WAR AND CONFLICT IN THE AFRICAN SAHEL AS THE RESULT OF AN HISTORIC AND PERMANENT WAR BETWEEN TWO EMPIRES: THE ARAB-ISLAMIC EMPIRE AND THE WESTERN EMPIRE

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Introduction

The so-called sub-Saharan Africa is the cradle of humanity, of the domestication of rice and its history is the oldest in the world, so talking about war and conflict in this area means revisiting the history of the continent's insertion in the complex international flows and processes that gave rise to the modern international system based on trade flows such as the Trans-Saharan and the Trans-Atlantic (Vidrovitch 2011).

However, our interest obliges us to centralize our analysis in the most recent period of the historiography of that region of the African continent. While the economic, religious, socio-political and cultural consequences of these trade flows have had and are having strong negative impacts on the current security situation of the continent, an in-depth analysis of them shows that Africa has always influenced the rest of the world.

It was this continent, through these trade flows, that supplied the world with gold as raw material to mint the Dinar's currency for the trans-Saharan trade routes and then for centuries millions of Africans were transplanted to the New World as raw materials essential to capitalism and globalization after the independence of the Americas with the territorial colonization of Africa.

Therefore, to speak of wars and conflicts in the African Sahel means to revisit the history of the various forms of globalization, to understand their socio-economic, political and cultural impacts. The heritage of these

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“civilizing” processes constitutes the basis of the internal and external rivalries that the continent lives continuously and permanently. This rivalry is based on the “cultural antagonism” fed by the geopolitical and geo-economic interests that the region arouses, and therefore the current conflicts linked to Islamic terrorism in the Sahel are the result of this historical past that opposes Western colonization and the African resistance that had Islam as its mobilizing or motivating source.

To think about contemporary international relations in Africa means to revisit the history of external interventions, in the sense of the involvement of foreign agents, organizations and countries in internal armed conflicts, since the processes of Islamization in the region and the establishment of a political order resulting from the war called holy war or Jihad, which provoked reformulations and even the overlapping of borders in the region, passing through colonialism, neo-colonialism to culminate in the current phase of “humanitarian” and military interventions with the military presence of France and the United States.

So, to understand the problems in the African Sahel² (Saahil in Arabic) in the post-Cold War period, it is necessary to go back historically, typifying “interventions” and their impacts in the region. It is important to point out that all African countries took their independence in the midst of the Cold War, which in itself reveals the very narrow limitations of diplomatic maneuver that the new government authorities had. Thus, the purpose of this reflection is to analyze security issues in the African Sahel by elucidating a possible typification of external interventions, their causes, and impacts.

Working to build paths and conditions of lasting peace justify the relevance of a reflection focusing on historiography. It is hypothesized that if terrorism and organized crime, as threats to international security, justify external interventions in the region, a historical setback (Islamization, Arabization, colonization, westernization) shows that the motives of both

² Sahel (coast in Arabic), is the climatic and biogeographical transition zone between the Sahara in the north and the Savannah of Sudan in the south. It is a strip of land of up to 1,000 km (620 miles) wide that covers 5,400 km (3,360 miles) from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. The European settlers defined the region as a border strip separating the north and south of the Sahara in order to prove the non-Africanity of the northern countries (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya) linking them to the great Middle East. This imagery is based on the colonial logic of separating Arabic and Arabized Muslims, besides reinforcing the hierarchization based on the tonality of the color of the skin (the lighter the more “civilized”) and of Arabism (speaking, having the Arab culture and customs). These two criteria of hierarchization served as a basis for dividing Africans between “barbarians and civilized”, but also reinforced the ongoing division of the Muslim world by creating and applying the concept of black Islam as opposed to Arab (white) Islam. The current conflicts in the Sahel countries (Mauritania Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan) are in part a result of these divisions and hierarchizations.

jihadists and interventions are economic, geopolitical, geostrategic, and not humanistic or peacebuilding.

In other words, the current security crises in the African Sahel are part of these processes of globalization shaped by the actions of traders, religious missionaries, adventurers and soldiers and which put in opposition the Arab-Muslim world present on the African continent since the 8th century and the Western world present on the continent since the 15th century (Chanda 2011).

It is a reformulation and adaptation of colonial maps under the cloak of intervention in the name of the peoples' salvation against radical and radicalized Islamists. This hypothesis is theoretically based on the idea that the most recent history of West Africa is the result of internal and external factors. The article is structured in a conceptual part with the objective of dialoguing with the literature about the concepts; a historical part seeking to identify the external interventions over time, and the last part aims to relate this past to the current conflicts.

Conceptual Analysis

For our analysis it is important to define the key concepts of this reflection which are external intervention, war, conflict from a theoretical point of view and to situate the Sahel geographically. In relation to the former, considering the caution that foreign intervention is not a simple concept to define and knowing that reality is also no less complex than the definition, because, as Schimdt (2018) observes, even in periods of slave trade and established colonial rule, the dominant powers outside the continent needed to take into account local realities. Thus, the definition of Elizabeth Schmidt (2018) is adopted:

External intervention as the involvement of external powers or organizations in the internal affairs of African countries and that this entity may be based on other continents or may be neighboring African states or regional and sub-regional organizations. The term "intervention" implies an unequal power relationship and occurs when a dominant country or organization uses force or pressure to influence a weaker sovereign entity or/and when a weaker entity requests external assistance to restore order, monitor a peace agreement, or end a humanitarian crisis (Schmidt 2018, 36).

This reflection of Schmidt (2018) allows us to realize that the intervention can come from within the continent, from neighboring countries, a fact that allows us to affirm that the military incursions of Muslims (Africans

converted to Islam) as well as Arabs in sub-Saharan Africa can be considered as the first internal and external interventions in the continent. Another important information brought by Elizabeth Schmidt (2018) is the fact that “intervention” implies an unequal power relationship regardless of whether it occurs at the initiative of the strongest or is requested by the weakest and is characterized by the use of force or pressure to respectively influence the weakest, restore order, monitor peace, or end a humanitarian crisis.

So, despite its coercive character, intervention is always justified by “humanism” and consequently, in the African case, Islamization, Arabization, evangelization, and colonization can be characterized as external interventions and this does not necessarily mean that they are totally negative. Intervention can be seen in a positive light, as when powerful nations intervene to prevent genocide or enforce peace agreements, yet when outsiders intervene to enslave, conquer, colonize, overthrow or install governments or pillage resources, sell weapons, escalate internal conflicts, the intervention has had extremely negative modifications (Schmidt 2018; Diallo 2019).

In the second case, intervention becomes a serious question of insecurity seen here as the presence of external threats to the sovereignty and survival of the state. That is, the opposite of security understood as the absence of an external military threat to the objective survival of a state (Buzan 2009). Thus, Security means to constitute something that needs to be ensured: nation, state, individual, ethnic group, environment or the planet itself, whether in the form of “national or international security” in which the nation/state was the analytical and normative reference object.

