instance, one of al-Qaeda's main ideologues, Ayman al-Zawahiri, repudiated the heads of Muslim states who were not true to the spirit of Islam because they governed with laws other than the Sharia (Bin Ali 2015). Moreover, for the absolutists, democracy symbolizes unbelief (*kufr*) and should be forbidden (*haram*) because it proclaims a government for and by the people, rather than the divine omnipotence of God's caliphate. Proponents of a political Islam and a religious state reform, they argue, are wrong to want to participate in elections.

The treatment of "bad Muslims" is also a source of dissent within the jihadist movement. By the 19th century in the northwest of today's Nigeria, theologians of the Sokoto Caliphate had long debated whether syncretic practices allowed them to exclude nominal Muslims from the community of believers and to reduce their status to that of serfs. In the end, the law of necessity prevailed, coupled with the need to finance a standing army using the income from a plantation economy based on slavery. Contrary to the provisions of the Quran, jihadists in Sokoto justified the looting and the enslavement of their co-religionists on the grounds that they were heretics and renegades. In the northeast of Nigeria, near Lake Chad, such a position also allowed them to challenge the sultans of Borno who, having been Islamized long before, had refused to surrender and had preferred to join forces with infidels. In this debate, the leader of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio, was opposed by a theologian, Muhammad al-Kanimi, who defended the established order but took advantage of the unrest to seize power and overthrow the declining dynasty of the kings of Borno. "Every country," he wrote, "contains miscreants, apostates, and sinners. Anyone who gains control over them by aggression will inevitably have the difficulty of discrimination. And whenever the difficulty of discrimination has made all injury general, then the abandonment of the unbeliever is more acceptable than the killing of a Muslim" (Brenner 1979, p. 168).

Even today, the fate of apostates plays a key role in jihads aimed primarily at reconverting "bad Muslims." The intransigence of most sectarian groups creates divisions among supporters of the armed struggle. During the civil war in Algeria, the GSPC thus broke away from the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) in September 1998 over the GIA's killing of Muslim civilians whom they excommunicated haphazardly. GSPC then gave rise to AQIM in northern Mali. In Nigeria in January 2012, a faction called the "Community of Protectors of Black Muslims" (*Jama'at Ansar Al*

Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan) also emerged, criticizing the slaughtering of Muslims by Boko Haram. Small in number but much closer to al-Qaeda in terms of doctrine, members of this group abducted and executed expatriates in Nigeria. They are also believed to have participated in Mokhtar Belmokhtar's attacks against the gas plant of In Amenas in Algeria and against the Arlit uranium mine in Niger in January and June 2013.

In fact, this inclination toward "Takfirism" (excommunication of Muslims) is sometimes condemned by al-Qaeda ideologues such as Abu Musab al-Suri because it divides the Muslim community and plays into the hands of infidels (Bryniar 2007). Such dissents are not negligible. Introduced in Khartoum in 1977 and founded in Cairo in 1971 following a split from the Muslim Brotherhood of Hassan al-Banna, the Sudanese version of the Egyptian group Anathema and Exile (*Takfir wa al-Hijra*) allegedly attempted to murder Osama bin Laden in 1994 (Carney 2005, p.122). In Libya today, there are also significant divisions between the various armed factions fighting in the name of Islam. In Sabratha in early 2016, for instance, the Islamic State attacked the coalition *Libya Fajr* ("Libya Dawn"), a group under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has killed representatives of movements close to the Muslim Brotherhood: the Izala "eradicators" or the "Shiite" followers of Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky's Islamic Movement.

The disagreements that permeate fundamentalist groups emphasize a key point in this regard: There is no jihadist canon, nor are there Muslim dogmas or popes, and the various Islamist armed movements in Africa do not draw from a single ideological trend. It is therefore advisable to go beyond the oppositions between Salafist quietists or advocates of violence, on the one hand, and fundamentalists that are favorable or not to electoral participation and state reform, on the other hand. One reason for this is that activists may well move from one group to another. Also, the fighters' rhetoric is not always far from the rigor of nonviolent Salafists, to the extent that some authors use an oxymoron and talk about "quietist jihadists" (Wagemakers 2012).

