ISSN 2448-3915 | e-ISSN 2448-3923

BRAZILIAN JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos

Porto Alegre, v. 10, n. 20
Jul./Dec. 2025

UFRGS
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

CEGOV
CENTRO DE ESTUDOS INTERNACIONAIS SOBRE GOVERNO

NERINT

CEBRAFRICA
UFRGS | BRASIL

Brazilian Journal of African Studies	Porto Alegre	v. 10	n. 20	p. 1-211	Jul./Dec. 2025

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Brazilian Journal of African Studies is a biannual publication, in digital format, dedicated to the research, reflection and propagation of original scientific articles with emphasis on the analysis of International Relations, Organizations and Integration, Security and Defense, Political Systems, History, Geography, Economic Development, Social Structures and their Transformations and Schools of Thought. RBEA is essentially academic, linked to the Brazilian Centre for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

The RBEA has as target audience researches, professors and students interested in the specificities of the African continent and its international insertion. Alongside such perspective, the Journal intends to expand the debate about the Brazilian projection world widely, the Brazilian cooperation efforts (including in the Defense field) with the African countries in the South Atlantic perimeter and the construction of a regional identity in face of a scenario of geopolitical transformations.

INDEXES

This work was supported by the Journal Edition Supportive Program (PAEP) - UFRGS

Programa de apoio à Edição de Periódicos

EDITORIAL TEAM / EQUIPE EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF /EDITOR CHEFE
Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

DEPUTY EDITOR /EDITOR ADJUNTO
Paulo Visentini (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

ASSISTANT EDITOR /EDITOR ASSISTENTE
Rafaela Pinto Serpa (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

EDITION ASSISTANT /ASSISTENTE DE EDIÇÃO
Augusto Lorenzo Esposito (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

EDITORIAL BOARD /CONSELHO EDITORIAL
Ajay Dubey (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)
Ángel Dalmau Fernández (CIPI, Cuba)
Antônio Joaquim Calundungo (Universidade Agostinho Neto, Angola)
Beatriz Bissio (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Chris Landsberg (University of Johannesburg, South Africal)
Cyril Obi (Social Science Research Council, EUA)
Fábio Morosini (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)
Frédéric Jean Marie Monié (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Hilário Cau (Instituto Superior de Relações Internacionais, Mozambique)
Ian Taylor (University of St Andrews, Scotland) - IN MEMORIAM
Kamilla Raquel Rizzi (Universidade Federal do Pampa, Brazil)
Karl Gerhard Seibert (UNILAB, Brazil)
Li Anshan (Peking University, China)
Luiz Dario Teixeira Ribeiro (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)
Vladimir Shubin (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia)

CONSULTATIVE BOARD /CONSELHO CONSULTIVO
Alfa Oumar Diallo (Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, Brazil)
Andrei Tokarev (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia)
Aparajita Biswas (University of Mumbai, India)
Diego Pautasso (Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing – Sul, Brazil)
Eduardo Migon (Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército, Brazil)
Fantu Cheru (American University, USA)
Gladys Lechini (Universidad Nacional de Rosário, Argentina)
Henry Kam Kah (University of Buea, Cameroon)
Igor Castellano da Silva (Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Brazil)
John Akokpari (University of Cape Town, South Africa)
José Carlos dos Anjos (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)
José Rivair Macedo (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)
Leila Hernandez (Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil)
Lito Nunes Fernandes (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas, Guinea-Bissau)
Lotfi Kaabi (Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques, Tunisia)
Mamadou Alpha Diallo (UNILA, Brazil)
Mamoudou Gazibo (Université de Montréal, Canada)
Marina de Mello Souza (Universidade de São Paulo, Brasil)
Nathaly Silva Xavier Schütz (Universidade Federal do Pampa, Brazil)
Paris Yeros (Universidade Federal do ABC, Brazil)
Renu Modi (University of Mumbai, India)
Tim Murithi (Free State University, South Africa)
Wolfgang Adolf Karl Döpcke (Universidade de Brasília, Brazil)

This issue also included reviews from the following researchers: Aldomar Arnaldo Rückert, Camila Castro Kowalski, Guilherme de Araujo Grigoli, Josias Marcos de Resende Silva, Nilton César Fernandes Cardoso, Rodrigo Stumpf González, Sofia Isabel Vizcarra Castillo and Sylvio de Souza Ferreira.

BRAZILIAN JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES
Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos

© Brazilian Centre for African Studies - UFRGS

Editorial supervising: Michele Bandeira
Cover: Fernanda Chiodi de Castilho
Graphic design: Janaína Horn
Layout: Augusto Lorenzo Esposito
Proofreading: Felipe Raskin Cardon e Marcos Viola Cardoso
Artwork: Tiago Oliveira Baldasso

The *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* is available online both in English and Portuguese at www.seer.ufrgs.br/rbea

CONTACT INFO

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul
CEGOV - Centro de Estudos Internacionais sobre Governo
João Pessoa Avenue, 31, rooms 303 and 304.
ZIP code: 90040-001 – Porto Alegre – RS – Brasil.
Phone: +55 51 3308.3272 / 3308.3348
E-mail: cebrafrica@ufrgs.br

seer.ufrgs.br/rbea
ufrgs.br/cebrafrica

CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION (CIP)

Responsible: Gládis W. do Amaral Library, Faculty of Economics, UFRGS

Cover image: Boy and soldier in a refugee camp in Uganda.

Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos / Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas, Centro Brasileiro de Estudos Africanos. – Ano 10, n. 20 (Jul./Dez. 2025). – Porto Alegre : UFRGS/FCE/CEBRAFRICA, 2025 -

Semestral.
ISSN 2448-3907.
e-ISSN 2448-3923

1. África. 2. Relações internacionais. 3. Integração regional. 4. Segurança internacional. 5. Política de defesa.

CDU 327

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE **6**
Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira

THE GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS IN THE SAHEL: THE SINO-RUSSIAN STRENGTHENING VS THE FRANCO-AMERICAN DECLINE **9**
Yoslán Silverio González

REFUGE, INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR BRAZIL-AFRICA SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC **31**
Guilherme de Araujo Grigoli

PEACE IN PIECES: THE POLITICS AND PITFALLS OF PEACEMAKING IN SOUTH SUDAN **58**
Ibrahim Bangura

THE CONFEDERATION OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL (CAF) AND THE AFRICAN CUP OF NATIONS (AFCON) AS EXAMPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE PAN-AFRICANISM: A BRIEF DISCUSSION **82**
Guilherme Silva Pires de Freitas
Felipe Antonio Honorato

PAN-SOMALISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND CRISIS OF THE SOMALI STATE: INTEGRATION AND IRREDENTISM **105**
Rafaela Pinto Serpa

A LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION PROCESS IN GUINEA-BISSAU **133**
Angelita de Carvalho
Vavito Andre da Costa

ENDOGENOUS PEACEBUILDING IN THE NIGER DELTA: COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACHES AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS **155**
Tope Shola Akinyetun
Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi
Ambrose Osariyekemwen Iyase

SHARIA IN YORÙBÁLAND: NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ETHNIC TENSIONS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA **178**
Olasupo Thompson
Tokunbo Stephen Dada
Olugbenga Seun Aina
Bamidele Jinadu
Surajudeen Oladotun Oladele

EDITOR'S NOTE

Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira
December/2025

The current global context, in which Africa is acquiring increasing relevance, presents a set of overlapping and multifaceted tensions whose epicenter we are currently experiencing. The present crisis is particularly peculiar, especially due to the simultaneity of several events converging toward conflicts and wars. On the other hand, the political, ideological, and economic erosion of the West has unveiled, on the African continent, a diversity of projects, new political regimes, and intense economic growth that has expanded Africa's place in the global economy. The systemic changes in the position of the African continent as a geopolitical and geoeconomic space stem from the establishment of a new political pattern of international interactions, with the development of African partnerships within the framework of South-South and South-East Cooperation, alongside the erosion of the West's five-century-long political and economic monopoly. In this sense, Africa is moving toward advocating for the adaptation of the international order to the realities of the twenty-first century.

It is necessary to consider that, with the end of the Cold War, the United States emerged as a destabilizing state, leading to growing distrust in the liberal economic system and to the crisis of neoliberal globalization. In the wake of this process, the European Union declined and gradually lost its sphere of influence. At the same time, new economically dynamic poles (including in the technological field) rose and revealed the crisis of the West as the center of global power. African, Arab, and Asian proactivity, combined with the tactical alliances of the so-called "emerging powers" in response to U.S. actions, has fostered international realignments in the search for new socioeconomic models. This is an ongoing geopolitical transition, also demonstrated by the intensification of crises and conflicts.

Considering the new global geopolitical reality, as well as the position of the African continent and its challenges, this issue includes contributions from scholars from Brazil, Cuba, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone who address these

issues from different perspectives. In the article entitled *The geopolitical shifts in the Sahel: the Sino-Russian strengthening vs the Franco-American decline,* Yoslán Silverio González analyzes how insecurity in the Sahel impacts the global geopolitical landscape. According to the author, the exhaustion of the Euro-American cooperation model and the failure to contain terrorism triggered a wave of *coups d'état* opposing the French military presence, thereby strengthening the Sino-Russian presence in the region. Guilherme de Araujo Grigoli, in *Refuge, Integration and Regional governance in Uganda: implications for Brazil-Africa South-South Cooperation in the South Atlantic*, discusses Uganda's response to forced displacement, originating mainly from the conflict in South Sudan, articulating the domestic legal-institutional framework, regional African commitments, and recent programmatic implementation. According to the author, this generates implications for Brazil-Africa South-South cooperation (South Atlantic) in line with contemporary African regionalism.

In the article *Peace in Pieces: The Politics and Pitfalls of Peacebuilding in South Sudan*, Ibrahim Bangura examines the politics and challenges of peacebuilding in South Sudan, analyzing why peace remains unattainable despite the commitments made under the R-ARCSS framework. Meanwhile, Guilherme Silva Pires de Freitas and Felipe Antonio Honorato, in the article entitled *The Confederation of African Football (CAF) and the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) as examples of an effective Pan-Africanism: a brief discussion,* analyze how both AFCON and CAF have been used to reinforce national and regional identities, promote regional integration, and project Africa internationally. According to the authors, football quickly proved to be an important diplomatic, political, and integrative tool for the leaders of independent Africa.

In *Pan-Somalism in the Construction and Crisis of the Somali State: Integration and Irredentism*, Rafaela Pinto Serpa discusses Pan-Somalism as both an ideal and a movement in the construction and crisis of the Somali state. The author argues that Pan-Somalism operated in two simultaneous dimensions: as an internal vector of national integration and as an external project of territorial reunification of Somali peoples in the Horn of Africa. Subsequently, Angelita de Carvalho and Vavito Andre da Costa discuss, in *A look at the demographic transition process in Guinea-Bissau*, the demographic transition between 1950 and 2020, as well as future population trends in Guinea-Bissau. The authors seek to present and discuss the country's historical, social, and political processes and their relationship with demographic transition. Furthermore, they estimate and seek to understand the demographic transition model experienced by Guinea-Bissau and countries in the Sub-Saharan African region.