Thus, there are political and normative decisions in the definition of security, making it one of the essentially contested concepts in modern social science. In this sense, security is always a “hyphenated concept” and always linked to a specific object, to internal/external allocations, to one or more sectors and to a particular way of thinking about policies (Buzan 2009, 28).

Following the same reasoning, one can conceive security as a guarantee of social order that means a pattern of human activity that sustains its primary and universal objectives (Bull 2002) that aims at guaranteeing protection against violence that leads to death or bodily harm (i); the fulfillment of promises made and that agreements adjusted to goals are implemented (ii) and seeks, to a certain extent, that the possession of things are stable and not subject to constant and unlimited challenges (iii).

In this sense, intervention is an instrument of action, a means, not an end, because, depending on the morality or immorality of the objective for which it is destined, it can serve in defense of human rights and preserve the International Order, but, on the other hand, many of these interventions

invade the privacy of people and the sovereignty of States compromising the stability of the local, national and/or regional social order and consequently the International System through the destruction of its base units, which are the States.

The interventions that have taken place on the African continent throughout history, from the Almoravian incursion in the time of the African empires (Mali, Ghana, Songai, Kaneem Bornou, etc.) to the invasions of the European colonial empires (France, United Kingdom, Italy) up to the current “humanitarian” interventions and/or peace missions of regional organizations (African Union, European Union), international organizations (UN) and foreign powers (France, United Kingdom, United States, China) that are currently in progress in the Sahel region (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso). Niger, Chad, and Sudan fit this vision.

Figure 1: From the Sahelo-Saharan Empires to the Colonial Empires (I)

Source: Bouquet (2017).

Figure 2: The Group of the Five Sahel Countries (G5 Sahel)

Source: Mantinez (2019).

However, it is important to point out that when focusing on the Islamic intervention that provided trafficking and slavery for millions of Africans on trans-Saharan routes, we must be very careful. One of the elements that contributed greatly to the enslavement of Africans was the fact that the monotheistic religion had become the main barometer of the degrees of humanity, but also the color of the skin. Islam claims that one Muslim could never enslave another, but this was never respected when dealing with black Muslims (Coulibaly 2006).

Coulibaly (2006) presents the case of Hamad Bhabha who was one of the greatest Muslim scholars and teachers in Mali and has been captured and taken to Morocco just for being a black man. The so-called Moors and light-skinned Arabs became the greatest merchants of other Muslim Africans. Other black skinned Muslim Africans began to capture and sell other Africans for seeing in them inferior beings only by their refusal to convert to Islam. It was because of this that in 1212, the Emperor of Mali carried out one of the greatest political revolutions with “La Charte des Chasseurs” that not only abolished slavery but also put in place infrastructures to curb the practice like the death of merchants.

Therefore, the Sahel is a region of political instability, characterized by civil wars, internal and interstate conflicts; economic that is materialized through various forms of predation of resources whose consequence leads to social instabilities due to the growing impoverishment of peoples and their

brutal forms of exclusion and, last but not least, cultural instability which is a more pernicious form of acculturation beyond the scientific and technical gap (Kipré 2003).

According to Williams (2014), conflict is the use of violence organized by collectivities, groups of individuals, for political ends that are characterized by antagonism and opposition between collective agents and can culminate in armed struggle leading to extreme violence (Deadly conflict) and internal armed conflicts can occur between citizens (Civil War) or between the state and its contesting groups (Rebellion).

War itself is an act of violence designed to force the adversary to execute our will, i.e., the continuation of politics by other means (Clausewitz 1955, 51). In short, one realizes that while conflict is characterized by the opposition of interests, struggle for values, status, power or resource, war is the sum of all this and constitutes an organic, human and civilizational phenomenon, a dispute between two or more states through their armed forces or two different civilizations/cultures or even visions with the purpose of dominating each other.

Thus, to understand and correctly define the conflicts and wars of the African continent, a historical retreat is necessary to pinpoint how and why the opposition of interests, the struggle for values (which ones?), power and resources are or are not linked to external intervention and vice versa and as an organic, human and civilizational phenomenon; which oppositions are being faced mainly from the cultural/civilizational point of view and since when?

Africa and the Arab Muslim World

The Islamic conquest of the Sahara in the seventh century of the Christian era marks the end of the region's ancient history and the beginning of medieval history that culminates with the fall of Baghdad in the third phase³ of the expansion of Islam in 750 when the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyyad dynasty, transforming the capital city of the Muslim empire (Salem 2006). The medieval period has nothing to do with African periodization. This conquest

3 1st stage: from 632 to 661 - the successors of Mohammed, the caliphs, conquered Persia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt and the 2nd stage: from 661 to 750 - the Umayyyad caliphs dominated politics, transferring the capital to Damascus, Syria. The power became hereditary; the caliphs began to act as absolutist monarchs. In that period, territories were conquered in China, North Africa, and almost in the entire Iberian Peninsula, in Europe. 3rd stage: from 750 to 1258 - the Abbasid dynasties of Persian origin appeared. Baghdad became the political and cultural capital of the Islamic world.

will be followed by the dispute of space by several movements among which the movement of the Mauri, the Almoravid movement that emerged from the rivalries within the Arab-Islamic empire between the 7th and 19th centuries.

Islam was in the European Middle Ages the enlightened representative of civilization within the Western world. Some might even think that Islam is a religion of stagnation and death, but they cannot deny the value of its principle of civilization without which much of the ancient knowledge would have disappeared for good.

The prestigious Arab-Muslim civilization had its apogee marked by the establishment of the caliphate in Spain and its decline began with the takeover of Baghdad by the Mongols and the Spanish reconquest. This decline makes the general manifestation of civilization disappear, but it leaves undeniable traces and legacies upon the European civilization itself. Moreover, the role of Arab-Muslim civilization continued its influence and role in all Muslim societies in “regional movements” according to Redan (1922).

The Islamic conquest of the Sahara in the 7th century after Christ marks the end of the region’s ancient history and the beginning of medieval history that ends with the fall of Baghdad in the third phase of the expansion of Islam in 750 when the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad dynasty transforming the capital city of the Muslim empire (Salem 2006). This conquest will be followed by the dispute of space by several movements among which the onslaught of the Mauri/Africans, the Almoravid movement and the Almoravids who since the last third of the seventh century and the first of the eighth century have made their first warrior incursions into the Sahel and Sudan.