These theological convergences allow for ad hoc alliances. They also reflect the ambivalence of reformist positions in favor of the modernization of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, played the game of democracy and elections in Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, and Sudan. But their doctrine has also given rise to leading terrorists such as Omar Abderrahmane, organizer of the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York City in 1993; Mohammed Atta, who led the attackers on Sept. 11, 2001; Ayman Zawahiri, founder of al-Qaeda in Egypt; Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who started jihad in Iraq; and Abu Qoutada, spokesman for GIA in London. In Sudan, Hassan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front got closer to Osama bin Laden, provoking the

bombing of Khartoum by the Americans in 1998. As for the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria after the cancellation of the 1992 elections, some of its members opted for the armed struggle and formed the GIA, an organization that later swore allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2007.

Of course, the circulation of ideas and of activists from one doctrine to another does not mean that Islam is an inherently violent religion, predestined to conquer the world through military power. Rather, it indicates that both proponents of armed struggle and those of compromise can legitimize their position by tapping into the same intellectual resources. Finally and most importantly, the genesis of jihadist movements in Africa shows that the great shift into violence results not only from a dogmatic agenda but also from situational elements. In Algeria, it was the cancellation of the 1992 elections that pushed the Muslim Brotherhood toward resistance and terrorism. In Nigeria, it was a simple altercation with the police about wearing helmets while riding motorcycles that, in 2009, pushed Boko Haram members into insurgency and then underground, following the extrajudicial killing of their spiritual leader. Beyond the question of religious fanaticism, the growth of jihadist movements in Africa owes much to local political dynamics.

Enduring Jihads

Many observers are puzzled by the sudden upsurge of jihadist activity in the Sahel.

For French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, speaking at the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa in December 2014, Boko Haram for instance constitutes "an unprecedented threat" that is even deadlier than the Islamic State. Some media, suffering from historical myopia, also present the unrest as if it were the first time that revolts developed under the banner of Islam, that insurgents circulated across the Sahel, or that their leaders controlled territories by using large-scale violence. Of course, hurried journalists and soldiers are often unconcerned with the history of past conflicts. However, conflating matters can lead to analytical mistakes or self-fulfilling prophecies about the internationalization of Islamist protests. Many strategists are anxious to justify the importance of the terrorist threat and thus neglect the dynamics of local conflicts, choosing instead to view everything through the lens of global jihad, pointing toward Saudi Arabia, Libya, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

However, rebelling in the name of the Quran is nothing new in sub-Saharan Africa. The jihadist activities that we label as "terrorism" today are neither unprecedented nor exceptional. In what is now Somalia, the conquest from 1529 to 1542 of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim, nicknamed "the left-handed," was a major historical event that accounts for the large population of Muslims in the East of Abyssinian and Christian Ethiopia. Neither is jihad new to West Africa, with Nasir al-Din's jihad in the Senegal River Valley circa 1673; the Fulani uprisings of Futa Jallon in 1725, Futa Toro around 1777, Gobir from 1804, and Macina in 1818; the formation of El Hadj Umar Tall's Toucouleur Empire from 1856 to 1861; the rebellion of Samori Ture's Dioula against the French from 1878 to 1898; or Rabeh's Mahdist rebellion in Borno around Lake Chad from 1896 to1900.

Significantly, these revolutionary movements often had a territory, a social base and a longevity that current jihads do not have. The most impressive being that of a Fulani scholar, Usman dan Fodio, who, from a base in Gobir in northwestern Nigeria, established a caliphate that stayed in power for a century, until the arrival of the British in 1903. Just like the Islamic State with its two capitals in Raqqa and Mosul, Usman dan Fodio's "empire" was bi-cephalous, with Sokoto in the East and Gwandu in the West. It controlled about thirty emirates and ruled over 10 million people, from Niger in the North to Ilorin in the South. Usman dan Fodio's influence was felt to the East and the edges of today's Central African Republic through the Fulani in Adamawa, and to the West all

the way to Burkina Faso and Mali, with the vassal kingdom of Macina. His caliphate thus spread over about 150,000 square miles[2] in the middle of the 19th century, much more than what the Islamic State had at the height of its power in 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his men claimed to control 8 million people over territories covering some 83,000 square miles[2].