Finally, in the article *Endogenous peacebuilding in the Niger Delta: community-centered approaches and alternative development pathways*, Tope Shola Akinyetun, Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, and Ambrose Osariyekemwen Iyase analyze endogenous peacebuilding practices that are more deeply rooted in the local context and which, according to the authors, prioritize inclusion, accountability, livelihood diversification, and ecological restoration as central pillars. In *Sharia in Yorùbáland: navigating religious pluralism and ethnic tensions in Southwest Nigeria*, Olasupo Thompson, Tokunbo Stephen Dada, Olugbenga Seun Aina, Bamidele Jinadu, and Surajudeen Oladotun Oladele discuss how the reintroduction of sharia courts in Yorubaland reignited debates on religious pluralism, ethnic relations, and constitutionalism within Nigeria's multiethnic democracy. The authors examine the historical, legal, sociopolitical, and cultural dimensions of the sharia controversy in the region, assessing its implications for intergroup harmony, governance, and national unity.

The BJAS, however, is a bilingual electronic publication (Portuguese and English). Thus, we welcome contributions from colleagues in Brazil and abroad, with whom we seek to establish connections to deepen knowledge and build a Southern perspective on the African continent and its relations.

***

We would like to thank the Editorial Assistant Augusto Lorenzo Esposito, as well as the Cebrafrica team that worked on the translation and revision of the articles, Augusto Camatti, Gabriela Gampe Bonness, Gabriele Lima de Souza, Giuseppe Camargo Pulice, Isabella Cruzichi, Ítalo Daniel Fonseca, Letícia Soares Rosa, Luca Franklin Primon, Luiza Gabriel de Souza, Kauane Santos de Oliveira, Maria Eduarda Lameira Nascimento, Maria Manoela Ribeiro Spolavori, Mariana Reali Vitola, Matheus Severiano Marques Xavier, Pedro Henrique Galante Zandoná, Rebeca Martins de Lima, Vinicius Zanchin Baldissera and Vitor Redivo Ferreira.

THE GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS IN THE SAHEL: THE SINO-RUSSIAN STRENGTHENING VS THE FRANCO-AMERICAN DECLINE

Yoslán Silverio González[1]

Introduction

The political changes that have taken place in the Sahel over the past five years have been a result of the sustained context of insecurity experienced in the region and also an expression of a transformation in the dynamics of the international geopolitical arena. The weakening of the Euro-U.S. model of security cooperation and its failure to contain terrorism provoked a wave of coups against the French military presence in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The "coup" governments adopted an anti-French narrative that has had repercussions in former Western allied countries, such as Senegal, Chad, and the Ivory Coast, which have also requested the withdrawal of French troops. The political crisis affected the structure of ECOWAS when the Sahel countries decided to withdraw from it and create the Alliance of Sahel States. In this region of the Global South, the traditional Franco-U.S. hegemony has eroded.

On the other hand, these changes have allowed, first, the consolidation of China's position, not only in the Sahel, but throughout the entire sub-Saharan region. China has managed to completely displace traditional players — such as France, the United States, and the European Union (EU) — from economic control, in terms of trade volume and foreign direct investment, and has consolidated its position as Africa's main strategic partner and is advancing its own security agenda. Second, these political changes have

1 Center for Asian and African Studies, Colegio de México. Mexico City, Mexico. E-mail: yosilglez@yahoo.es. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8533-4234.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.154853

allowed a greater Russian involvement in security issues to combat terrorism. Russia has increased its international role not only through its actions in Syria and Ukraine, but also in the Sahel, an area where traditional Euro-American influence is declining.

This paper demonstrates how, over the past five years, the Sahel-Saharan region has become the African epicenter of changes in the international geopolitical order, which is undergoing a transition toward a multipolar system with the loss of Euro-U.S. hegemony. The medium-term scenario presents a strengthening of the Sino-Russian axis in detriment of the France-U.S. "bloc" in sub-Saharan Africa.

Deteriorating Security in the Sahel: Euro-American Military Presence (2012-2022)

Terrorism has become one of the most serious security problems on the African continent due to its interconnectedness with other illicit activities such as drug trafficking, arms and human trafficking, as well as with interethnic and intercommunal dynamics. A general assessment of terrorism in the Sahel should begin by stating that this region possesses particular geographic attributes: the extent of its vast desert and semi-desert zones, its low population density, a great cultural and linguistic heterogeneity expressed in the diversity of its ethnic groups, and a severely deteriorated socioeconomic situation. All these factors have made the area a bastion for the emergence and expansion of armed groups of different tendencies, including terrorists. Therefore, this is an intersectoral phenomenon that makes it difficult to eradicate definitively because these groups operate in the same areas as other armed groups and are often confused with those linked to al-Qaeda's international terrorist networks.

In the global context of the fight against terrorism, the United States had incorporated the Sahel region into its military programs. The George W. Bush administration was responsible for inaugurating two initiatives to "combat" al-Qaeda. In 2003, the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) was established, which sought to secure borders, combat terrorism, and foster cooperation among countries in the region to achieve greater political stability. This program was later expanded with the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), created in 2005, which extended its area of operations to Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, and South Sudan. In general terms,

the TSCTI continues to this day, now under the direction of AFRICOM, the U.S. Africa Command, which emerged in 2007 (Sánchez and Pujol 2005).

The year 2007 would also be marked by the creation of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which marked the beginning of a regional strengthening of terrorist activism. It was from 2012 onward that terrorism would diversify with the emergence of other groups such as Ansar el-Dine, the Movement for the Oneness of Jihad in West Africa (MUYAO), and various cells that would form around specific leaders such as Mokthar Belmokhtar. It was from the war in northern Mali that the group's first major spread across the Sahel would occur.

Despite existing U.S. programs, the multinational foreign military presence in the Sahel was reportedly led by France, starting in 2012. The crisis in the Sahel also served as a pretext for the EU and the UN to establish various military and civilian missions. Along with African troops, the diversification of the military presence led to the dispersion and fragmentation of terrorist groups. These groups were not defeated but rather strengthened, starting in 2014-2015. That year, another international terrorism organization called Islamic State (ISIS) entered the scene, activating several groups in the Sahel: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). On the other hand, other groups allied to al Qaeda were created, such as the Macina Liberation Front, led by Amadou Koufa (January 2015) and Ansarou Islam founded by Ibrahim Malam Dicko, in Burkina Faso, in 2016. This wide variety of groups, their geographical dispersion, their extension towards Burkina Faso and the levels of coordination that existed between them, made the Sahel the epicenter of terrorism in Africa.

Between 2015 and 2025, the behavior of terrorism in the vast Sahel--Saharan region has been characterized by an increase in the number of actors involved, the formation of new alliances, and the fragmentation and emergence of other groups without a specific affiliation. Consequently, the systems of loyalties and alliances established among them are confusing and fluid. This has complicated the security landscape and introduced new dynamics into relations between the groups. In this regard, high levels of "coordination" were evident among them as they respected each other's zones of influence. This means that the rivalry between al-Qaeda and ISIS was very subtle in the Sahel. Each group employs methods adapted to the specific conditions of the Sahel and enjoys strong social support. The defeat of ISIS in the Middle East did not lead to the disappearance of its affiliates in the Sahel. However, they have been unable to surpass AQIM, so the Sahel has remained under al-Qaeda's control.

Regarding "counter-terrorism" policies, it should be noted that it only had partial and very superficial results between 2013 and 2014, when France's Operation Serval in Mali managed to dismantle, only temporarily, groups linked to AQIM. With the emergence of ISIS in 2014, groups in the Sahel reorganized. From 2015 to 2022, the diversity of terrorist groups and their concentration in certain areas within a single country meant that the counter-terrorism agendas implemented by state, regional, and international actors have yielded no results. The existence of multiple strategies to confront these networks hampered the coherence of these security programs.

Only the French military operation in northern Mali, known as Serval, could be considered the only one that met its objective of halting the armed groups' offensive toward Bamako, but its long-term results were negative, because the Franco-African action dispersed the groups. For its part, the EU had established several civil-military programs for the training of the Malian and Nigerien armies. The first of these was launched in July 2012: the European Union Training Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger). It had a civilian character and focused on advising Niger's internal security forces (Council of the European Union 2020), particularly the National Police, the *Gendarmerie*, and the *Garde Nationale*. The second was made official on February 18, 2013: the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), whose objective was the advice, education and training of the Malian armed forces (European External Action Service 2020).

France, for its part, promoted another initiative: the G5 Sahel (G5S) group, since February 2014. This coordination mechanism would comprise Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad, as a regional response to transnational problems arising from migration flows, Islamic radicalization, violent extremism, and organized crime. Starting in August 2014, France launched its counter-terrorism operation: Operation Barkhane, across the entire trans-Saharan region, thereby taking the lead in coordinating EU counter-terrorism activities in the Sahel.

Another EU initiative was adopted on 15 January 2015, when the European Council approved the EU civilian crisis management mission in Mali: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali). It focused on supporting security sector reform and strengthening the governance and accountability of Malian internal security forces (EUCAP Sahel Mali 2021). As has been shown, France and the EU prioritized the Sahel region from a security and defense perspective, but the results were not as expected. In 2017, it was decided to create the G5S military force known as the G5 Sahel Joint Forces (FCG5S), under the coordination of Operation

Barkhane. France maintained its leadership in its "*pré carré*" or post-colonial zone of influence.

For its part, the United States was not far behind. In November 2017, Niger had approved U.S. drones carrying weapons and carrying out attacks on its territory against terrorist groups. According to AFRICOM, the U.S. would arm drones MQ-9 deployed in Niger for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance purposes. These drones were located at Air Base 101 in Niamey, which served both the 800 U.S. soldiers and the 1,500 French troops stationed there (Arslan 2023). They also used Air Base 201 (AB201) in the Agadez region. Its construction began in 2016 with a budget of $50 million, but eventually exceeded $100 million (Pillalamarri 2018). It began operations in 2019 as part of a ten-year agreement with Niger, which is set to expire in 2024. This airbase allowed AFRICOM forces to conduct surveillance flights throughout the Sahel. This facility was a clear example of the expansion of the United States' military presence in Africa, being the second largest facility built on the continent, after Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. Thus, the U.S. could follow the same approach it took in Somalia against Al-Shabaab: drone strikes.

In October 2019, the French government announced the launch of a new European operation in the Liptako-Gourma region (Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso), called Operation Takuba. Its military actions began in July 2020 (Mali Actu 2020). This phase coincides with an exponential increase in terrorist activism in this area, known as the triple border. All the reports prepared by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) confirm this increase in terrorism in the Sahel from 2015 to the present (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2020).

The scale of Western counterterrorism military programs corresponded with an exponential increase in terrorist activism, indicating that this diversification of bilateral military presence — France and the United States — and multilateral military presence — with the EU and the UN — was not yielding the expected results. The security crisis combined with the intensification of national political crises, lead to a wave of *coups d'état*, each deeply interconnected in one way or another, against governments in power that did not resolve security problems after more than a decade of direct military subordination to the Western powers.

Political Transformations in the Sahel: Reactivation of *Coups d'État* (2020-2023)

In just four years, the Sahel-Saharan region experienced eight *coups d'état;* four government overthrows, including the controversial case of Chad; two failed attempts; and three self-coups against the military juntas themselves. The resurgence of *coups d'état* has shaken the region, challenging France, the EU, and even African subregional institutions. Sub-Saharan Africa has not seen such a concentration of *coups d'état*, almost in a domino effect, in a single area and in countries that share borders for decades. This has not happened since 1980, when there were more effective *coups d'état* in a single year, and since 1999, the second time this number was a record in a single year (Powell 2022).