According to Kane (2004) in this period one speaks of the presence of a link of the Umayyad through which the soninkes of Biru Biru were hit for the first time by Islam from the 9th century onwards. The security of the Fulani people, like that of the people with whom they lived, was seriously threatened by the Berber impulse, in particular that of the lemtouna who subjugated the desert regions, waged a war with the black nations to force them to (convert) become Muslims, and the people who did not want to embrace Islam or pay taxes had a choice between servitude, death or flight (Kane 2004, 88).

Unlike what we are driven to think by the intellectuals of North Africa, a region of greater resistance against the penetration of Islam in the continent (Chebel 2007), the so-called Berbers composed of black and white people also had to pay tributes. It is also important to say that this is not an ethnic or tribal issue, which is in the eyes of some analysts a false concept comparable to the concept of “national identity” as something mobile, floating and illusory (Vidrovitch 2011; Amselle 1999), since three quarters of African languages belong to the Bantu language family.

“Bantu” is not an ethnic term, but linguistic (the equivalent of the so-called Indo-European languages), just as the dominant group in North Africa is the so-called Afro-Asian languages, which include Berber and Arabic. It is noted that the current use of the term “Arabic” to designate a people is a scientific heresy (except if it is to designate, in ancient times, inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula): we should speak of Arabic speakers, particularly to North Africa, where the vast majority of people were Berber speakers; Muslim “Arabs” are mostly aboriginal descendants of Berber (or other) descent converted to Islam (Vidrovitch 2011, 36).

This reflection from Vidrovitch (2011) allows us to reaffirm and reinforce the idea that the Berbers of North Africa are not Arabs, but Africans converted to Islam and consequently the advances of these Arab-speaking and Islamic-converted Berbers in the sub-Saharan Africa can be framed in the interventions of Islamized and Arabized neighboring states and peoples whose strength, superiority and legitimacy are given by the fact that they speak Arabic and dominate the precepts of Islam. As it can be seen, the intervention of Arabs, Arabized, and Islamized on the African continent in the Middle Ages constitutes the first phase of interventionism that can and should be classified as both foreign (Arabic) and domestic (Berber) on the continent and significantly changes the socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamics in the West African and Sahel region.

Conflicts defined as “ethnic-religious” became inevitable from the moment that Islamization and the dominance of the Arabic language that is “divinized” because it was the language of transmission of the Koran became the barometer measuring the degree of humanity, as well as the almost innate relationship established by Arabs and light-skinned Muslims (Fulbes for example) between being Arabic/Muslim and the degree of humanity and a true Muslim can only learn the words of God in Arabic, language in which he spoke to the prophet Muhammad (Chanda 2011).

This explains the adoption of Arabic as a language of communication by Africans who became Islamized and Arabized culturally, socially, politically and even economically, since Arabization is also seen as a measure of Islamization and legitimacy. Even the leadership of the “light-skinned” Muslims (fawns, Hausa etc.) is certainly justified first because the color of the skin resembles that of the Arabs and second because they dominated the Arabic, memorized the Koran and therefore taught the religion besides leading the Jihadist revolutions and theocratic states.

This leads to the intensification of the “ethnicization” of internal

instabilities, of the cultural and religious base involved which, besides changing social, economic, political and cultural dynamics, leaves a favorable opening for the justification and penetration of Western colonization. Thus, while Islamization has contributed to the strengthening of African empires (Mali, Waalo, Fula, Songai, etc.) between the 8th and 15th centuries, made possible by fruitful trade relations with the Mediterranean world (trans-Saharan trade), on the other hand, it contributed to the fall of empires (another time strengthened), the end of internal and regional socio-political stability due to the so-called Muslim revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, leaving a legacy of internal instability to the continent that will be reinforced by the legacies of two inherent processes, the Western occupation and colonization that took place between the 15th and 20th centuries and its legacy, which makes one believe that everything on the African continent can be explained and apprehended in terms of tribal and ethnic terms that refer to the “wild” nature of Africans (Amselle 1999).

The legacy left by these two colonizations (Arab-Islamic and European Christians), are the embedded values that marked and still mark the bipolarization of inter-African relations, thus justifying internal conflicts, regional and international interventions of both foreign powers (France, England, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc.) and regional and international organizations such as the UN and the AU.

The incarnate humanism of these actors began with the merchants of the era of Islamization, and was continued by the missionaries, adventurers and soldiers who proselytized and secured territories for their sovereigns and merchants actively seeking to convert souls, sometimes forcing people to adopt the new faith (Chanda 2011, 172). According to Mota (2018), the 16th and 17th centuries remain in limbo being associated with a phase of de-Islamization or at least a stagnation of the advance of Islam in Africa, due to the arrival of the European empires to dispute the domination, influence and exploitation of material and “civilizational” resources in the African space. This dispute of the African continent regarding Arabs, Arabized and Muslims, and Christian Europe was the reflection of a political, economic, and cultural dispute for the domination of the modern world and its international system, as Toynbee shows:

The history of Russia's relations with the Western society in contemporary times seems to be a repetition of an older history in which the role of Western civilization would be played by the Greco-Roman civilization and that of Russia by Islam. Communism was called a heresy of Christianity and we could say the same to Islam. Islam, like communism, succeeded

proportionally, because it proposed to reform the abuses that had infiltrated Christianity at the time (Toynbee 1953, 92).

These reflections of Toynbee show that the opposition between the Western world represented by the Europe heir to the Greco-Roman civilization and the Arab Muslim world is not only historical, but permanent. In this sense it is important to remember that the emergence and expansion of Islam from the 7th century onwards was to the detriment of the Greco-Roman world and Christianity and Arab-Muslims: Arabs and non-Arab Muslims (who were the majority) liberated from the Christian tutelage several Eastern countries from Syria to Spain, passing through all of North Africa until then under Greco-Roman rule. It is of fundamental importance to point out that it was the same Arab-Muslims who colonized the Iberian world for more than seven centuries (Kaly 2016).

It was during this period that they introduced the cultivation of domesticated sugarcane in Asia and the domesticated coffee in Ethiopia, plants that will be the basis of plantations in the New World. The conquest and expansion of Islam follows its course toward equatorial Africa, India, and eastern China, as well as Russia temporarily dominated by the Tartars, saw its occupiers convert to Islam and all that remained of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Toynbee 1953). In other words, the Islamization of Africa was concomitant with the expansion and domination of the world by Arabs and Muslims and, in our view, this period constitutes the first phase of external intervention to the continent and comes along with long distance commerce (Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic).