Historically, the reference to the universalism of the Quran unified very diverse African populations by transcending their ethnic and linguistic differences. At the beginning, Usman dan Fodio fought "natives" called *habe* in Fulfude, a term later used to refer to the "original" Hausa as opposed to Fulani invaders from the Sahel. But he also founded local alliances that enabled him to expand outside the Hausa cultural spheres and to conquer Yoruba settlements in Ilorin, to the South. From this point of view, past jihads were not less ambitious than those of today. The circulation of ideas and people across the vast Sahel was particularly impressive. The stories about Usman dan Fodio's exploits were shared by pilgrims on their way to Saudi Arabia. They inspired the rebels who, three thousand kilometers away, were to defeat the British troops led by Charles Gordon in Khartoum in 1885 (Biobaku & Al-Hajj 1966). Their leader, Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abd Allah Al-Mahdi, had proclaimed himself Mahdi ("Messiah") in 1881 thanks to the support of his deputy and successor, Muhammad Ahmad, who came from a Kanem-Bornu family and had settled in Sudan while traveling to Mecca. In return, the uprising of Sudanese Mahdists spread to Nigeria through one of their warlords, Rabeh, who ravaged the region of Borno from 1893 until he was beheaded by auxiliaries of the French army in 1900. Meanwhile, Usman dan Fodio's grandson, Hayatu ben Said, converted to Sudanese Mahdism. His followers fought the British during the final battle of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 in Burmi, in today's Gombe State in Nigeria. Defeated, the Fulani sought refuge in Sudan, where they were called Felata.

Since then, globalization has undoubtedly increased and accelerated the circulation of ideas, men, and fighters. But the magnitude of past jihads should not be overshadowed by progress in communication technologies. In a continent where the telegraph and the railway were introduced after the Ottoman world, proselytism and conversion continued through the mosque, marriage, and trade (Trimingham 1962, p.225). In Africa, Islam is often misrepresented as an imported religion preached by Arabs only. These views should not obscure the influence that Africans, in return, have had on the religious practices of the Sahel and the Arab world.[3] Just like the Yorubas' traditional gods (*Orisha*) exported to Latin America through the transatlantic slave trade, the Hausa's *bori*

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[3] See, for instance, Susan O'Brien, Pilgrimage, Power and Identity: The Role of the Hajj in the Lives of Nigerian Hausa Bori Adepts, *Africa Today* 46, no. 3-4 (1999): 11-40.

ritual, for instance, was passed on by slaves and was eventually integrated into Maghreb communities in Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. In the Americas, it is estimated that up to one third of the slaves were Muslims. As a result, jihad was also exported and it was in the name of Islam that captives rebelled in Sierra Leone in 1831-1832 and then in Malé in the Bahia region in Brazil in 1835 (Lovejoy 2005, 1994, 2001; Reis 1993). In Latin America, Maroon slaves, who were themselves victims of Sokoto's expansionism, migrated—an exodus referred to as *hijra*—to settlements called *quilombos* in Portuguese.

Meanwhile in Africa, jihad first strengthened then slowed down the spread of Islam. Since the Quran condemns the enslavement of Muslims, Allah's soldiers were in no hurry to convert the pagans they had captured. Paradoxically, Usman dan Fodio's jihad started in Gobir as a tax revolt against Muslims enslaving other Muslims, which was prohibited by Islam. The Fulani were joined by captive communities, including non-Muslims, in their efforts to bring down the decadent Hausa kingdoms (Fisher 1988). Subsequently, they also managed to spread southward by taking advantage of other slave rebellions in Ilorin in 1817 and in the Nupe kingdom in 1831. But the establishment of a caliphate led to the population being forced to work on the plantations that funded the administration of Usman dan Fodio and his successors. From the 1840s onward, jihadists therefore faced desertion and sabotage as they betrayed their promises to ban the enslavement of Muslims.[4]

At a time when there was no international humanitarian law, the treatment of hostages and prisoners of war fueled many debates. In the case of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio and his successors first took care of banning the enslavement of the Fulani and the sale of their captives to merchants on the Atlantic coast (Lovejoy 2001). Rules concerning the treatment of non-Muslim prisoners were very specific: The infidels could be executed, released, held for ransom, enslaved, or forced to pay the special tax (*jizya*) of miscreants placed under the protection of an emir and exempted from military service and religious alms (*zakat*) (Lofkrantz 2012, 2011). The choice was left to the discretion of the local imam. In the event of release, "one-fifth" (*khums*) of the prisoner's monetary value was set aside for the State. If the infidel had to pay the *jizya*, or if he was traded for a Muslim captive, the local emir's share—but not that of other fighters allowed to get their hands on the spoils of war—was subtracted from the amount of the tax or of the sale price. Finally, if the infidel was held for ransom or enslaved, the income generated from the sale price was added to the

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[4] With the abolition of the slave trade, colonization and the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903, the British then used the Islamic legal instrument of *murgu* to let slaves buy their freedom and work independently of their masters in exchange for a compensation or a regular payment. See Kabiru Sulaiman Chafe, *State and Economy in the Sokoto Caliphate: Policies and Practices in the Metropolitan Districts, 1804-1903*, (1999): 176.

spoils to be shared.