A combination of internal factors, such as the profound post-pandemic socioeconomic crisis, tens of thousands of displaced refugees, and the impact of security challenges, marked the deepening of the political and institutional crisis in the countries of the region. The advance of groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State heightened criticism of the already questionable effectiveness of the foreign military presence led by France. At the same time, tensions between the military leadership and the government bureaucracy intensified. The governments derived from the military juntas in power have been an expression of the profound political and institutional crisis facing Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. However, their positions have led them to direct confrontation with France and the EU, while tending to strengthen their relations with the Sino-Russian axis.

The epicenter of the security crisis in the Sahel for more than a decade has been Mali. Once again, this country would find itself at the center of political transformations with long-term geopolitical implications. The coup scenario of 2012 was repeated, but under worse conditions: an escalation of popular discontent over the results of "fraudulent" legislative elections and demands for the president's resignation for his mismanagement of terrorism. On August 18, 2020, a military plot was launched against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who was forced to resign (Bèle 2020); but contradictions among members of the military junta would lead to a second coup attempt by the same Colonel Assimi Goita on May 24, 2021. From now on, relations with France would begin to deteriorate dramatically.

The second country where another *coup d'état* would erupt was Guinea Conakry, on September 5, 2021, led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya (Deutsche Welle 2021). This process cannot be placed within the same dyna-

mics as the Sahel, but it undoubtedly generated tensions within the subregional organization: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The third coup scenario would take place in another Sahelian state: Burkina Faso, in January 2022. The country had been deeply affected by a security crisis since 2015. Here, another group of officers, led by Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, overthrew President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.

In February 2022, France officially announced its decision to withdraw its troops from Mali, a process that would be completed by August of that same year. On November 8, 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the official end of Operation Barkhane in the Sahel. France's military collapse in West Africa was only just beginning. The way in which they were forced to withdraw, in stages and without any possibility of negotiation, was a scenario that almost no analyst could have foreseen. Amid the antagonism between France and the ruling military governments, the European Council agreed, in January 2023, to extend the mandate of its EUCAP Sahel Mali mission until January 31, 2025, with a new allocation of 73 million euros (Swissinfo 2023). However, internal EU contradictions led to the mission being concluded ahead of schedule due to France's negative vote.

Regarding the missions in Niger, the EU authorized in February 2023 the launch of another program for this country: the European Union Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM), which would have a mandate until May 2024. The German parliament even approved, in April 2023, the deployment of up to 60 German soldiers in Niger as part of this new mission (Anadolu 2023). In the meantime, EUCAP Sahel Niger was maintained, in addition to a bilateral mission by Italy: Bilateral Support Mission (MISIN), which has been training Nigerien soldiers since 2018. Italy reportedly has around 350 troops as part of MISIN and EUMPM (Esma Arslan 2023). It is important to note that Germany, along with Spain, have been the two European countries with the largest presence in the various EU missions in the Sahel.

The latest *coup d'état* in the Sahel occurred in Niger on July 26, 2023. Members of the presidential guard, led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, arrested President Mohamed Bazoum. This military action in Niamey was not preceded by anti-government protests, as occurred in Mali and Burkina Faso. However, the military's main criticisms focused on the government's ineffectiveness and lack of cooperation with the rest of the Sahel countries in combating terrorism. Niger faces terrorist attacks from its border with Mali and Burkina Faso to the west, but also Boko Haram attacks from the southeast along the Nigerian-Chadian border.

The EU had suspended all financial support to Niger in response to sanctions following the coup. As a result, the military junta terminated two security agreements with the EU: the EUMPM program and the EUCAP Sahel Niger program, active since 2012 (Tasamba 2023). The situation in Niger further complicated France's military presence in the Sahel, as its troops, expelled from Mali and Burkina Faso, had been relocated there. The junta adopted the anti-French rhetoric of its neighbors, and antagonisms with France quickly arose. An unprecedented measure adopted by the Nigerien military junta was to decree the suspension of uranium and gold exports to France. On August 3, 2023, they also announced the end of military agreements with France and, consequently, the withdrawal of the 1,500 French troops present on its territory.

The gradual dismantling of all EU civil-military programs would, of course, affect the regional security organizations sponsored by them, as was the case with the G5 Sahel. On May 15, 2022, Mali announced its withdrawal from the alliance in protest of not being allowed to assume the group's presidency (Le Monde 2022). In turn, on December 3, 2023, Niger and Burkina Faso withdrew from the mechanisms of this "alliance." Just days later, on December 6, the remaining members (Chad and Mauritania) announced their final dissolution, marking another resounding failure of one of the security mechanisms that the Europeans, led by France, had been building in the Sahel. The final blow to the European presence would come on May 17, 2024, when the mandate of another EU mission in the Sahel, EUTM Mali, ended. The failure of the African security programs put the EU's so-called Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in crisis.

The *coups d'état* that have taken place in recent years were driven more by internal processes and the contradictions or power struggles among domestic actors than by foreign interests, although biased reports have sought to promote the idea that Russia and the Wagner Group were behind these actions. However, it is most likely that none of the coups occurred due to external pressure, whether from Russia, France, or the United States, as had been the case in the 1960s through the 1980s. Rather, these coups (2020–2023) were driven by internal factors and, with the exception of the one in Guinea, quickly took a stance against the French military presence in the Sahel.

In the case of Chad, in April 2021, the situation was triggered by other factors, and even here there was no talk of a classic *coup d'état,* but rather a "palace" coup. In December 2022, there was a failed coup attempt in Chad, but without major repercussions. This country, which had been one of France's main allies from a military perspective, had conflicting positions

regarding its relations with the other military juntas in the western Sahel, and there was even talk of participating in a possible military intervention in Niger, which did not occur. The most obvious trend points to a coup crisis in the French-speaking region — if we also include the *coup d'état* in Gabon (2023) — after more than a decade of European training, coaching, advisory, and financing programs for local African armies.

Faced with this dynamic, the protocols of the AU, subregional integration organizations such as ECOWAS, and even those of Western international actors — the US, EU, and UN — generally reject unconstitutional military governments. Consequently, a series of sanctions are adopted until constitutional order, multiparty democracy, and the return of an elected civilian government are restored. In this context, none of the international sanctions or diplomatic pressure had any effect. The ECOWAS sanctions could not be maintained for long, and these countries were not even entirely excluded from the subregional integration mechanism, as was customary.

The military juntas have extended their hold on power with no intention of facilitating a return to constitutional order in the short term. This has been strongly criticized by African organizations. Consequently, the transition period toward civilian governments will be much longer than usual, suggesting a profound political transformation in the Sahel with implications for regional geopolitical dynamics.

These *coups d'état* did not generate a wave of social violence as had occurred in the past. The rhetoric of the respective Malian, Nigerien, and Burkinabe military leaders has had a markedly anti-French focus, unlike anything previously seen. This was also fueled by popular opposition to France's military presence in the Sahel, hence the strong social support they have enjoyed. There is evidence of a resurgence of anti-neocolonial and anti-imperialist ideas. This may be merely rhetorical, but it has been sustained and effective to date. They could be classified as populist and anti-Western military governments.

Counter-coups, that is, the ousting of military juntas by another *coup d'état,* as occurred in Mali and Burkina Faso, might have indicated a lack of consensus within the armed forces. However, so far, the military juntas in power have consolidated their respective leaderships, as in the case of the young Burkinabé captain Ibrahim Traoré, and there have been no further coup attempts. Nor does their internal social legitimacy appear to be in question, beyond the traditional political parties that served the interests of the ousted governments.

Since late 2023, the scenario of an ECOWAS military intervention in Niger had been raised, but it did not materialize. This had undoubtedly divided positions within the organization. The de facto governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea declared that they would support the Nigerien military junta against a possible Nigerian-led military intervention (Mednick 2023), which they considered a "declaration of war against them" (Agenzia Nova 2023). This position of ECOWAS responded more to external pressure, coming from France, than to an internal subregional logic, since in the other coup scenarios, an intervention to restore order in those countries was never considered, as was the case in Niger.

Had the intervention taken place, the governments of the military juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso would have withdrawn their countries from ECOWAS. The media spoke of a "coup alliance" and labeled them "pro-Russian military juntas." The end result of this process was the strengthening of the positions of the countries led by the military juntas. They managed not only to prevent the region from being immersed in a new inter-African war, at a subregional and international level driven by the geopolitical interests of all the actors involved, but also to resist diplomatic pressure from both Africa and abroad. In the end, ECOWAS was weakened, as the withdrawal of the Sahel countries from its ranks was confirmed, and they created a new consultation mechanism: the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), to which another country, Togo, also a former French colony and member of ECOWAS, had recently expressed interest in joining. This is another example of how political transformations impacted African institutions.

It is important to pay closer attention to Chad's shift in positioning toward France. This country has played a pivotal role in combating Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and has been an undisputed ally of France since decolonization. French troops have remained on its territory uninterruptedly ever since. Following the "palace" *coup d'état* of April 2021, there were no serious challenges to Chad. Chad was the recipient of French troops expelled from Niger and was seen as one of the main responders to an ECOWAS intervention in Niger. However, its government declared that it would not participate in such an action.

The change in Chad's position took many by surprise, but there were already some signs of a disagreement. In October 2024, France withdrew its support for Chad's Operation *Haskanite* against Boko Haram, and in July, the Chadian leader canceled an official visit to Paris. The resounding announcement came on November 28, 2024, when they also declared the end of their

defense agreements with France[2], although not the severance of diplomatic relations. A total of 1,000 French troops were deployed across three military bases: Air Base 172 in N'Djamena (the capital city), Faya Largeau (north), and Croci Base in Abéché (east). This break with France placed Chad in the orbit of the rest of the Western Sahel countries, due to the need to establish good relations with those governments. At the same time, the AES's positions were strengthened by a possible rapprochement with Chad and now Togo.

Events such as the expulsion of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and even the severance of diplomatic relations in the case of Mali, the decision to abandon French as an official language, and even the withdrawal from the International Organization of La Francophonie, could be understood as temporary rather than structural measures. However, there is no precedent, let's say in the last 50 years, in which French military personnel have been forced to leave an African country at the behest of a de facto government, nor has the multidimensional antagonism toward France been such. Questioning and positioning like these have not been seen since the era of decolonization. Therefore, the way in which this transformation of relations with France has occurred points to a scenario in which it seems unlikely that it will be able to resume its political-military role in the rest of West and Central Africa.

This idea is reinforced by the statements made by the leaders of Senegal and the Ivory Coast regarding the end of the French military presence in their respective countries. Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye declared that the end of all foreign military presence in the country will begin in 2025, especially for the 350 French troops. Similarly, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara announced the "concerted and organized withdrawal of French troops" from the country (Swissinfo 2025). France has already announced that it has begun the transfer of two military bases in the Marechal and Saint-Exubery districts of Dakar to Senegal, as part of its plan for the complete withdrawal of its soldiers and the return of the bases by the end of 2025 (France 24 2025).

While the focus of attention has been on questioning France, the United States seems to have gone unnoticed. Its most significant military presence was precisely in Niger, in the Agadez region, where they established a large-scale military base that would remain in operation until 2024. Coinciding with the effects of the *coup d'état* and the withdrawal of French troops from Niger, the cessation of the U.S. military presence in the country took

2 The defense cooperation agreement had been in force since 1976 and was revised on September 5, 2019.

place. This process began on May 19, 2024, following a mutual agreement in which they established the conditions for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Air Base 101 in Niamey by July and from Air Base 201 in Agadez by August 2024. The withdrawal was completed, in an orderly and safe manner, on September 15, 2024 (United States Africa Command 2024).