In a first moment the trans-Saharan trade allows the Mediterranean, Arab and European world to be supplied with gold directly from the main source of production of the metal in the region of Senegal which included the countries of the current Sahelian zone (Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria) and Ashanti which covers Benin and part of the current territory of Nigeria until the invasion of the Americas. Boubacar Barry draws attention to the importance and relevance of these flows:

For the societies of tropical Africa, this trade will form an essential basis of their organization. The royal exploitation of gold provides the ruling classes of states with an important means of obtaining, throughout the Sahara, on the one hand, rare luxury products (bedsheets, medicines and perfumes, dates and salt), but also and above all, establishing and strengthening their social and political power (horses, copper, iron bars, weapons). This trade thus favors the development of social differentiations, the constitution of

states and empires, because it favors the progress of productive forces (the improvement of techniques and products, etc.) (Barry 1984, 14).

It is important to note that while trans-Saharan trade has allowed African societies to organize themselves, has provided the ruling classes with means and strengthened political and social power, has fostered the progress of productive forces, and has developed social differences as a result of the change in values by the political elite that has opened the African space to new moral (Islam) political values (theocratic state) as well as outside influence, be it peaceful (Soft) or violent. The incorporation of Arab and Islamic values drastically transformed the continent's social and political organization from an egalitarian, balanced and just society to an unequal and very violent hierarchical society.

Cheikh Anta Diop in his work “L’Afrique Noire pré-colonial”, showing that African society was caste-based⁴, demonstrates that the originality of this system lies in the fact that the dynamic elements of society, whose discontent could have engendered revolution, are truly satisfied with their social condition and would not seek to change it (Diop 1987). In other words, a man of the so-called “lower caste like the slaves (djam in wolof)” would not have the will nor would he accept to enter a higher caste, for reasons of material interest, and so there were no revolutions against the regime, but rather against those who mismanage the public thing. This does not mean absence of social division, but absence of social injustice, because for each caste or class advantages and disadvantages, deprivations of rights and compensations were balanced, and so, concludes Diop (1987, 19), it is outside the consciences in material progress and external influences that historical motives must be sought.

This changes drastically with the Islamization and the establishment of the theocratic state that emerged from the trans-Saharan trade and Islamization, in which the elites begin to exploit society and become rich also with the sale of slaves. For this reason, Reid (2012) states that the African response to long-distance trade was dynamic and interventionist, on the part of relatively old states and, as in the Atlantic zone, the period of trans-Atlantic trade was a violently creative era, involving new economic and political forms and a revolution in military affairs with a very active participation of

⁴ The “caste” system is born of a division of labour in an advanced political regime, monarchical because there is no caste without nobility. Thus, caste is understood as the set of individuals who practice the same labour function and constitute the social and political institution (BARRY 1984). For example, the “caste of the Geer in Senegal” is made up of the nobles and all free men without a manual profession other than agriculture. The “caste of the ñeño”, also noble and free, is represented by all the craftsmen (shoemakers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, etc.).

the nomadic peoples of the savannah and the Sahel in the region's armed conflicts.

What is interesting is the participation of the Fulbes⁵ in the armed conflicts of the 6th century BC; perhaps as contingents of mercenaries ready to give their support to the biggest bid. If, already, the Fulbes recruited as archers and armed with shields were much appreciated on the battlefield of Ethiopia, Egypt and the Near East, their later participation in the Almoravian army that operated in Spain in the XI should not be too surprising, even if the motivations are different (Kane 2004, 87).

From this reflection of Kane we can see that the Fulbes have long been inhabitants of the Sahel region, but also their warrior side is historical (before Christ) and composed the Almoravian army still in the expansion of Islam to the Iberian peninsula before acting in Islamization and the formation of theocratic states through Jihad seen here as Holy War to first form a pan-Fulbe Muslim federation, and second, to fight against Western colonization.

The origin of Africa's present and future conflicts and wars is thus closely linked to the external influence and the historical internal instabilities generated by long-distance trade flows linked to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Thus, both the processes that allowed the dynamization of trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic trade were a means of opening the African space to external/foreign interventionism based on humanism, civilization and the values of Islamic monotheism of the Arabs; arabized on one side and on the other, this Europe that became the home of Christians thanks to the constant missionary activities of monks supported by the Pope and the conversion of kings (Chanda 2011), but:

In a short time the rise of Islamism united the Arab peninsula and North Africa and placed Spain under Islamic rule, effectively confining the Christian faith to Europe. If the Muslim forces had not been defeated by the Franks commanded by Carlos Martel at the Battle of Poitiers in 732, all of Europe would have become part of the Islamic Caliphate. It would have taken the emergence of the European maritime power and its fervent evangelism, forged by centuries of struggle against Islam and the crusades, for Christianity to break its continental confinement (Chanda 2011, 185).

This reflection by Nayan Chanda reinforces our argument of historical rivalry built and carried out by Europe since the perception of the strength of

⁵ Plural of Fulani.

the Islamic empire, elected the main enemy to be fought. Moreover, the author shows that the occupation of Europe by Muslims was the work of Muslims composed of Arabs, Arabized and Islamicized Africans who, in a way, helped to build and consolidate what would become Europe. This Europe that relied on maritime force and evangelism to reverse Arab and Muslim domination, in Europe, but also in Africa and the rest of the world.

This is why Chanda (2011) concludes that European colonial expansion was shaped by the fight against Islam since the period of the crusades and, in the Iberian Peninsula, against the Caliphate of Cordoba. Equally, the information brought by Chanda on the use of evangelization as a means of mobilization and fight against Arabs and Muslims from the perspective of occupying territories and subduing peoples is very valuable. This shows the importance of religious symbolism (Muslims against Christians as in Sudan) present even today in African conflicts in international relations and especially in the opposition between Christian Europe and the Muslim world.

According to Kaly (2016), Europe has always seen Islam as its greatest enemy since the 8th century because it is the most feared military and cultural competitor of Christian Europe and this in spite of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) having the Arabian Peninsula as their cradle and being introduced to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. Admitting that this declared enmity of Christian Europe to Islam and Muslims came from the colonization of the Iberian peninsula by the Muslims, among whom there were Africans converted to Islam like the Bebers of North Africa, the Soninke, Bambaras and Fulani who are black from West Africa (Kaly 2016) and that it is these blacks who took charge of expanding Islam in the West African region and fought against Western penetration in the Jihadist revolutions in the 16th and 19th centuries, it is easy to conclude that the current conflicts constitute the continuation of this “religious” war involving internal, regional and international actors in search of resources and power.

Colonization of Christian Europe

It is important to point out that just as the holy war of the Jihadists contributed to the expansion of Islam and the establishment of internal instabilities, the missionary tradition was determinant for the expansion of colonialism, but also for the emergence of local resistance to colonialism and consequently the establishment of internal wars. According to Lamin Sanneh (2005) from the vernacular traditions, local Christians gained confidence in the indigenous cause and while the colonial system represented a world economic and military order, the mission represented the defense of the

vernacular.