Of course, paying for the liberation of Muslims detained by the enemy was a completely different story. Unlike his son Abdullah who released prisoners in exchange for ransoms, Usman dan Fodio felt that the state should intervene as little as possible, except for negotiating the release of indigents. If they could afford it, families were to pay for the liberation of their relatives in detention. The rich could also pay the ransom of other captives and asked to be reimbursed once freed. If the latter were penniless or had not consented to the payment of a ransom, creditors could then turn to the state to demand compensation or act in the name of Islamic charity and wait for a reward in heaven. Only a few theologians felt that the liberation of Muslims was a moral and financial responsibility that should be borne by the entire community of believers (*Ummah*).

Islam and the Colonial Rule: a Marriage of Convenience

All these debates proved to be surprisingly modern when considering Western governments' discussions on the payment of ransoms today. Despite its extraordinary pre-colonial development, the Sokoto Caliphate actually failed to prevent the enslavement of Muslims, which illustrated the failure of its political project. Jihadists were unable to impose their religious views on the way society should be organized. Because his followers were much more diverse and numerous than the small Muslim community of the Prophet in Medina, Usman dan Fodio had to delegate his authority to commanders who were eager to loot. The Caliphate Government, being weak and bi-cephalous, quickly gave birth to an aristocracy (*sarauta*) whose principles of hereditary succession, instead of merit and knowledge of Islam, were no better than the tyrannical practices of the old Hausa kingdoms. Over the years, Usman dan Fodio's jihadists also abandoned their agrarian reform and land redistribution projects. Founded on predation, slavery and agriculture, their economy still relied on the capital of rich merchants who traded along the trans-Saharan caravan routes.

Further illustrating the failure of political Islam, the Sokoto caliphate turned out to be the most fervent "collaborator" of the British. Despite a failed attempt to resist, what happened in Northern Nigeria was not an isolated case. In the Sahel, the Muslim establishment generally supported the colonial rule in hierarchical societies that were already Islamized, as well as in acephalous and pagan communities. In East Africa, the British used an Omani trading post, Zanzibar Island, as a stepping-stone to move onto the mainland, while mobilizing Egyptian troops to take hold of Sudan. Meanwhile, the Italians trained Muslim Somali to conquer Christian Ethiopia with auxiliaries called *askari*. In West Africa, the mainstay of French colonization was Senegal and its famous Muslim *tirailleurs*. The heirs to the former Islamic kingdoms thus chose to compromise. Often, the

Muslims' opposition to colonial rule was expressed rather peacefully with the emergence of civic movements that were a success in the Four Communes of Senegal but a failure due to internal disputes in Cape Town in South Africa (Loimeier 2010).

Collaboration between Islamic and 'secular' institutions certainly varied across the Sahel. Within the sphere of influence of the Sokoto Caliphate, the British indirect rule established a kind of government "by proxy," using the sultan's vassals to collect taxes as well as to maintain law and order. Under a two-tiered Islamic justice system, the emirs dealt with land and criminal cases in *alkali* courts (the Hausa version of the Arab *qadi*) but applied customary law to rule on family or business disputes. Recognized as "sole native authorities," the emirs had more power than they had in pre-colonial days, when they were subject to control by a council and deposed if they became too unpopular (Crowder 1964, p. 198). By contrast, the French followed a "republican" model with a government "by consent," which was backed by opinion leaders such as the representatives of Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal. Their policy of assimilation, rather than association, was more centralized and gave less autonomy to emirs. Paradoxically, however, French officials who denounced the "Islamic peril" also played the biggest role in helping spread the Muslim influence.[5]

The colonizer was rather ambivalent in this regard. On the one hand, Islam was perceived as a civilizing factor that promoted order and stability amongst barbarians. Perhaps with the exception of the Germans, who tried to promote pig farming in order to curb the spread of Islam in Tanganyika, the British, the French, and the Italians preferred to rely on monotheistic and educated emirs who spoke and wrote Arabic, rather than on illiterate tribal and pagan leaders. On the other hand, Islam was also seen as a source of obscurantism, slavery, and resistance to the benefits of Christian civilization. In Libya, the Italians were challenged by the revolt of the Senusiyya in 1917; in Somaliland, the British fought the rebellion of the Mad Mullah in 1920. London, in particular, was traumatized by the fall of Charles Gordon following the assaults of Mahdi jihadists in Khartoum in 1885. As for the French, they long kept a stinging memory of al-Hajj Umar Tal's uprising in 1848.