All these processes denote the complete dismantling of Europe's defense programs in the Sahel, and therefore, this is not just a failure of France but of the EU as a whole. It is a systemic crisis of the entire security and defense apparatus that the Europeans have been establishing in West and Central Africa for more than a decade, which is a manifestation of the discrediting of their counterterrorism initiatives and the retreat that Europe is experiencing on the African continent. The geopolitical transformation taking place in this African space, as part of the Global South, is another manifestation of the changes in the international system in favor of a multipolarity led by China and Russia.

China and Russia in the Sahel's Geopolitical Game: Initiatives in the Security Sector

The first quarter of the 21st century marked the beginning of a transformation in Africa's historical dependence on Western powers. This has been evidenced by the emergence and consolidation of new, non-traditional actors that have expanded their political, diplomatic, economic, commercial, and even security ties with the African continent. Undoubtedly, the most important has been China, which has established itself as Africa's main trading partner, displacing traditional European partners and the U.S. market as the main destination for African exports.

This shift of the African market toward the Indo-Pacific region, to the detriment of the Atlantic-Mediterranean trade axis, has also been accompanied by an increase in foreign investment from China, India, and Japan, as well as from Gulf Arab countries, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Russia. This diversification of Africa's economic relations means that one can even speak of a decrease in Africa's historical dependence on the West, although in the area of security and defense, the "subordination" to the United States is even more evident. Meanwhile, with Europe, this security dependence has almost completely eroded and is beginning to be occupied by countries such as Russia, especially in the Sahel.

The return of Russian influence to sub-Saharan Africa is framed within the context of Vladimir Putin's rise to power (2000). Thus, the idea of reestablishing political ties with the region began to emerge. Since the end of the USSR, no Russian leader had traveled to the continent until Vladimir Putin's 2006 visit to Morocco and South Africa, the first sub-Saharan country to host a Russian leader. Russia's interest focused on investing and increasing cooperation between the two countries in the mining sector (Wines 2006), and from here, an upward path would begin, expanding economic ties and now giving way to security ties.

On average, a Russian president would make at least one trip to sub-Saharan Africa every three years. Putin visited Libya in 2008, and in 2009, during President Dmitry Medvedev's extensive official visit to the region, which took him to Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia, and Angola, it was acknowledged how Russia had neglected its relations with these countries since the end of the Soviet era. During his African tour, the longest by a Russian president to the region, Medvedev met with key political figures from those nations (AFP 2009). When Putin returns to the presidency, he will visit South Africa again in 2013; Egypt in 2015; and South Africa in 2018.

According to the UN, Russian foreign investment in the continent grew by 185% in one decade (2005-2015), and by 25% in 2017 alone, to $17.4 billion. South Africa's membership in the BRICS since 2010 played a significant role in this (Rodríguez-Marín 2019). Taking into account the trade balance data presented at the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi (2019), over the last five years (2014-2019), total Russian-African trade reached $20 billion, but investments are at 1% (Pandiella 2023).

It is estimated that only 3.7% of Russia's exports were destined for the African region, and of these, more than 2.7% went to the North African subregion. Meanwhile, exports from Africa represented only 1.1% of Russia's total imports. This trade volume is still far from the $204.2 billion traded with China and the $63 billion traded with India in 2018 (Tih 2019). This is undoubtedly a very positive step and an additional element that helps explain why the first Russia-Africa Summit was held in Sochi in 2019, followed by a second summit in St. Petersburg in 2023, which, for example, included the leader of the Malian military junta, Ibrahim Traoré. At the 2023´s Summit, the attendance of African leaders was much lower — 43 heads of state versus 17 — due to the Ukraine issue. However, important agreements were reached on food — cereals —, and the cancellation of 90 million dollars in debt (Pandiella 2023).

In the security sector, Russia has been present in several African conflict zones, such as the Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya, and now in the Sahel countries, through the controversial Wagner Group. The issue of Russian mercenaries has sparked intense debate in political and academic circles, which also forms part of an anti-Russian narrative. Mercenary activity on the continent is not new, and it was precisely the French, British, and Americans who utilized this method since the era of decolonization. Russian collaboration with African countries on security issues comes alongside the failure of Euro-American military programs and even as an extension of the war in Ukraine: the "Ukrainization of Africa".

Russia has been able to occupy these spaces, not only with the former Wagner Group, now renamed African Corps, but also through increased arms sales to African countries and direct military collaboration in the Sahelian arena. The African Corps' first operations were carried out in Mali, where the Malian army, with Russian support, retook control of the strategic city of Kidal in November 2023. Following this, its activism has increased, extending its operations to Burkina Faso (Lechner and Eledinov 2024). The military junta in Niger has also drawn closer to Russia. In December 2023, the cancellation of agreements with the EU occurred in the context of a Russian visit to Niamey, after which defense cooperation agreements were signed between the Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Colonel-General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Nigerian Defense Minister General Salifou Mody (Tasamba 2023).

It is evident that Russia's objective is focused on trying to equate the level of political relations with economic and military ones, since all are part of its projection toward the region. To date, Russia's economic and cooperation relations with Africa are far from comparable with the volumes of trade between China, India, and Japan with the region. Its first steps in security matters are taking place in an international context marked by its victory against Islamic State terrorist group in Syria, the strengthening of its positions vis-à-vis the United States and the EU in Ukraine, and now, its dispute over geopolitical spaces traditionally controlled by France.

It is important to note that since the arrival of the Wagner Group in Mali in 2021 and the subsequent removal of France troops in 2022, in the reports prepared by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, an institution belonging to the United States Department of Defense, includes Russia in the statistics on civilian casualties resulting from military actions and alleges "human rights violations". In fact, previously reports of civilian casualties were only associated with attacks by terrorist groups, and now they link them to attacks by Russia and state security forces (Africa Center for Strategic Stu-

dies 2025). They also maintain the narrative that terrorism increased from these dates onwards. This approach is somewhat biased, because previously they failed to account civilian casualties resulting from joint military actions by the United States and France. Furthermore, they seek to convey the impression that terrorism has increased as a result of the French withdrawal, when this trend had been on the rise since 2015.

For its part, China has been taking steps to improve its contributions to stabilization and peacekeeping in Africa through military cooperation agreements. Bilateral cooperation is based on arms sales, equipment donations, and training and development programs. In 2015, China was, after Russia, the second largest supplier of arms to sub-Saharan Africa, supplying 22% of the arms transferred to the region. According to a report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS22) in London, 35 African countries (68%) use Chinese military equipment (Tebas 2016). In addition to significant Chinese economic deals in Mali, such as a contract worth over $11 billion to finance two major railway projects: the rehabilitation of the Bamako-Dakar railway line and the construction of the railway line between Mali and the port of Conakry, or a contract to establish a cement factory, China has provided Mali with over $9 million in military equipment, including weapons, ammunition, trucks, transportation and security equipment, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2021.

Regarding multilateral cooperation, this is expressed through the AU and African subregional organizations or through the participation of its troops in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. China once had more than 2,000 soldiers and personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. In Mali alone, as part of MINUSMA, it had 403 Blue Helmets. Since 2007, it has been the permanent member of the Security Council that has contributed the most with troops to peacekeeping contingents, currently being the eighth largest contributor, with 3 044 troops worldwide, of which 2 217, or 74%, are deployed in Africa.

China has not only strongly supported the AU's positions in UN security debates, but has also made financial donations to counterterrorism and the stabilization mission in Somalia. For example, in September 2015, President Xi Jinping offered military aid of up to $100 million to the AU's African Standby Forces, and during the 6th China-Africa Summit (Johannesburg-South Africa, December 4, 2015), he offered the AU $60 million to fund its peacekeeping operations.

Regarding subregional organizations, military aid in the form of funds, equipment transfers, and training for peacekeeping missions to ECOWAS and IGAD stands out. China has supported the security and counterterrorism operations of the G5 Sahel, working with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In early 2019, it pledged more than $45 million to the now-defunct G5-Sahel Joint Force. It also allocated $1.5 million for the operations of the G5 Permanent Secretariat; a mechanism completely dismantled by the Franco-European crisis in the Sahel.

Despite the opening of its military base in Djibouti in 2017, the granting of scholarships to Burkinabe students and government representatives to attend military academies in China, the provision of training to Burkinabe military personnel, and the maintenance of military cooperation agreements with at least 11 countries on the continent[3], China's military presence in Africa remains discreet. However, it has been increasing. For example, in 2015, the Nigerian armed forces used a Chinese-made armed drone (model CH-3) in operations against Boko Haram. In 2018, they held the First China-Africa Security and Defense Forum, organized in Beijing by the Chinese Ministry of Defense. This was an opportunity to define the axes of this cooperation and, in particular, the theme of "mutual assistance for security". On July 25, 2022, the Second Ministerial Meeting of the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum was held.

Defense and security issues have already been incorporated as part of the core themes at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This was expressed at the Eighth FOCAC Ministerial Conference in Dakar, from November 29 to 30, 2021, where they proposed "firmly safeguarding the sovereignty, security, and development interests of China and African countries, and protecting the common interests of developing countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2021). The ministerial meeting adopted the Dakar Declaration, the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024), the Declaration on China-Africa Cooperation in Climate Change Response, and the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation.

All of these aspects reflect a more open stance among African states in demanding more proactive participation from Beijing in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, and general instability in the Sahel. China is gaining a predominant role in regional security, but it is still far from completely displacing the U.S. military role. Regarding the Sahel, it can be said that the balance has shifted in its favor.

3 Angola, Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The systematic and progressive deterioration of security in the western Sahel has been the result of the unstoppable advance of terrorist groups linked to the networks of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The U.S.-led global counterterrorism strategy has been a failure. Not only has this supposed threat not been eliminated in the Middle East, but it has also expanded into Africa, making the Sahel the epicenter of its development. Therefore, the approach pursued by the United States and its allies in the region has yielded no real results, either in the Sahel or the Horn of Africa.

Throughout the period from 2012 to 2022, during which the military "cooperation" programs implemented by the United States and the EU in the Sahel, as well as French military operations, were present, terrorism never diminished. This confirms the hypothesis of the ineffectiveness and discredit of all these security programs in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Therefore, in a single decade (2012-2022), the Western powers have not only lost the initiative in the Sahel and failed, but have also lost control of a geostrategic space to Russia and China.

France was left in a state of clear decline and discredit vis-à-vis the Sahelian governments. This, coupled with the political erosion of traditional African leaders, led to the emergence of new internal actors: military figures with a discourse articulated in nationalist and anti-interventionist terms. Therefore, one of their main actions after coming to power through a *coup d'état* was to appropriate an anti-French narrative, supported by decisive and concrete actions. The geopolitical changes brought about by military governments in the Sahel have had no other parallel in the continent's recent history.

At the level of African institutions, the changes are also notable. The contradictions within ECOWAS weakened the organization's position. The dismantling of the G5 Sahel Group paves the way to the emergence of a new regional coordination group, initiated by Africa itself: the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). This group is on the way to strengthening itself with the possible expansion of its membership. Therefore, a reconfiguration of the subregional bloc is taking place. On the one hand, we see a weakened ECOWAS with a stance of conciliation with the West, versus a strengthened AES with a more "nationalist" and anti-interventionist narrative.

This undoubtedly explains a shift in the way security crises are managed, rejecting traditional Western methods — particularly those of France — where the military perspective has prevailed. Meanwhile, these African governments are moving toward an alternative and multidimensional approach to

security, not only focused on the military but also with a special attention on investment and economic development, as is the case of China. Regarding Russia, the country represents another alternative, despite the international anti-Russian campaign and biased approaches that speak of an increase in violence in the Sahel as a result of joint military actions against armed groups.