In other words, just as Islam becomes a tool for the struggle of Africans against colonization, Christianity also served Africans as a platform for mobilization and struggle against what they considered invasions and external aggressions, including Western colonialism and the violent expansion of jihadist and revolutionary Islam. As a result, chaos is installed in the midst of African society and within the continent, with Africans themselves divided by their professed faith as the main antagonists. On one side, there were the Muslims, Christians and “traditionalists” that declared war on Western colonialism, on the other, there was a violent rivalry opposing Christians and Muslims as well as the two were seeking to convert and co-opt those who continued to profess their traditional African faith.

One can point out that all of them had as its “humanitarian” goal the spread of the Faith on the African continent, as well as the purpose of gaining control of political and cultural economic resources and, mainly, to concentrate power. It is in this sense that Livingstone, once he had failed as a missionary in Africa, came to the conclusion that God’s plan for his life was to use his talents to explore and map the unknown continent and open the road of God, the Zambezi River, to Christianity, commerce and civilization (Chanda 2011, 192). The discovery made him a man adored by his contemporaries and was later accused of being an instrument of imperialism, since his discoveries preceded the dispute for the largest diamond and gold mines in the world leading to the division of the continent into British, Portuguese, French, German and Belgian colonies in the late 18th century, early 19th century.

The current conflicting scenario in the African Sahel, for example, continues to be driven by the same mines of gold, diamond, natural gas, oil, and drinking water, disputed by the same actors as the radical Islamists who declare war on governments, unbelievers who include Muslims who do not follow the faith as they should, Christians and “pagans” who are the followers of traditional African religions and the outside interference represented by the former colonial powers, who claim to be protecting the nation state by fighting Islamic radicalism in the name of human rights.

This war is being fed theoretically by the forces of freedom, peace, and development that are the colonial, neo-colonial, and/or post-colonial forces (forces of good) against the destabilizing forces of evil, “responsible” for war and underdevelopment, represented here by religious radicalism with its jihadist flag. In short, it is a historical continuation of violence that continues to generate more violence in the name of humanistic values whether based on Christianity, colonialism, Islam or simply the Western values in defense of human rights, democracy and good governance.

The increase in this violence is due to the renewal and sophistication of the instruments of colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial violence by the great powers, by the states, but also by the radicals who are after all nothing more than the product of this historical process, thus benefiting as much from the new technologies. These processes are highlighted not only by the cruelty and violence generated among the African population but also by the rivalry between the representatives of these two visions and cultures, but above all by the conflicting legacy originated in both trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan trade that continues to plague African society.

It is important to say that the trans-Saharan trade, Islamization, and the Arabization of Africa have been violent processes (slavery, pillage of resources, interference in the internal affairs of Africans) as much as the transatlantic trade. Certainly, the latter is better known, demonized, while the former (process of Islamization and Arabization) of the African continent is interpreted as positive, peaceful, cooperative by much of the literature and intellectuals in the area like Boubacar Barry (1984):

First, while the trans-Saharan trade of the pre-mercantilist period, in which Waalo participated, had strengthened the centralization of the state and driven progress in this autonomous kingdom of Senegal, the Atlantic trade, which replaced the former as soon as the French settled in Saint Louis (1659), does not free the productive forces, but ends instead with a regression of this and a disintegration of society and the Wallo State. That is why the French had to use force to break off previous trans-Saharan relations, to subjugate this region of Africa, and to orient their foreign relations according to the requirements of the Saint Louis trading post. Because African society obviously tried to react against this deterioration of its lot; Islam was the framework for this defensive reaction (Barry 1984, 17).

In these reflections Barry brings important information to our analysis and disagrees with the first one that presents the Trans-Saharan trade as positive, autonomist, that is, favorable to Africans while the Trans-Atlantic trade is presented as a brake to development, autonomy and progress due basically to the effects of slavery.

It is important to remember that Europe did not have a monopoly on trafficking, since there have been other processes of slavery such as the trans-Saharan organized by Arabs which was as violent and devastating for Africa and its descendants as the trans-Atlantic slave trade and was endorsed by Islam just as Christianity long justified slavery (N'diaye 2008). According to this author, while the trans-Atlantic slave trade lasted for four centuries (XV-XIX), it was for thirteen centuries (VII-XX) without interruption that Arabs

invaded sub-Saharan Africa and most of the millions of men they deported disappeared as a result of inhumane treatment. Thus, it is realized that both Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic trade have been tragic for the continent of Africa and their legacies continue to generate conflict.

The second information Barry provides assures us that the use of force by the French was necessary to put an end to the trans-Saharan trade, the Arab-Muslim influence and the African resistance for the benefit of the trans-Atlantic trade controlled since the 15th century by the Europeans. This means that the process that led to the replacement of trans-Saharan trade by the trans-Atlantic was a violent process involving, beyond the African, foreign forces in dispute and certainly this dispute marks the beginning of the imperial struggle for the domination and control of Africa and Africans.

Finally, it is clear from Barry's analysis that Islam is seen as part of or even the framework of African reaction and defense against Europe in the name of self-interest. This view illustrates how and why on the one hand Arabism and Islamism have been incorporated as part of the solution to the continent's problems while European imperialism is seen as "the problem" and on the other hand, the West's constant struggle against the maintenance and influence of the Arab-Islamic empire is justified.

This mistaken or biased view and interpretation of the impacts of Arab-Islamic imperialism makes it very difficult to analyze the continent's security problems, since the West's permanent struggle for dominance and exploitation of the continent is primarily motivated by the containment of the empire of the trans-Saharan trade era. Nor should the impact of Islamism be minimized first in the division of Africans between those who opted for conversion to Islam and those who opted for African religions (considered pagan, polytheistic) or Christianity, as well as the division among Muslims themselves. It is from this point of view that Redan (1922) affirms that with the races, the sects, the divisions generated, the Muslim world has not been one thing for a long time and warns that one should not lose sight of the possibility of union and strength that the Muslim world would have towards the West. This means that on the one hand, if the division of the Muslim world has generated internal conflict in the continent, on the other hand the presence of Muslims has always been considered a serious threat to the interests of the West as this observation by Redan shows:

We saw this well at the end of 1914, during the proclamation of the "Holy War against the infidels; only a few tribes answered the call, but the Ottoman Empire itself did not rise with unanimous impulse. However diverse the Islamic world may be today, concerns of a religious and political

nature act upon it and react constantly to each other. Many events in the history of modern and contemporary times are proof of this; but it is more evident than that of the past and present, a serious attempt at a new Islamic general union, against the Christian foreigner, which occurred in 1921? Let's let it develop and suffer with the rapprochement of the sects and regional movements of Islam with Ottoman nationalism. This would be a particularly dangerous game. Therefore, let us take care to prevent the constitution of a Turkish or Pantourian bloc. Let us distinguish the populations that received Islam from the Iranians from those that received the Arabs and not allow them to merge; neither is allowed the "turquisation" of the non-Turkish provinces (Redan 1922, 28).