Imperialist powers feared a large Islamist conspiracy, which is reminiscent of today's fear of a global jihad. They were wary, among other things, of a Sufi brotherhood founded by Ahmad al-Tijanni (1735-1815), a sheikh born in Ayn Madi in the Algerian desert, and which reached Senegal

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[5] See Gouilly, Alphonse [1952], *L'Islam dans l'Afrique occidentale française*, Paris, Larose, p.254. Alphonse Gouilly was the pseudonym of Jacques Mouradian (1910-1992), a colonial administrator and a close associate to Jacques Foccart, the chief adviser for the government of France on African policy.

before spreading to northern Nigeria in the 1920s. Indeed, the Tijaniyyah was likely to disturb public order by challenging the aristocracy of the Sokoto Caliphate, based on the Qadiriyyah and an ally to the British (Hill 2013). The French, who provided most of the intelligence about Saharan Islam, also conveyed to the British their fear of the Tijanni after al-Hajj Umar Tal's uprising in Senegambia (Binger 1906). Additionally, the English often confused Tijanni and Mahdist as they prayed in the same way, following what is called the *Kabalu* style of prayer, with hands crossed on the chest, as opposed to the Qadiri's *Sabalu*, with hands placed along the body (Reynolds 2001, p.609). The Tijanni were therefore perceived as dangerous revolutionaries, first suspected of being pro-Ottoman and pro-German spies during World War I, and then of being offshoots of communist sleeper cells in Morocco or Libya.

Because they were also a problem for the Fulani aristocracy, the sultan of Sokoto accused them of heresy and ordered the destruction of their mosques in the 1950s. Yet the Tijaniyyah became increasingly popular and rallied important leaders such as the Emir of Kano in 1937, who wanted to free himself from the Qadiriyyah tutelage of the Sokoto Caliphate, and the Sultan of Borno in 1923, who wanted to reassure the British by abandoning the Libyan Senusiyya, which was suspected of having collaborated with the Germans during World War I. Oppositions took both a political and an ideological turn. The Qadiriyyah of the Sokoto Fulani aristocracy was conservative and close to colonial power; the Tijaniyyah was "socialist" and represented the interests of urban and rural masses. At the time, its members were just as sectarian as Boko Haram and refused to speak or eat in the company of Muslims from a different tradition. The latter were shocked by the macabre aspect of their initiation ceremonies, the extravagance of their rituals, and the pressure exerted on their followers to extort supposedly voluntary offerings.

The Silent Majority: Between Trade and Conversion

It is therefore amusing to note that, today, the Tijaniyyah is presented by some American strategists as the vehicle for an Islam that is "African," "tolerant," and likely to deter the youth from joining terrorist groups under Arab influence. The Qadiriyyah is also viewed as a quietist organization, though it had provided the ideological arguments of the jihad of Usman dan Fodio in Gobir in 1804 or Alfa Bâ in Futa Jallon in 1725. It is true that Sufi brotherhoods are now part of the Muslim establishment.[6] However, their association with the authorities is both their main strength and weakness. Indeed, they are criticized by Salafists for their syncretic arrangements with pre-Islamic African traditions. Moreover, many of them have been discredited due to their involvement with

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[6] The culture of obedience of the Tijanniya, for instance, finally served the interests of the colonial master to maintain law and order.

secular and corrupt powers. Contrary to the assumptions of specialists of terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa, Sufi brotherhoods are likely not the most effective instrument to "de-radicalize" the youth attracted by jihad.