The Sino-Russian presence, although the U.S. continues to have military hegemony in this region, has already taken steps toward an agenda focused on Sahel security. China and Russia are in a better position to expand their legitimacy in this area, with more concrete proposals than those traditionally offered by the West. Therefore, the affected countries see Russia and China as a more serious alternative for support. The military steps taken by Beijing and Moscow in the sub-Saharan region have been a cause for concern for the U.S. and the Europeans.

However, the Euro-U.S. alliance in the Sahel is poised to weaken further under the new Republican administration of Donald Trump. Africa has never been a priority for Donald Trump and it is worth remembering that at the end of his first term, he ordered the withdrawal of troops from Somalia and doubled the total number of drone strikes in that country. His second administration begins with the removal of U.S. troops from Niger in September 2024. Its pressure on the EU to increase its share of NATO defense spending, as well as Europe's evident defeat in the Ukrainian space against Russia, mean that collaboration with the Europeans to "rescue" their lost spaces in the Sahel will not be an important issue for the US. AFRICOM will remain active in Africa, but not with the aim of reestablishing the levels of coordination it had with European forces, at least in West and Central Africa, but on the contrary, it will try to focus its rhetoric on stopping Russia's military offensive in the Sahel and China's economic control in Africa.

These events have been the expression, at the subregional level, of a transitional process in international relations, where Sino-Russian, Sino--African, and Russian-African alliances are consolidating, eroding the Africa's historical subordination to Western powers. Thus, the Sahel, as part of the Global South, is becoming the African epicenter of the contradictions between the Sino-Russian and Euro-American axes, as an expression of the geopolitical shift in international relations, with these two actors — China and Russia — at the center.

REFERENCES

AFP. 2009. "Medvedev viaja a África para reinstaurar la influencia rusa en el continente." *El Economista*, June 21. https://www.eleconomista.es/mercados-cotizaciones/noticias/1346759/06/09/Medvedev-viaja-a-Africa-para-reinstaurar-la-influencia-rusa-en-el-continente.html.

Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2020. "African Militant Islamist Groups Set Record for Violent Activity." July 21. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-militant-islamist-groups-new-record-violent-activity/.

Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2025. "Militant Islamist Groups in Africa Sustain High Pace of Lethality." February 18. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mig2025-militant-islamist-groups-in-africa/.

Agenzia Nova. 2023. "Malí, Burkina Faso y Guinea reconocen a la junta militar de Níger: nace la 'alianza de los golpistas'." *Agenzia Nova*, August 1. https://www.agenzianova.com/es/news/mali-burkina-faso-y-guinea-reconocen-junta-militar-nigerina-nace-alianza-de-golpistas/.

Anadolu Agency. 2023. "Germany to participate in EU military mission in Niger." *AA*, April 28. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/germany-to-participate-in-eu-military-mission-in-niger/2884190.

Arslan, Fatma Esma. 2023. "Western military presence in Niger faces uncertainty following coup." *Anadolu Agency*, August 2. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/western-military-presence-in-niger-faces-uncertainty-following-coup/2959863.

Bèle, Patrick. 2020. "Coup d'État au Mali: le président Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta démissionne après son arrestation par des soldats mutins." *Le Figaro,* August 18. https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/mali-coups-de-feu-dans-un-camp-militaire-proche-de-bamako-20200818.

Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy. 2023. "China's strategic inroads in African Sahel region." *The Economic Times,* January 12. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/chinas-strategic-inroads-in-african-sahel-region/articleshow/96937105.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

Council of the European Union. 2020. "EUCAP Sahel Niger: Council appoints new head of mission." December 16. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2020/12/16/eucap-sahel-niger-council-appoints-new-head-of-mission/.

Deutsche Welle. 2021. "Unión Africana suspende a Guinea por golpe de Estado." *DW*, September 10. https://www.dw.com/es/uni%C3%B3n-africana-suspende-a-guinea-por-golpe-de-estado/a-59147717.

EUCAP Sahel Mali. 2021. "About EUCAP Sahel Mali." https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eucap-sahel-mali/about-eucap-sahel-mali_en.

European External Action Service. 2020. "EUTM Mali: European Union Training Mission in Mali - Military Mission." November 30. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eutm-mali/eutm-mali-european-union-training-mission-mali-military-mission_en.

France 24. 2025. "Francia inicia la cesión de bases militares a Senegal en un primer paso hacia la retirada total." *France 24*, March 7. https://www.france24.com/es/%C3%A1frica/20250307-francia-inicia-la-cesi%C3%B3n-de-bases-militares-a-senegal-en-un-primer-paso-hacia-la-retirada-total.

Lechner, John A., and Sergey Eledinov. 2024. "Is Africa Corps a Rebranded Wagner Group?" *Foreign Policy,* February 7. https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/07/africa-corps-wagner-group-russia-africa-burkina-faso/.

Leigh, Asia Jane. 2021. "The Dragon's Game in the Sahel." *ACCORD*, December 10. https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-dragons-game-in-the-sahel/.

Le Monde. 2022. "Le Mali annonce son retrait de l'organisation régionale G5 Sahel." *Le Monde,* May 16. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/05/16/le-mali-annonce-son-retrait-de-l-organisation-regionale-g5-sahel_6126249_3212.html.

Mali Actu. 2020. "Mali: Opex: Barkhane en lieu étroit avec la mission de Takuba dans la BSS." *Mali Actu*, July 24. https://maliactu.net/mali-opex-barkhane-en-lieu-etroit-avec-la-mission-de-takuba-dans-la-bss/.

Mednick, Sam. 2023. "Juntas militares prometen defender a golpistas en Níger ante la amenaza de intervención regional." *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 1. https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/en-espanol/noticias/story/2023-07-31/juntas-militares-prometen-defender-a-niger-ante-la-amenaza-de-intervencion-contra-los-golpistas.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People´s Republic of China. 2021. "La VIII Conferencia Ministerial del FOCAC Ha Sido un Éxito Rotundo." December 1. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/esp/wjb/zzjg/fzs/xwlb/202112/t20211202_10461234.html.

Pandiella, Lluís Muñoz. 2023. "Rusia trata de seducir a África: Putin asegura que estudia plan de paz sobre Ucrania." *France 24*, July 28. https://www.france24.com/es/europa/20230728-rusia-trata-de-seducir-a-%C3%A1frica-putin-asegura-que-estudia-plan-de-paz-sobre-ucrania.

Pillalamarri, Akhilesh. 2018. "Is the New US Drone Base in Niger Worth the Cost?" *Defense News,* October 16. https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2018/10/16/is-the-new-us-drone-base-in-niger-worth-the-cost/.

Powell, Jonathan. 2022. "Burkina Faso coup: latest sign of a rise in the ballot box being traded for bullets." *The Conversation,* January 25. https://theconversation.com/burkina-faso-coup-latest-sign-of-a-rise-in-the-ballot-box-being-traded-for-bullets-175642.

Rodríguez-Marín, Alicia G. 2019. "Rusia en la carrera comercial por África." *El Orden Mundial (EOM)*, February 21. https://elordenmundial.com/rusia-carrera-comercial-por-africa/.

Sánchez, Julio César and Juan B. Pujol. 2005. "Relación de Estados Unidos con África en la última década del siglo XX y principios del siglo XXI. Perspectivas en el segundo mandato de la administración Bush." *Cuadernos de Estudio*, n. 1. Madrid: Centro de Estudios de Información de la Defensa.

Sandnes, Marie and Ilaria Carrozza. 2023. "Russia, China and New Power Dynamics in the Sahel Region." *PRIO Blogs (Peace Research Institute Oslo)*, January 16. https://blogs.prio.org/2023/01/russia-china-and-new-power-dynamics-in-the-sahel-region/.

Swissinfo. 2023. "La UE prolonga hasta 2025 su misión de apoyo de capacidades militares de Mali." *Swissinfo*, January 10. https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/la-ue-prolonga-hasta-2025-su-misi%C3%B3n-de-apoyo-de-capacidades-militares-de-mali/48193868.

Swissinfo. 2025. "Senegal anuncia que 2025 marcará el fin de la presencia militar extranjera." *Swissinfo*, January 1. https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/senegal-anuncia-que-2025-marcar%C3%A1-el-fin-de-la-presencia-militar-extranjera/88663661.

Tasamba, James. 2023. "Niger ends EU defense, security partnerships." *Anadolu Agency*, December 5. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/niger-ends-eu-defense-security-partnerships/3073237.

Tebas, Juan Alberto Mora. 2016. "China: Nueva estrategia [paz y seguridad] en África China." *Documento de Análisis 56/2016* (September 13). Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2016/DIEEEA56-2016_China_NvaEstrategia__Africa-JAMT.pdf.

Tih, Felix Nkambeh. 2019. "El retorno de Rusia a África aumenta la competencia por el continente." *Anadolu Agency*, November 5. https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/el-retorno-de-rusia-a-%C3%A1frica-aumenta-la-competencia-por-el-continente/1636518.

United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). 2024. "Withdrawal from Niger completed." *U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs*, September 16. https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/35590/us-withdrawal-from-niger-completed.

Wines, Michael. 2006. "Putin Visits South Africa, Seeking Good Will and Trade." *The New York Times*, September 6. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/06/world/europe/06putin.html.

Xinhua. 2022. "Defense minister urges enhanced China-Africa peace, security cooperation." *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*, July 26. https://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/weifenghe/202207/26/content_WS62df83c4c6d02e533532e7b6.html.

Zimmerman, Katherine. 2020. "No Competition Without Presence." *PRISM, Institute for National Strategic Security* 9 (1): 68-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26940160.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to evaluate how the context of insecurity in the Sahel has impacted the international geopolitical scenario. The exhaustion of the Euro-American cooperation model in security issues and its failure to contain terrorism caused a wave of *coups d'état* in opposition to the French military presence in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The coup governments assumed a nationalist anti-French narrative that has had repercussions on the former Western allied countries, such as Senegal, Chad and Ivory Coast, which have requested the withdrawal of French troops. The political crisis affected ECOWAS, when the military junta decided to abandon this integration bloc due to its attempt to organize a military intervention in Niger: thus, the Alliance of Sahel States emerged. We are in the presence of a region of the Global South where the traditional France hegemony has been eroded. On the other hand, these modifications have allowed the consolidation of Chinese and Russian positions in the Sahel. China has managed to completely displace traditional actors such as the U.S. and also began promoting its own security agenda in the Sahel. Secondly, these political changes have allowed a greater Russian influence on security issues to combat terrorism. We demonstrate that, in the last five years, the Sahelo-Saharan zone has become the African epicenter of the modifications of the international geopolitical order. The short- and medium-term scenario is presented to us as the strengthening of the Chinese-Russian axis in detriment of the France-U.S. "bloc" in Africa.

KEYWORDS

Security. Terrorism. *Coup d'état*. Alliance of Sahel States. Wagner Group. France. United States. Russia. China. Sub-Saharan Africa. European Union.

Received on March 30, 2026
Accepted on May 06, 2026[4]

4 How to cite: González, Yoslán Silverio. "The geopolitical shifts in the Sahel: the Sino-Russian strengthening vs the Franco-American decline." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 10 (20): 9-30. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.154853.