As it is perceived, if on one side the Muslim world on the verge of World War I did not have a union or a single leadership, this possibility was never discarded or minimized by the West and the author wonders if the West will let a unification of Muslims happen, knowing that they will suffer if this happens? His answer and recommendation are categorical in the sense of preventing the formation of an Islamic community with a single leadership. Since the Turkish-Ottoman empire was the nation that dominated a large part of the Muslim world, until the Western counterattack on the Muslim world started after the failure of the Turks before Vienna in 1683 (Toynbee 1953), Redan's suggestion to his compatriots, was that the West should avoid the unification of the Muslim world under Turkish rule and seek the distinction between Arabs and Arabized like the Africans and Persians.

In the African case, the focus of Redan's analysis, this warning is justified by the multiple resistances to Western colonization led by the Arabized and Islamized where the framework of resistance is formed by Islam and the weapons of this resistance were bought with slaves captured in the interior of the continent and sent to the Arab-Muslim world on the other side of the Sahara and the Mediterranean (Barry 1984). However, this resistance, led by the marabout movement, sinks the region of sub-Saharan Africa into a constant instability caused by the attempt to forcibly convert the local population and oppose the monopoly of trade.

Therefore, these instabilities had economically, politically and socially disturbed the West African and Sahel states in the name of Islam. Thus, one can see that the first foreign interventions (Arab-Muslim), came from the process of Islamization and Arabization that began with the Almoravid movement that took over the cities of Awdagost and Sidjimassa around 1054-1055, Fes in 1069 and in 1070, Abu Bakr bin Omar founds the capital Marrakesh, sedenting the power of the Almoravids before conquering Ghana in 1076 (Bresi 2014).

Finally, according to Barry (1984) since the 14th century, there have been infiltrations of Arab-Berber tribes in sub-Saharan Africa with the justification of “political and social misunderstandings” in the north until the submission in the 17th century of the Berbers Senhaja and Lamtuna who are descendants of the Almoravids of the desert. During this same period, the Mali empire lost its main cities of Gao and Timbuktu, targets of attacks by the Moroccan monarchy for their need to supply gold and slaves. This means that resistance to westernization/colonization has had an impact on the division-hierarchy, “ethnicization” and arabization of African society and, consequently, the transformation of the continent into a permanent war zone in addition to the systematization of external interventions in African affairs.

These elements are visible in today’s African conflicts and have been pointed out as causes of wars and conflicts without, however, connecting them with the historical past of the Islamization of Africa by European expansion, the transatlantic slave trade accompanied by “civilizing” missions. The French first set foot in Senegal between 1639 and 1677, settling successively in Saint Louis and Gorée, as well as several companies responsible together with their directors and agents for the recognition, prospecting and exploitation of the African coast.

According to Chailley (1953) their goals already suggest the great design that will be developed during the 19th century, which goals were to reach the gold mines at the top of the Senegal river; but also looking for relationships with Timbuktu, whose treasures are subjects of the Arab chronicles. Therefore, the phase of de-islamization or stagnation of Muslim forces corresponds to a phase of engagement of the West in the occupation of the African continent and the phase of revolutions (XVIII and XIX), which simply means resistance to Western colonialism that was consolidating at the expense of the Arab-Islamic onslaught on the continent.

Here it is worth emphasizing the importance of domestication and the incorporation of Islamic principles and the Arab culture into African society which will carry forward this resistance to the West in the form of a local “nationalism” blessed by Allah (God). However, this symbiosis has served as a basis for consolidating and legitimizing arabized and Islamicized leaderships at the expense of local communities, and the West would use these divisions first to ally itself with “traditional” leaderships to confront the resistance of the Muslim revolutions, and second, to use this “domestication” of Islam by local communities in Africa and the rest of the Islamic world to create or reinforce internal divisions, which have led to Western rule over the Muslim world.

According to Saedar (2014) the fracture of the Muslim world occurred through the domestication of local power by Arab governors and tribal leaders

giving rise to a multitude of dynasties and policies characterized by the inability to centralize political control and manage disputes generated over the religion originated in the establishment of the rival caliphate (Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid), which established respectively the capital of the Muslim empire in Damascus (661-750), Baghdad (750-1258) and Cairo (910-1171). These historical facts of the Arab-Islamic and Western world constitute the historical basis of the conflicts and contemporary wars of the African continent and consequently of the external interventions in various periods of African history, as Elizabeth Schmidt states.

Foreign intervention in Africa accounts for foreign political and military interventions in Africa during the decolonization periods (1956-75) and the Cold War (1945-91), as well as during the periods of state collapse (1991-2001) and the “global war on terror” (2001-10). In the first two periods, the most significant intervention was extracontinental. The United States, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and the former colonial powers became entangled in numerous African conflicts. During the period of state collapse, the most consistent interventions were intracontinental. African governments, sometimes aided by powers outside the continent, supported warlords, dictators, and dissident movements in neighboring countries and fought for control of their neighbors’ resources. The global war on terror, such as the Cold War, increased foreign military presence on the African continent and generated outside support for repressive governments. In each of these cases, foreign interests changed the dynamics of internal struggles, increasing local conflicts in larger conflicts with devastating effects on African peoples (Schmidt 2013, 12).

Schmidt’s reflection demonstrates through periodization the continuity of foreign interventions on the continent from the end of World War II to the Global War on Terror initiated in 2001 by the U.S. government, but it also shows the diversity of actors as well as the origin and historical reasons for Africa’s “innumerable conflicts” within the Trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic trade flows, which have reinforced respectively the geopolitical use of Islam and Christianity to influence political leaders, conquer and dominate peoples in a peaceful and violent manner. This hybrid form of violence and humanism is evidently only possible with the active participation of Africans, better said, some Africans in a position of legitimate leadership whether by possession of the means of violence (warlords), faith (traditional or revealed religions), or political and economic power.

New Conflicts, Old Causes

The objective of this session is to relate the past reported in the previous session with the current conflicts of the Sahel countries in order to support the argument that one cannot understand the conflicts of West Africa without taking into account the Arab-Islamic colonization and its historical rivalry with the Western colonization. To this end, the countries that make up the G5 Sahel group (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad) as well as the conflicts that afflict them are used to show how the highlighted causes of conflicts originate in the two colonial maps mentioned above.