The revival of Sufism should also not be overestimated. A quiet and relatively invisible majority of African Muslims does not identify with any one of the major traditions of Islam: Sufism, Salafism, or the various millenarian or Shiite fundamentalist groups that advocate a stricter enforcement of the sharia. These "moderates" are sometimes criticized for being too soft because they do not react to condemn terrorism, as if they tacitly condone jihad. Yet their "omertà" does not confirm that Islam is inherently fanatical and violent. Actually, the criticism of terrorism voiced by Muslim clerics is seldom heard outside of the region because it is expressed in vernacular languages and is not relayed by Western media. Also, many Muslims do not publicly express their aversion to the violence of jihad because they have other concerns, mostly relating to the economic and daily survival of their families in criminal environments. Therefore, their lack of interest in the issue is comparable to American citizens who do not bother to go vote because they have more pressing daily concerns, not because they reject the democratic values of parliamentary systems. Moreover, many African Muslims are afraid to denounce the evils of terrorism simply because they fear reprisals. In Nigeria, the targeted killings of Izala preachers by Boko Haram commandos showed the price to be paid by those who dared to speak up against jihadists.

In fact, the proselytism of religious fanatics is specifically intended to convert the silent majority of Africans who, in their eyes, are only superficially Islamized. The fundamentalists criticize syncretic marabouts who are scientists, school teachers, judges, and healers all in one. Called *mallam* in Hausa, these preachers used to play the role of a missionary serving a religion without priests. Indeed, preaching is not regarded as a profession but as a religious duty that can be combined with other agricultural or commercial occupations. In sub-Saharan Africa, the spread of Islam was closely linked to trade. In the East, it originated in Zanzibar and relied on the coastal trading posts of the slave trade. In the West, it was relayed in Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia by merchants called "Dioula" in the Malinke language. From Ghana to Nigeria and Chad, Hausa traders also disseminated the teachings of the Quran. In Yorubaland, Islam was introduced informally all the way to Lagos by "professional men of prayer" (*alfa*) described by anthropologist John Peel as religious entrepreneurs rather than missionaries; the institutionalization of proselytism through congregations and mosques came much later (2015, p. 137).

Regardless of recurrent jihads here and there, trade was the major factor in the Islamization of the

Sahel. Contemporary narratives about a "crescent of terror" in the Sahel should not obscure the fact that, historically, wars were not the prime mover of conversion. While the Romans in Maghreb used a wall (*limes* in Latin) to contain barbarians, the Arabs sought to spread their civilization without resorting to military campaigns. In the Sahara, traders and preachers found shelter in fortified monasteries and entrenched camps called *ribats*.[7] But the Islamization of pagans in West Africa followed the routes of the trans-Saharan caravan trade. In many cases, conversion actually resulted from rational and prosaic choices about political allegiance or adherence to a system of values, even if it meant integrating a Muslim ethnic group rather than a community of believers. In the Middle Ages, for example, the Mali Empire converted to Islam to assert its authority, seek allies against the Songhai, and become a member of the "civilized" nations (Rebstock 2010).

This was followed by the emergence of theocracies whose power was not based on a military jihad but on the wise advice of Muslim scholars, such as the two famous dynasties of the Askiya of the Songhai Empire around Gao, in the 16th century, and the Saifawa of Kanem-Bornu who, in the 11th century, had been exposed to Islam through a missionary named Muhammad Mani (Fisher 1977, p. 308). They entered into many territorial and commercial conflicts with their neighbors to gain control over trans-Saharan trade routes. It is difficult, in this context, to talk about "holy wars," given that religion and politics were so deeply intertwined. Islam was mainly used to bless and motivate fighters; on a few occasions, it also justified their conquering rebellious peoples such as the inhabitants of Logone, located in the north of today's Cameroon, who were regarded as pagans and invaded in the early 16th century by the Borno army because they had refused to pay their religious tax (*zakat*). In the late 16th century, the sultan of Borno, who had taken the title of caliph, truly Islamized his war rhetoric for the first time. He called the Bulala in Kanem, with whom he was fighting over the control of some oases in Chad, infidels (Alkali 2013, pp. 110 & 202).

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[7] The word *ribat* is in fact a generic term with derived names such as the 'Almoravid' dynasty in the 11th century, Sufi 'marabouts' in the 18th century, and 'al-Murabitoun' ("sentinels") in the 21st century, a terrorist offshoot of AQIM in Mali.

Converting the peasant masses, however, was not the goal of these conflicts. The Sufi brotherhoods became popular later, first with the Qadiriyyah in the 18th century, then with the Tijaniyyah.