REFUGE, INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR BRAZIL-AFRICA SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

Guilherme de Araujo Grigoli[1]

Introduction

Uganda's response to the South Sudanese exodus has consolidated itself as an analytically relevant case for examining the interaction between African norms, sub-regional arrangements, and state implementation capacities under recurrent security and budgetary shocks (International Crisis Group 2015; OCHA 2018; UNHCR 2018). At the continental level, the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU) and the 2009 Kampala Convention constitute an expanded normative foundation for protection, while at the sub-regional level, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) shapes commitments and coordinates durable solutions in dialogue with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (AUC and IOM 2024; IGAD 2022; IGAD and EAC 2023). In Uganda, the Refugees Act (2006) and the Refugees Regulations (2010) anchor the progressive integration of refugees into national systems and the practice of mass refugee recognition, constituting a distinctive legal framework in East Africa (Republic of Uganda 2006, 2010).

Building on this context, the article seeks to address the following research question: to what extent does the continental and sub-regional normative framework for the protection of forcibly displaced persons, articulated around the Kampala Convention and the commitments of the AU and

1 Meira Mattos Institute, Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército (ECEME). Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. E-mail: guigrigoli@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0406-3239.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.149809

the IGAD, condition the outcomes of refugee policies in Uganda over the 2013–2025 period?

The working hypothesis holds that the combination of a relatively dense regional normative framework and asymmetric domestic state capacities produces a selective and incremental implementation of these commitments, resulting in significant advances in terms of reception and inclusion, but also in persistent zones of friction and vulnerability, particularly along the livelihoods–local integration nexus (World Bank Group 2016; Doyel 2022; U-LEARN and REACH 2023). Uganda was chosen both for its role as a "laboratory case" for the self-reliance and local integration agenda in East Africa and for the country's centrality to recent protection reforms within the AU and IGAD (African Union 2009; IGAD 2023).

The article contributes on three fronts: first, it traces the normative–operational linkage connecting the AU, IGAD, and the CRRF to Ugandan legal provisions and policy plans, thereby elucidating the mechanisms through which regional commitments are transmitted into domestic implementation (IGAD and EAC 2023; UNHCR 2022). Second, it traces the temporal evolution of implementation (2013–2025), highlighting territorial variations, demand-side pressures, and recurrent "stress tests" related to financing and sectoral coordination (UNHCR 2024a, 2025b). Finally, it derives operational implications for Brazil-Africa (South Atlantic) cooperation, with an emphasis on sectoral integration modules, livelihoods, and results-based monitoring (Komakech et al. 2024; U-LEARN and REACH 2023).

Methodology

The research design consists of a single-case study, with Uganda as the primary unit of analysis and a temporal scope spanning 2013–2025, selected for combining an advanced normative framework, adherence to regional commitments, and extensive documentary availability that enables the tracing of causal mechanisms between norms and sectoral outcomes (UNHCR 2022; IGAD 2022; IGAD and EAC 2023). The case allows for the observation of the nexus between the AU, IGAD, and the CRRF and domestic policy instruments under exogenous shocks, providing favorable conditions for process-tracing inference in protection-oriented public policy contexts (AUC and IOM 2024; UNHCR 2024b). The strategy prioritizes temporal variation in policies and outcomes, as well as territorial heterogeneity across settlements and host districts (UNHCR 2024a, 2025b).

The core corpus comprises programmatic and regulatory documents from 2020–2025, including the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2022–2025, detailed planning documents for 2024–2025, the 2023–2025 multi-year strategy, and the Refugee Policy Review Framework (RPRF); national legislation and planning instruments (the Refugees Act/Regulations and NDP III); as well as global and regional reports and sectoral strategies in education and health (UNHCR 2022, 2025b; OPM and UNHCR 2024).

The sources also include the Global Trends reports and sub-regional overviews for East and the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes (EHAGL), enabling triangulation across statistical data, institutional narratives and implementation assessments (UNHCR 2024a, 2024b). Source selection prioritizes reproducibility and direct relevance to the case, while retaining earlier documents when indispensable to the historical sequencing (Republic of Uganda 2020, 2023).

Operationally, process tracing was employed to identify intermediate steps between regional commitments and programmatic decisions, with evidence coded across six dimensions: normative, programmatic, operational, socioeconomic, financial, and governance-related (UNHCR 2022; UNHCR and World Bank 2024). Measurement combines policy responses (targets, coverage, and coordination arrangements) and outcomes (access, inclusion, and self-reliance), with an emphasis on the education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and livelihoods sectors (OPM and UNHCR 2024; UNHCR 2025b). Sectoral studies and benchmarks in health and livelihoods anchor the interpretation of outcomes (WHO 2022; Komakech et al. 2024; U-LEARN and REACH 2023).

In the case of time-series data on flows, direct extraction from official dashboards of the UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP) is used when necessary, avoiding imputations and ensuring traceability of data sources and applied filters (UNHCR 2024a, 2024b). Discrepancies between documents and dashboards are resolved through source hierarchy, giving precedence to more granular and recent data and through explicit recording of access dates and update cutoffs (UNHCR 2025b; UNHCR and World Bank 2024). Exogenous shocks and methodological changes are treated as contextual variables in the longitudinal analysis (AUC and IOM 2024; IGAD 2022).

The temporal scope covers 2013–2025, and the spatial scope encompasses the continental and sub-regional levels (AU/IGAD), the national level (Uganda), and the local level (settlements), prioritizing recent documentary evidence, multi-year strategies, and publicly accessible sectoral assessments

(WHO 2022; Republic of Uganda 2023; UNHCR 2025b). The analytical approach combines process tracing with the triangulation of primary and secondary sources, avoiding unverified extrapolations and anchoring causal inference in frameworks and plans with explicit targets (OPM and UNHCR 2024; UNHCR 2022). The structure of the article proceeds from this methodological section to a section on the theoretical framework, followed by a discussion of the AU/IGAD/CRRF–Uganda normative–operational linkage, and then an examination of implementation over the 2013–2025 period. It subsequently addresses the implications for Brazil–Africa relations and concludes with a discussion of the main findings.

Theoretical Framework

The literature on African regionalism argues that continental norms and sub-regional arrangements function as vectors of regulatory harmonization and policy coordination, particularly in the presence of cross-border shocks that exceed the response capacity of individual states (AUC and IOM 2024). The 1969 OAU/AU Convention and the 2009 Kampala Convention constitute the legal–normative foundation that expands protection for refugees and internally displaced persons, shaping domestic policy design in first-asylum countries (AUC and IOM 2024). In East Africa, IGAD operates as a platform for political commitments and durable solutions, engaging with the CRRF and inducing programmatic convergence among states and agencies (IGAD 2022; IGAD and EAC 2023). This architecture underpins the reading of Uganda as a case of interaction among regional norms, multilateral commitments, and national inclusion policies (UNHCR 2022).

Recent scholarship has emphasized that the Kampala Convention is not merely a normative codification instrument, but also a vehicle for institutional reconfiguration at the continental scale, with both direct and indirect effects on domestic policies (Adeola 2019; Addadzi-Koom 2023). The adoption of the Harare Plan of Action (2017–2022) by the Conference of States Parties in 2017 added operational density to this arrangement by establishing concrete priorities in the areas of domestic legislation, coordination mechanisms, data collection, and monitoring (African Union 2017). These developments reinforce the view that the African regime for the protection of forcibly displaced persons constitutes a "normative complex", in which hard-law norms, action plans, and monitoring practices operate in a relatively integrated manner (ICRC 2016; IDMC 2012).

From a governance and policy implementation perspective, the analysis adopts the premise that the translation of norms into outcomes depends on the congruence among legal frameworks, planning instruments, administrative capacities, and predictable financing (UNHCR 2022). Inter-agency plans such as the UCRRP operate as coordination mechanisms by allocating sectoral targets and responsibilities and reducing transaction costs among multiple actors (OPM and UNHCR 2024). The Refugee Policy Review Framework provides a comparable framework for assessing rights, practices, and institutions, allowing for an evaluation of the extent to which normative ambition translates into operational adherence (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). Public administration scholarship underscores that multi-level governance requires accountability and budgetary alignment; otherwise, service delivery may experience regressive effects (Republic of Uganda 2020).

The integration of refugees into national health and education systems is treated as a preferred strategy for achieving gains in sustainability, quality, and equity, provided it is accompanied by capacity strengthening and predictable recurrent financing (WHO 2022). Recent evidence in the health sector points to improvements in governance and coordination when full integration into the national system occurs, while also identifying persistent bottlenecks related to human resources, inputs, and territorial coverage (Komakech et al. 2024). In education, the continuity of the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP II) suggests that multisectoral coordination and input predictability are critical to sustaining enrollment and educational progression (Republic of Uganda 2023). At the programmatic level, the UNHCR multi-year strategy reinforces the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and conditions inclusion on verifiable targets and indicators (UNHCR 2025b).

Self-reliance is treated both as a policy objective and as an impact hypothesis, but it is constrained by political economy factors, land quality, market linkages, and access to capital and technical assistance (U-LEARN and REACH 2023). Recent studies draw attention to the fragility of the sustainability of income trajectories when assistance is volatile or when local markets remain segmented and shallow (Mastrorillo et al. 2024). Sub-regional reports show that climate shocks, price fluctuations, and new waves of displacement can reverse livelihood gains over short time horizons (UNHCR 2024b). Accordingly, the literature recommends caution against linear readings of "self-reliance", advocating instead for phased targets and territorially differentiated strategies (AUC and IOM 2024).

Critical analyses, however, emphasize that framing self-reliance as a central paradigm of refugee policy in Uganda shifts part of the costs and risks onto individuals and communities, while broad legal inclusion coexists with material and financial capacities insufficient to ensure effective protection and substantive rights (Doyel 2022; Grzeskowiak 2024). In this sense, self-reliance appears less as a condition already achieved and more as a normative horizon continuously negotiated among domestic actors, regional bodies, and donors.

Political economy approaches to refugee policy highlight the centrality of shared responsibility and financing incentives for the stability of inclusion arrangements, particularly in first-asylum countries (IGAD and EAC 2023). Demographic pressure and the volatility of humanitarian funding, as evidenced in the Global Trends reports, test capacity limits and reveal dependence on external flows to maintain social safety nets (UNHCR 2024a, 2025a). Analyses of the "Uganda model" caution against idealizations detached from territorial heterogeneity and fiscal constraints, advocating for a contextualized reading at the settlement and sectoral levels (U-LEARN and REACH 2023). This theoretical framework guides the subsequent analysis by linking norms, instruments, and outcomes across temporal and multi-scalar perspectives (UNHCR 2022).

Finally, in the Ugandan case, this continental normative complex does not operate in a vacuum: it is embedded in a domestic framework already recognized as progressive in terms of labor rights, mobility, and access to basic services for refugees, yet marked by territorial asymmetries and significant fiscal constraints (World Bank Group 2016). Reports from the African Union and specialized agencies indicate that Uganda was among the first countries engaged in initiatives to "implement domestically" the Kampala Convention, including through targeted workshops with government actors and civil society (IDMC 2012; ICRC 2016). Accordingly, the country provides an ideal case for observing how regional norms translate — or fail to translate — into institutional arrangements and concrete sectoral outcomes.

The Systematization of the Normative–Operational Link between the AU, IGAD, and the CRRF and Uganda's Legal and Programmatic Instruments

The normative-operational link describes how continental norms and sub-regional commitments are translated into rules, plans, and imple-

mentation routines at the national level, linking protection principles to management and budgeting instruments (AUC and IOM 2024). In Africa, the 1969 OAU/AU Convention and the 2009 Kampala Convention expand protection and guide both internal and cross-border solutions, serving as a reference for domestic arrangements in countries of first asylum (AUC and IOM 2024). In East Africa, IGAD shapes political and programmatic commitments aligned with the CRRF, acting as a bridge between regional consensus and implementable plans (IGAD 2022; IGAD and EAC 2023). In Uganda, this incorporation is reflected in specific laws and regulations that establish rights, procedures, and institutional arrangements consistent with these frameworks (Republic of Uganda 2006, 2010). The UCRRP provides the programmatic framework that organizes targets, sectors, and responsibilities, translating normative consensus into verifiable outputs (UNHCR 2022).