The current situation of insecurity in the Sahel countries arose from the change of regime in Libya due to Western intervention combined with an internal uprising that provoked an influx of combatants and weapons into Western Sahara, where it destabilized weak governments. According to Schmidt (2018) in Mali, these developments shook a secessionist movement and spurred the military coup, the insurgency linked to al-Qaeda, and generated another round of foreign interventions in the region. Curiously, in the 19th century, it was from Libya that the Mahdist brotherhood that spread in the Sahel (Chad, Mali) under the name of Senoussiya of Libya, in connection with its Muslim brothers generated an insecurity due to its more military than commercial characteristics; and would be as demonized and feared by the French and Italians who aspired to conquer and colonize the region (Vidrovitch 2011).

These two cases brought by Schmidt and Vidrovitch show that for a long time the jihad linked to Islam conducted by Muslims (Arabs and/or Arabized) and the colonial empires are part of the actors involved directly and indirectly in the region. Thus since 2012, despite the presence of thousands of French troops and the UN, the conflict in Mali has taken over the center of the country and spread to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. For its part, Nigeria faces insurgents coming from training camps linked to Al Qaeda (Schmidt 2018) who returned with weapons from Libya's arsenal, a conflict that spread to neighboring Niger and Cameroon and attracted fighters from Mali, Mauritania and Algeria.

From the internal point of view, one speaks of a struggle of the jihadists of the Katiba from Macina against the central power; from the other, one speaks of an "ethnic" violence opposing Fulani shepherds and Dogon farmers, without paying due attention to the historical origin of this conflict, which also constitutes a legacy of Islamization, slavery, and western colonization. The empire of Macina, was a jihadist state founded by the arabized and islamized Fulani or Fulbes in the Niger delta in the cities of Mopti, Segou,

Djenne, Hamdallahi (capital) and Timbuktu in present-day Mali in the 19th century (1818), as a result of the advance of jihadist Islam in West Africa⁶ characterized by Fulani hegemony. This hegemony was consolidated after many fights against neighboring Bambaras, Ardos, Tuaregs and Moors.

According to Amadou Ampathe Ba, the history of this region is marked by tragic wars that opposed mainly Fulbes from the empire of Macina to the toucouleur of the army of El Hadji Omar, the great conqueror whose influence extended from the East of Guinea to Timbuktu (BÂ 1992) and other socio-political and cultural groups (Bambara, Ardos, Tuareg, Moors etc.) of the neighborhood. These wars and conflicts that were characterized by the “fulanization” or Fulani hegemony and Islamization under the leadership of El Hadji Omar in the region, reinforced by colonial action, constitute one of the bases and justifications of instability in the Sahel countries.

Between 1804 and 1818, Fulbes led by Sheikh Usman Danfodio (1804-1810) and Tuklors under Ahmadu (1807-1818) expanded between the upper Senegal River and Lake Chad in the name of Islam and established an immense Muslim empire in the region. It is important to remember that Fausa and Tuklors are of the same “halpular” family (those who speak fula) and were nomads for a long time because of their pastoral activities and according to Hampathe Ba (1992) were both oppressed, scattered in oppressed diasporas or forcedly fixed in concentration zones before they organized themselves into kingdoms and succeeded, after Islamization, in forming great empires.

These empires will be maintained by means of permanent conflicts with the original peoples, who, despite being subjected to hegemonic fulani power, will not conform, especially those who, despite being Fulbes, arabized and islamized, were subjected to state violence. The memory of this period is one of the causes of the current conflicts or at least serves as a reference and/or justification for leaders such as Amadou Kouffa, leader of the Liberation Front of Macina and creator of the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin in Arabic), who wants a coalition of all jihadist groups⁷ in the region against the states and their political, social, economic and cultural systems seen as a legacy of western colonization, which favors the westernized elites and the western powers themselves. The interventions of the West and the African Union in the region are justified

6 Region currently composed of Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria and at the time it was a part of a set of empires: Futa Toro, Futa Jalon, Sokoto, Macina).

7 Al Murabitun (led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar), Ansar Dine (led by Iyad Ag Ghali), the Macina Liberation Front (led by Amadou Koufa) and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

by the security threats posed by this jihadist coercion, and this vicious cycle in which each side bases its violence on moral and religious humanism has historically generated and still generates permanent instability in the region.

Indeed, the real reasons for this instability in the Sahel region lie in its geopolitical and geo-economic importance (Schmidt 2018; Kipré 2003; Gaye 2017) in view of its importance in Africa's connections with Europe and Asia across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and with the Americas across the Atlantic. This central role of the region in the Sahel and Sahara in the continent's international relations was initiated with the trans-Saharan trade of slaves, gold and salt. Today the same routes are used by criminal groups to traffic in weapons, drugs, and people which brings legal and illegal actors into contact with converging and divergent interests at the same time as all seek to control spaces and exploit regional strategic resources (Schmidt 2018; Gaye 2017; Keenan 2013).

These complex and violent relationships, together with increasingly difficult living conditions due to the consequences of global warming, are emptying the depths of the Sahelian countries to the benefit of the coastal regions of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, with an effect similar to that caused by the detour of trade routes from the Sahara to the Atlantic in the 17th century. Moreover, the ports of the Atlantic slave trade (Dakar, Abidjan, Cotonou, Douala, etc.), are still the only outlets for the Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad). The interior of these countries not only escapes the control of the central governments, but also suffers from emptying and abandonment by its population through forced immigration, but coveted by various illegal actors (Islamist radicals, drug traffickers, arms dealers) and foreign powers (United States of the Americas and its Global War on Terrorism, France and its "peace" operations) in search of strategic resources.

According to Gaye (2017) if the absence of the state makes room for criminals, climate conditions unfavorable to human life such as drought turn traditional workers (farmers, shepherds) into labor for organized crime and border regions in rebel zones against governments of countries like Mali, Chad and Niger. The contestation of the governments of these countries in the name of greater social inclusion; an autonomy or a change in the system of government inherited from colonization by the post-colonial state since independence (the various attempts of coups d'état), passing through the period of the end of the Cold War to culminate in the current situation that began in 2000, came from these border areas and resulted in the weakening of the state.

Gaye (2017) relates the state's failure in this region to a drastic change in the geopolitics of the Sahel that is due to (1) a change in the cocaine route

from Latin America to Europe through the region and (2) the establishment of Salafist terrorism. This in turn recalls the reversal of slavery routes in the 19th century when Afro-descendants of independent Americas began to command Africa, evangelization, and the clandestine slave trade, transforming the networks that once operated in the trans-Saharan trade into pirates and human traffickers from the Sahel region toward the Atlantic.

Therefore, these complex historical flows between Africa, the Americas and Europe very well reported by Ambassador Alberto da Costa e Silva (2011) in “Um rio chamado Atlântico: África no Brasil e o Brasil na África” according to which, from the end of the 18th century, a new threat is imposed on Africa as a reality: the political, economic and military presence, increasingly constant and demanding of the European, continue (or have returned) to haunt the scenario of the African countries and peoples of the Sahel in the middle of the 21st century. It is worth noting that the fall of the legendary West African empires (Mali, Songai, Benin, etc.) also came from the emptying of the interior of the Sahel and Sahara region, from the weakening of trans-Saharan trade routes to the benefit of transatlantic trade, which was only possible with the political, economic and military presence of Europe that supplied the firearms, facts that are repeated in the era of the “Global War on Terrorism” with the action of the West (Europe and the United States).