Meanwhile, Islam spread to rural areas in the Sahel as the great medieval empires, founded on caravan trade and merchant activities in cities, dissolved into small agricultural kingdoms. In the 20th century, especially, Sufi brotherhoods became mass movements because they reconciled the challenges of colonization and market economy by integrating former slaves and new urban migrants.

Their sheikhs were thus criticized for exploiting their followers, asking them for money or free labor to live off their donations (*hadaya*) rather than the traditional alms (*zakat*). Yet they succeeded in reaching the rural masses and popularizing Islam beyond an educated urban elite. Indeed, the Sufi's "chain" (*silsila*) to teach the "path to God" (*tariqa*) crossed the borders of Senegal, Nigeria, Mali, Libya, and Sudan. Eventually they were challenged by Salafist groups that emerged in the 1920s and expanded during the oil boom of the 1970s, when Arabic Gulf countries tried to intensify their proselytizing efforts by awarding scholarships and by funding the construction of mosques.

What has really changed since then? Just like today, 19th century jihads were primarily intended to Islamize "bad" Muslims, not Christian communities, which were non-existent at the time. Allah's soldiers sought the protection of God to defeat pagan populations. Their quest, however, was rarely driven by an ideology of conversion of unbelievers. On the contrary, the fact that the Quran prohibits enslaving Muslims may have curbed the proselytizing enthusiasm of jihadists. In the same manner, current changes are not so much about mass conversion but rather about the spread of Islam in the public sphere, which is difficult to assess.

Indeed the increase in mosque attendance corresponds to the demographic growth of Muslims in Africa. It does not say much about the so-called "radicalization" of religious practices. Consequently, some authors are more interested in the influence of Sharia on public laws, the organization of states, constitutions, and freedom of religion (Fox & Sandler 2003). Yet we first

need to agree on definitions. Contrary to the way it has been portrayed in Western media, Sharia is not limited to criminal law and stoning. In Muslim societies, including the Shiites and the Kharijites, it encompasses casuistry, ethical norms, everyday etiquette, rules of inheritance, and family law (Schacht 1977). Therefore, it is important to put into perspective the alleged introduction of Sharia in some African countries. In Nigeria, for example, Muslims never stopped following the precepts of the Quran when it comes to trade, marriage, divorce, and burials. At the end of the military dictatorship in 1999, Sharia was thus not "introduced" but "extended" to criminal law, even if it meant reinstating provisions established under British rule.

The ongoing changes of contemporary jihad have probably more to do with the urbanization of extremist groups. There is no denying that populations across the Sahel are becoming increasingly sedentary. Colonization, the commodification of traditional economies, as well as the droughts of the 1970s, which resulted in a massive impoverishment of peasants, pushed students of itinerant Islamic schools to move to the cities. The fact that people now live in larger human settlements certainly facilitated the spread of seditious ideas and the mobilization of a youth that was unemployed and sometimes homeless. However, it should be noted that the jihad of Usman dan Fodio was already based on an alliance between savannah warriors, Muslim clerics, and traders in market towns. Subsequently, some peripatetic *mallamai* preferred to avoid the urban modernity of the colonizer by withdrawing from the world to meditate on the Quran and lead Quranic students who would beg for food from one village to another.

Today, missionary groups labeled as terrorist still preach to farmers. The remoteness of the countryside is very useful to set up training camps far away from the police. In Nigeria, for example, Boko Haram is the result of both a rural exodus to Maiduguri and a peasant revolt against city dwellers. The founders and leaders of the sect, Mohammed Yusuf and Muhammad Shekau, came from the countryside of Yobe State. But their precursors in 2003, the so-called "Nigerian Taliban," were students from the city of Maiduguri who preached a cultural revolution and went to farming in a rural and remote area, the village of Kanama, near the Niger border. Chased away by the army, they returned to Maiduguri and joined the most radical preacher in town, Mohammed Yusuf, who was killed by police in 2009. As military repression increased, Boko Haram fighters were gradually driven away from Maiduguri and had to move to the countryside. In 2012, they settled down in the village of Krenowa in the Local Government Area of Marte. Then, in 2013, they got the support of poachers to chase out rangers and occupy the Sambisa forest, a game reserve established by the military regime in 1991. They also took control of rural regions on the border of Cameroon, where they allegedly proclaimed a caliphate in Gwoza in 2014. To attack the

communities of Banki and Amchide, for instance, they first preached in villages like Tarmuwa and Kumshe because urban imams were usually better educated and less receptive to the sect's doctrinal deviance.[8]