The architecture of this link involves three interdependent arenas: the definition of rights and eligibility criteria, multi-year programming with targets and indicators, and multi-sectoral operational coordination with reporting and review mechanisms (UNHCR 2022). The first arena is anchored by the Refugees Act and the Refugee Regulations, which authorize mass recognition and detail administrative responsibilities, thereby reducing transaction costs in the response (Republic of Uganda 2006, 2010). The second arena is the UCRRP 2022–2025 and its 2024–2025 updates, which allocate outputs, timelines, and responsibilities by sector and territory, linking protection objectives to budgeting and procurement processes (OPM and UNHCR 2024). The third arena is overseen by the Refugee Policy Review Framework, which compares institutional arrangements and implementation practices, generating reputational and financial incentives for alignment with regional standards (UNHCR and World Bank 2024).

Uganda's normative-operational content includes freedom of movement, access to documentation, *prima facie* recognition in large-scale arrivals, settlement management, and progressive integration into public services, constituting a rights regime aligned with the African ambition (Republic of Uganda 2006, 2010). These rights are operationalized through inter-agency plans that set minimum coverage standards and guide coordination with sectoral ministries and local governments, thereby reducing parallel structures and duplication (UNHCR 2022). The integration logic is embedded in development planning through the National Development Plan (NDP III), which recognizes refugees and host communities as policy targets and integrates actions in education, health, and livelihoods (Republic of Uganda 2020). The alignment between rights, planning, and administrative routines explains the predictability of the response, even though it remains subject

to funding cycles and territorial variations in capacity (UNHCR 2022). This arrangement creates conditions for regional commitments to be internalized without disrupting institutional mechanisms (IGAD and EAC 2023).

Sectoral translation occurs through dedicated instruments that link the UCRRP to national policies, such as the ERP II in education and the integrated health plan for refugees and host communities, which regulate service flows, responsibilities, and quality standards (Republic of Uganda 2023; WHO 2022). In health, integration into the national system improves governance and coordination but requires continuous reinforcement of staff, inputs, and financing to avoid overburdening and erosion of outcomes (Komakech et al. 2024). In education, maintaining enrollment and educational progression depends on multisectoral coordination and predictable logistics and budget management in host districts (Republic of Uganda 2023). In the WASH sector, the reliance on public systems entails local maintenance and performance-based contracts, making sustainability contingent on financing routines and technical supervision (UNHCR 2022). These sectoral mechanisms are a constitutive part of the normative–operational link, as they translate principles into verifiable delivery standards (OPM and UNHCR 2024).

The financial component of this link combines humanitarian resources with development funding windows, with incentives tied to the observance of rights and the quality of policies, according to comparable readings from the RPRF (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). Funding predictability conditions the effectiveness of planning, as inter-agency targets and inclusion commitments depend on stable financing for services and investments in district-level infrastructure (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Sub-regional reports indicate that price shocks and new waves of displacement strain allocations, testing the resilience of the arrangement and the capacity to safeguard social safety nets (UNHCR 2024b). Regional and continental experience suggests that shared responsibility is a necessary condition for model stability, given the combination of demographic pressure and fiscal asymmetries (AUC and IOM 2024). Thus, the financial dimension mediates between normative ambition and day-to-day implementation, being central to the durability of the link (UNHCR 2022).

Data governance and programmatic integrity strengthen the link by enabling targeting and accountability, with biometric verification, database integration and results-based monitoring and evaluation routines (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Indicator-based management requires transparency and safeguards for vulnerable groups, including protocols for preventing and

responding to gender-based violence and accessible complaint mechanisms (WHO 2022). Independent livelihood assessments show that phased targets and territory-differentiated strategies are more realistic than linear self-sufficiency trajectories (U-LEARN and REACH 2023). UNHCR's multi-year strategy formalizes objectives, milestones and metrics that anchor protection and inclusion commitments to the planning horizon (UNHCR 2025b). In short, the quality of the link depends both on the existence of norms and plans and on the capacity to measure, correct and respond to risks and asymmetries (UNHCR 2022).

Finally, the political-institutional dimension of the link presupposes vertical and horizontal coordination, with the Ugandan Prime Minister's Office and sectoral ministries engaging with local governments and partners, under regional and global incentives for convergence practices (OPM and UNHCR 2024). The IGAD-EAC (Intergovernmental Authority on Development-East African Community) Ministerial Declaration crystallizes expectations of durable solutions and integration into national systems, reinforcing the priority for inclusion and shared responsibility (IGAD and EAC 2023). The Ugandan arrangement reveals that the internalization of regional commitments is feasible when there are clear programmatic instruments, functional multi-level governance and minimally predictable financing (UNHCR 2022). Where these requirements fail, capacity bottlenecks and risks of regression in protection and services multiply, requiring fine-tuning of design and incentives (UNHCR 2024b). Thus, the normative-operational link is a dynamic construct that depends on the co-evolution between norms, capabilities and resources over time (AUC and IOM 2024).

Uganda's substantive and procedural law establishes a set of guarantees that reduce transaction costs and shorten the time between influx and effective protection. These guarantees articulate *prima facie* recognition in large-scale flow scenarios, freedom of movement, access to documentation and public services, as well as procedures for administrative review and appeal where applicable (Republic of Uganda 2006, 2010). Compatibility with the expanded African refugee definition and with safeguards for vulnerable groups reinforces alignment with the continental framework and limits grey areas in screening and initial registration (AUC and IOM 2024). These procedural rules constitute the entry point of the normative–operational link, as they translate principles into administrative routines with observable effects on the ground (UNHCR 2022). By standardizing stages, the policy reduces decision-making asymmetries and creates predictability for district-level administrators and implementing partners (OPM and UNHCR 2024).

The mass recognition mechanism functions as a pressure-release valve during arrival peaks, preventing bottlenecks in individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and reallocating resources toward protection and essential services, with immediate benefits for the stabilization of settlements (Republic of Uganda 2010). The literature and regional policy briefs suggest that clarity regarding activation triggers and the public disclosure of criteria reduce litigation and strengthen the social legitimacy of the arrangement (IGAD 2022). In comparative assessments, the RPRF records gains when mass recognition is accompanied by robust registration integrity and biometric verification, which safeguard the system against fraud and wrongful exclusion (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). This combination adds institutional density to the link by connecting legal decision-making, registration systems, and sectoral planning (UNHCR 2022).

Budgetary integration constitutes the second pillar of the link, as it translates UCRRP targets into operating and investment budget lines within sectoral cycles, linking physical outputs to supply and maintenance contracts with timelines aligned to the fiscal year as well as to school and health calendars (UNHCR 2022). NDP III recognizes refugees and host communities as policy beneficiaries, paving the way for the incorporation of action lines into government planning and for the use of national procurement and audit systems (Republic of Uganda 2020). The 2024–2025 Detailed Planning specifies responsibilities, timelines, and indicators, strengthening the logic of "one plan, one budget, one monitoring framework" (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Interannual predictability buffers shocks and improves efficiency in the territorial allocation of essential inputs (UNHCR 2025b).

The RPRF operates as a mechanism of regulatory and institutional benchmarking, creating reputational and financial incentives for convergence with good practices and enhancing transparency regarding rights, procedures, and intersectoral coordination (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). By standardizing analytical domains and assessment scales, it improves comparability across first-asylum countries and encourages evidence-based, incremental reforms (UNHCR 2024b). This external evaluation layer reduces information asymmetries between donors and governments and helps align development financing windows with verifiable programmatic targets (AUC and IOM 2024). The result is a learning cycle that feeds back into planning and corrects institutional design biases (UNHCR 2022).

Across sectors, the translation of the inclusion principle is operationalized through instruments such as ERP II in education and guidelines for full integration into the national health system, with targets for coverage, quality,

and continuity of care allocated by the hosting district (Republic of Uganda 2023). In health, evidence suggests gains in governance and coordination when service networks and care pathways are managed by the line ministry with technical support from partners and supported by auditable metrics (WHO 2022). In WASH, the adoption of public systems entails performance-based contracts and maintenance routines, whose success depends on stable recurrent financing and regular technical oversight (UNHCR 2022). This design reduces parallel systems and anchors the normative-operational link in the everyday grammar of policy delivery (OPM and UNHCR 2024).

The protection dimension, with an emphasis on gender-based violence (GBV), requires intersectoral protocols, specialized teams, and accessible complaint channels integrated into routine service delivery and into local governance arrangements for community security and justice (WHO 2022). Sub-regional updates document the persistence of risks and recommend tailored safeguards for children, women, and persons with disabilities, including context and culture-sensitive responses (UNHCR 2024b). The formalization of referral pathways reduces traumatization and loss to follow-up, improving accountability and efficiency in the protection of rights (UNHCR 2022). These practices consolidate the link by bringing the core of protection into regular service provision systems (OPM and UNHCR 2024).

Data governance completes the triangle of the link by ensuring registration integrity through biometrics, database integration, and public dashboards with disaggregated indicators and targets by settlement and district, thereby enhancing targeting and accountability (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Multi-year strategies formalize metrics and time-bound milestones, enabling mid-course evaluations and timely course correction (UNHCR 2025b). Transparency reduces fraud and facilitates coordination among multiple actors, including for the allocation of inputs in complex logistics (UNHCR 2022). Information quality thus becomes a policy input as central as financing and human resources (AUC and IOM 2024).

Risks and safeguards should be explicitly embedded in institutional design: climate shocks, price volatility, and security fluctuations can disrupt supply chains and strain services, warranting contingency clauses and technical reserves in contracts (UNHCR 2024a). Comparative experience suggests that stabilization funds and rapid response protocols mitigate territorial regressivity and protect essential services during resource contractions (AUC and IOM 2024). These instruments align incentives and preserve minimum public goods under adverse scenarios, keeping the normative-operational link functional (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). By institutionalizing buffers,

the arrangement enhances resilience and reduces cumulative welfare losses (UNHCR 2022).

In light of this normative-operational design, the temporal analysis seeks to trace how the combination of regulatory coherence, budgetary integration, coordination mechanisms, and data governance does, or does not, translate into concrete outcomes in protection, sectoral inclusion, and livelihoods. From a causal perspective, continental and sub-regional frameworks internalized into national laws and plans are expected to generate more stable and responsive implementation arrangements, provided they are underpinned by administrative capacity and predictable financing. The following section therefore examines the 2013–2025 period as a laboratory for testing this hypothesis under successive "stress tests" of flows, budgets, and inter-agency coordination (UNHCR 2018, 2024a, 2025a; OPM and UNHCR 2024).

Implementation Analysis in a Temporal Perspective (2013–2025)

Between 2013 and 2025, Uganda consolidated its position as the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and one of the largest globally, with populations originating primarily from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi (UNHCR 2018, 2025). The combination of progressive legislation, a settlement-based model with land allocation and integration into national services was accompanied by intense pressures on district budgets, social infrastructure, and the livelihoods of host communities, in contexts marked by structural poverty and low resilience to external shocks (World Bank Group 2016). This backdrop underscores the relevance of examining the 2013–2025 trajectory as a critical period for assessing the extent to which normative coherence and inter-agency coordination were sufficient to sustain inclusion, protection, and territorial stability.