Jeremy Keenen (2013) in “The Dying Sahara: US Imperialism and Terror in Africa” shows how U.S. foreign policy since September 11, 2001, through the Global War on Terror (GWOT), has led to the worst and longest human catastrophe⁸ that the Sahara and the Sahel have suffered because of Western lies⁹. 2 This means that we are facing conflicts caused by external interventions justified by a false humanism just as the “humanism” of the civilizing missions of Christianity, Islam and Arabism justified slavery and colonization.

In this sense, it is worth remembering that there was no one held responsible for the slave trade. Catherine Coquery Vidrovitch (2011, 33) notes that its political consequences were more damaging than its strictly quantitative impact. The populational deficit was caused by the multiple disturbances that followed (incessant internal wars, massive displacement of population) and left lasting resentments that have not yet disappeared among invading and invaded peoples. In this way, one realizes how important and necessary a

8 Because tens of thousands of people have lost their livelihoods; because almost 500,000 Malians have had to flee their homes; and because hundreds, if not thousands, more local people may die - and for reasons they probably won't understand (Keenan 2013, 11-12).

9 Mainly the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Algeria as the main regional power states the author.

historical retreat is to analyze the conflicts and war and many other problems faced in contemporary times since their roots lie in their colonial past (Arab-Muslim and Western) and the Cold War, as Elizabeth Schmidt points out:

Distinctions of power, privileges, and conflicts over natural resources are part of human history and in Africa these phenomena preceded the colonial period, however, the plundering of wealth through unequal exchange was incorporated into colonial economic practices, and the ethnic and regional hierarchies of the colonial era - sometimes built on pre-existing distinctions - often assumed new power after independence from the post-Cold War context (Schmidt 2018, 23).

Schmidt's reflections are based on the argument that the origin of conflicts should be sought in part in periods prior to Western colonization, such as the era of Islamization, Arabization and trans-Saharan trade. Second, it draws attention to practices embedded in the era of Western colonization, ranging from the plundering of the continent's resources and wealth to ethnic and regional hierarchization and/or invention as the supposed superiority of North Africa ("white Africa") over sub-Saharan Africa, undermining pre-existing differences. In this sense, it is understood that taking ethnicity, race, and religion as the cause of conflict without proper historical and geopolitical contextualization can be as problematical as attempting to resolve them through external intervention, the Global War on Terrorism, or by creating new political units such as South Sudan in 2011.

Therefore, it is essential to include among the causes the issues related to the degrading conditions of the climate, the demographic increase, the colonial borders that in turn have favored the creation of social and cultural borders as important elements for the conflicts and wars of the 21st century including those involving Islamic terrorism. Is it even possible to comprehend Islamic terrorism and the civil wars caused by it without a historical setback that informs events prior to the Western expansion of the 15th century? In this regard Ibn Batuta (1982) in his manuscript "I. Voyages: de l'Afrique du Nord à la Mecque" that the first Muslim civil war and Islamic extremism arose from political-social (power struggle)¹⁰ and ethnical problems (between Arabs and non-Arabs).

¹⁰ That puts in opposition Shiites represented by Ali and Sunnis and leads to the emergence of a third group: the Kharijites (those who have left or abandoned), who rejected the first two groups. This group is seen as the first extremist split of Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis are political opponents), who would defend the execution of all who do not follow them, including women and children. Shiites and Sunnis are treated as polytheists, i.e. inferior to Christians and Jews considered to be "the people of the book", as followers of a revealed religion.

Final Remarks

Several analyses about the origin and causes of African conflicts point to the post-colonial state and its structures, ethnicity, “tribe”, religion, and border as the main causes of instabilities ignoring, unconsciously or not, the historical factors linked to colonial maps, connected specifically to the Arab-Islamic and Western empires. Historical analysis shows that these colonial processes accompanied by long-distance trade (Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic) left among other legacies the violence and internal rivalries coming first from the processes of slavery, Islamization, and European colonization. These violent processes, besides dividing, leave lasting resentments as Vidrovitch (2011) states.

The second point that justifies the current conflicts is linked to the jihadist revolutions of the eighteenth century, which, in a way, will test the divisions and hierarchization of African society based on elements such as speaking Arabic, dominating the Koran and its religion in addition to having the lighter skin tone (a greater degree of humanism). This will justify, for example, the emergence of the first Fulani hegemony, the creation of the empires of Macina in the current Republic of Mali and the base of the Macina Liberation Front also known as Katiba Macina led by then Amadou Kouffa, Sokoto founded in the 18th century by Usman Dan Fodio whose territory serves as a base for the Booko Haram in today's Nigeria.

The third important element that reveals a historical analysis of the origin and causes of African conflicts is the declared rivalry of the West against the Muslim world that emerges from the Arab-Muslim colonization of the Iberian peninsula and reinforced by the resistance of the Muslim world to Western expansion mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Finally, the issues related to the geopolitical and geoeconomic importance of the African continent, from the camel trade (trans-Saharan trade), seen as the beginning of globalization (Chanda 2011), passing through the boats driven by the monsoon winds, the steamers (in the era of the Atlantic trade) to the current era of electronic commerce, the greed for the continent is justified by its abundant and necessary resources and needed by all.

Therefore, if it is important to understand the causes of African conflicts, which are among others: ethnicity, religion, the struggle for state control, natural resources, borders, social, economic and political marginalization, structural issues, questions of sovereignty; it is more important to understand the historical processes linked to the colonial maps that gave rise to these causes. It is the Arab-Islamic colonization and the Western colonization that had changed dynamic elements of the African society, introduced new values,

new forms of social, economic, political, and cultural relations that Africans have domesticated, modified, adapted to their way of life, and fought for their preservation, making it possible to maintain conflicts, wars, instabilities, and consequently foreign interventions.

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ABSTRACT

This reflection concerns the armed conflicts of the African Sahel and aims to historically analyze the role of Arab-Islamic colonization, Western colonization and the rivalries between the two. It is based on the hypothesis that the confrontation between jihadist and internal and external interventionists in the region constitutes a historical struggle motivated by non-humanitarian and non-moral geoeconomic interests. Methodologically, a historical and comparative analysis is chosen to conclude that the main causes of conflicts should be located in the colonial maps and the historical rivalry between empires and not in ethnic, tribal and religious differences or the borders created by Western colonization.

KEYWORDS

Conflict; Intervention; African Sahel.

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