Following the typical pattern of guerillas, Boko Haram fighters thus used the bush to surround and infiltrate cities under the control of government forces. Although global urbanization did profoundly affect the Sahel, it would be absurd, in this regard, to ignore the importance of the countryside in jihad-related activities in contemporary Africa. Similarly, the impact of technological revolutions in telecommunications should not be overestimated. Online social networks did not play the role they may have played in the suburbs of America or Europe. Aside from Mali and Mauritania, the countries most affected by jihadism (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia) have instead been those where cell phone subscription rates were lower than the African average, at least if we consider the World Bank data to be correct.[9]

In areas without electricity, and sometimes without phone coverage, Islamists kept recruiting followers by building friendships and developing matrimonial alliances based on language affinities and trust. They used ethnicity as a tool, just like in the past. In the North of Mali, they integrated Tuareg communities to fight the Bambara of Bamako. In Nigeria's Middle Belt, the Fulani joined the Izala Salafists against Hausa mallams; this re-Islamization process also helped reduce their own clan differentiations. In Sudan, the Muslim Brothers of Hassan al-Turabi played with the resentment of Darfur Black Muslims against the Arab elite of the Nile Valley in Khartoum.

South of the Sahara, the only real operational innovation of the jihad was suicide attacks, the trademark of Islamist terrorist groups in Afghanistan, Palestine, Pakistan, and Chechnya. In his book on the *Management of Savagery*, Abu Bakr Naji,[10] an Egyptian-born al-Qaeda's propagandist, indeed advocated the use of terror to undermine the reputation of invincibility of the enemy. His recommendation, however, applies to non-Muslim insurgent groups engaged in asymmetric wars. It does not prove the existence of an operational link and a strategic coordination between Arab and sub-Saharan jihadists. The latter often only copied revolutionary models available to them. Above all, Abu Bakr Naji's book says nothing about how to exercise power after gaining control of territories.

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[8] I wish to thank my colleague Adam Higazi for this information.

[9] http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/IT.CEL.SETS.P2/countries?display=map

[10] This name is probably the pseudonym of Mohammad Hasan Khalil al-Hakim, alias Abu Jihad al-Masri, who was allegedly killed in a US airstrike in Pakistan in October 2008.

For this is the main difference with African jihadists from the past. Indeed, AQIM, al-Shabab, or Boko Haram do not seem to have the capacity to govern large populations, with about one million people in northern Mali, between three and four million in southern Somalia, and up to six million in northeast Nigeria around Lake Chad. In practice, today's jihadists have merely managed to secure the territorial control of Timbuktu in 2012, of Mogadishu in 2006, and of Gwoza in 2014. Far from being conclusive, their attempts at governing cities have generally not lasted more than a few months. In any case, they are in no way comparable to the pre-colonial proto-states of Sokoto and Macina. Unlike the Islamic State in Iraq, which has benefited from the infrastructure of an oil producing country, AQIM, al-Shabab, and Boko Haram have tried to govern very poor regions. Their failures reveal the weakness of states where bad governance and corruption were the breeding ground for jihadism. Because they contest the legacy of a postcolonial order, current jihadist groups could also be understood as anti-imperialist.

But their ideological extremism, their violence, their lack of governing capacity, and their political contradictions do not leave much room for the emergence of Islamic states. The coup of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan in 1989 was probably the only successful Islamic revolution in sub-Saharan African. Yet even then, the military junta failed to prevent the secession of the South.

In the most populated country in Africa, Nigeria, Boko Haram is a textbook case of the political failures of contemporary jihads in this regard. On one side, the insurgents contributed to exacerbate the religious and social divisions of a fragile state. On the other side, they provoked a national reaction that re-legitimized government institutions. Nigerians were humiliated by the defeats of their army against Boko Haram. In 2015, both Christians and Muslims voted for a Muslim president who was perceived as a strong man able to "save" the country and fight corruption in the military. Since independence, this was the first change of government without a coup or a war. Paradoxically, the struggle of Boko Haram thus contributed to democratize the biggest country in Africa. Like Europe, where war has been both a factor of destruction and state building, the current challenge of jihad in Africa could in fact be an opportunity to improve governance. History shows that so-called radical Islam has given birth to proto-states. Today, it could also result in modernizing and democratizing government institutions.

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