Between 2013 and 2015, the combination of escalating violence and humanitarian deterioration in South Sudan kept exit routes active, while Uganda consolidated registration routines and initial service provision in settlements, with district governments playing a prominent role (International Crisis Group 2015). The use of civilian protection instruments within the country of origin did not eliminate cross-border pressures, instead shifting to the Ugandan system the task of stabilizing protection and basic services under constrained capacity (OCHA 2018). This phase demonstrated that the domestic normative framework was a necessary enabling condition, but

insufficient on its own to address arrival peaks without inter-agency coordination and logistical reinforcement (UNHCR 2018). Territorial heterogeneity began to emerge as a critical variable shaping efficiency and equity outcomes (UNHCR 2022).

The 2016–2017 biennium recorded arrival peaks that tested reception capacities, requiring mass recognition and strengthened biometric registration, with gains in registration integrity and administrative back-office capacity (UNHCR 2018). In the aftermath of this shock, policy shifted from a predominantly emergency-oriented regime toward a logic of progressive inclusion, coupled with national systems and sectoral coordination (UNHCR 2022). Transaction costs declined as service delivery flows, procurement, and maintenance began to operate under sectoral calendars and minimum standards (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Nevertheless, hosting districts with fragile infrastructure remained at risk of overload and local regressivity (UNHCR 2024b).

In 2018–2019, expectations associated with the revitalized agreement in South Sudan coexisted with persistent displacement and protection risks, requiring caution in scaling down capacities and the continued maintenance of safeguards for GBV, children, and persons with disabilities (International Crisis Group 2015). Humanitarian needs remained high and unevenly distributed, sustaining pressure on services and district budgets (OCHA 2018). The Ugandan system responded by standardizing targets and scaling responsibilities, seeking to stabilize delivery in education, health, and WASH (UNHCR 2018). Variance across settlements reinforced the need for territorially calibrated approaches (UNHCR 2022).

The 2020–2021 period added pandemic related disruptions that affected supply chains, human resources, and school attendance, raising the premium on logistical coordination and risk communication (WHO 2022). In education, ERP II had to adjust calendars, inputs, and the distribution of learning materials to mitigate learning losses, particularly in remote hosting districts (Republic of Uganda 2023). In health, the continuity of essential services depended on supplies, workforce protection, and reliable health information, with variations across territories (WHO 2022). This conjuncture reinforced the centrality of interannual planning and performance based contracts to safeguard minimum quality standards (UNHCR 2024b).

From 2022 onward, the UCRRP 2022–2025 consolidated sector and territory specific goals, outputs, and responsibilities, operationalizing integration into national systems through comparable metrics and structured review cycles (UNHCR 2022). The 2024–2025 Detailed Planning introduced mid-

-course corrections focused on territorial bottlenecks and the maintenance of critical assets, improving alignment between demand and delivery (OPM and UNHCR 2024). Indicator driven governance became part of routine administration, strengthening accountability and transparency for donors and society (UNHCR 2025b). Budgetary constraints and vulnerability to exogenous shocks nevertheless persisted (UNHCR 2024b).

Sectoral assessments and baseline studies indicate that the combination of a relatively generous legal framework and planning instruments, such as the ReHoPE Strategic Framework and integrated sectoral plans, has contributed to the consolidation of a dominant narrative portraying Uganda as a "model" for promoting refugee self-reliance and inclusion in public services (World Bank Group 2016; Doyel 2022). In parallel, the literature highlights substantive tensions between this self-sufficiency discourse and the material conditions actually observed in settlements and urban centers, characterized by high dependence on humanitarian transfers and persistent structural constraints in labor markets and local infrastructure (U-LEARN and REACH 2023).

The RPRF helped align incentives for regulatory and institutional reforms, fostering convergence with regional standards and access to development financing windows that prioritize transparent and auditable arrangements (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). The 2023–2025 period combined denser sectoral coordination with persistent territorial variation, suggesting that stabilization funds and countercyclical buffers can reduce territorial regressivity during contraction phases (UNHCR 2024a). Experience indicates that annual expenditure predictability is decisive for safeguarding essential services and quality targets (UNHCR 2025b). In the absence of such predictability, institutional and coverage gains tend to erode (UNHCR 2024b).

More recent evidence indicates that, while the self-reliance agenda has generated benefits in terms of access to livelihoods and diversification of economic strategies, these gains are unevenly distributed across settlements, nationalities, and vulnerability profiles (U-LEARN and REACH 2023, 2025). Qualitative studies show that an emphasis on "entrepreneurship" and "individual responsibility" can reinforce hierarchies and subtle forms of stigmatization of refugees deemed "dependent" on assistance, while simultaneously shifting responsibility for structural resource scarcity onto individuals and communities (Doyel 2022). In this sense, the Ugandan case illustrates both the potential and the limits of the interface between regional protection arrangements and domestic development strategies in contexts of protracted displacement.

The recent literature indicates that, despite the maintenance of an inclusive legal framework and sustained efforts at sectoral integration, the so-called "Uganda model" faces significant structural limits when confronted with prolonged funding crises and successive shocks. Qualitative and quantitative studies show that inclusion in services and the expansion of self-reliance mechanisms are constrained by persistent material bottlenecks, such as chronic underfunding, overstretched social infrastructure, and localized tensions over land use (World Bank Group 2016; Doyel 2022; Grzeskowiak 2024; U-LEARN and REACH 2023). The recent contraction in international resources, marked by substantial cuts to food rations and budgetary gaps in the UCRRP, illustrates the vulnerability of an arrangement that relies heavily on donor financing to sustain minimum standards of protection and service delivery (UNHCR 2024b; WFP 2025).

In education, outcomes were more robust when enrolment, infrastructure, and student/teacher ratios were managed through territorial portfolios with standardized inputs, teacher training, and maintenance contracts linked to auditable targets (Republic of Uganda 2023). Multisectoral coordination reduced learning losses by harmonizing calendars and logistics, although remote districts continue to face higher marginal costs and greater outcome volatility (UNHCR 2022). Data transparency and integration into national systems increased accountability and enabled rapid course correction (UNHCR 2024b). The policy experience shows that quality and continuity depend as much on management capacity as on budgetary resources (UNHCR 2025b).

In health, full integration into the national system improved governance and coherence across care pathways, but also exposed bottlenecks in human resources, supplies, and coverage, with heterogeneous impacts across territories and demographic profiles (Komakech et al. 2024). In livelihoods, independent evaluations point to the need for gradual targets and territorially differentiated strategies, avoiding linear readings of self-reliance and prioritizing linkages with markets and inclusive financial services (U-LEARN and REACH 2023). Sustainable outcomes tend to emerge when programs combine skills development, access to productive assets and local public procurement (Mastrorillo et al. 2024). In WASH and protection, performance based contracts and GBV protocols are conditions for maintaining minimum standards under shock conditions (UNHCR 2022).

Implications for Brazil–Africa Cooperation in the South Atlantic

The reflection on the implications for Brazil–Africa cooperation in the South Atlantic is situated within a broader trajectory of Brazilian engagement with the region, structured around initiatives such as the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), defense and security cooperation agreements, and South–South development and interconnectivity agendas (Aguilar 2013; Moreira 2016; Mattos, Matos and Kenkel 2017). The literature on Brazilian foreign policy toward the South Atlantic describes this space as a regional complex of security and cooperation, in which Brazil seeks to articulate naval capabilities, multilateral diplomacy, and support for African peace and security institutions (Abdenur and Neto 2013). In this context, the Ugandan case is mobilized not as a model to be replicated, but as a source of analytical parameters on multilevel governance, sectoral integration, and predictable financing, which can inform cooperation modules aimed at the protection of forcibly displaced populations and the resilience of social services in African Atlantic countries.

The Ugandan experience suggests that effective South–South cooperation begins with normative convergence around African and sub-regional frameworks, so that external support instruments reinforce commitments already undertaken within the AU/IGAD architecture and aligned with the CRRF (AUC and IOM 2024; IGAD and EAC 2023). Such convergence reduces transaction costs, avoids duplication, and creates incentives for the domestic internalization of protection and inclusion standards, particularly when multiyear plans serve as the primary vehicle for coordination (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024).

In African Atlantic contexts, literal replication is inappropriate, but the design logic that links norms, plans, and budgets is transferable through gradual institutional adaptations (UNHCR and World Bank 2024; UNHCR 2024b). Cooperation should therefore prioritize mechanisms rather than standalone projects, with a focus on governance, metrics, and predictability (UNHCR 2025b; AUC and IOM 2024).

A priority institutional module is the construction of multilevel governance capable of articulating sectoral ministries, local governments and partners around a "one plan, one budget, one monitoring" framework anchored in verifiable targets and indicators (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). This module encompasses sectoral executive committees, responsibility matrices, timelines, and accountability routines, ensuring inte-

roperability with regional dashboards and comparability through the RPRF (UNHCR and World Bank 2024; UNHCR 2024b). Brazilian assistance could focus on organizational design, results based management, and interagency contracting, with an emphasis on periodic review mechanisms and course correction (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). Such support should be delivered within existing African arrangements, maximizing additionality and avoiding the proliferation of parallel structures (IGAD and EAC 2023; AUC and IOM 2024).

The Brazilian model of response to forced migration from Venezuela can be considered an important reference, although it addresses a more fluid pattern of refugee mobility and a decentralized mode of social integration. The internal relocation process carried out under *Operação Acolhida* has achieved significant results in integrating refugees into the Brazilian system, which is characterized from the outset by universal health and education services. In this regard, the Brazilian response offers a range of institutional and operational lessons that can be combined with existing protocols to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation processes between Brazil and African countries.

In education, the ERP II provides a reference for integrating refugees into public school systems through minimum standards for infrastructure, enrolment, and inputs, with outcomes conditioned on multisectoral coordination and the availability of recurrent financing at the district level (Republic of Uganda 2023; UNHCR 2022). Cooperation initiatives can support school capacity planning, teacher training, and materials management routines, using logical frameworks and territorially differentiated targets, while preserving the central role of the line ministry and local government (Republic of Uganda 2023; UNHCR 2024b).

The Brazilian model of aligning primary education cycles with territorial calibration reduces asymmetries and improves efficiency in the allocation of classrooms, teachers, and learning materials in dense and remote settlements (UNHCR 2022; AUC and IOM 2024). The focus should be on the sustainability of routines rather than on the one off expansion of places and inputs (UNHCR 2025b, 2024b).

In health, evidence points to gains when refugees are fully integrated into the national system, with governance and financing aligned to care pathways and primary health care, which requires continuous reinforcement of human resources, supplies, and health information systems (WHO 2022; Komakech et al. 2024). Cooperation can prioritize network management, contractual regulation, essential supply logistics, and data interoperability,

while preserving the leadership of the ministry of health and district-level managers (WHO 2022; UNHCR 2025b).

The Brazilian Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde* – SUS), despite its financial sustainability constraints, represents a reference model whose response capacity, institutional structure, and outcomes offer a range of lessons that are potentially replicable in African contexts. Among these, national models that operationalize gender-based violence (GBV) protocols and the protection of vulnerable populations should be embedded in routine service delivery and referral pathways, supported by auditable indicators and clear safeguards (WHO 2022; UNHCR 2024b). The objective is to consolidate quality and continuity of care, avoiding regression during demand surges (Komakech et al. 2024; UNHCR 2024b).

In WASH and protection, the transition to public systems and performance based contracts requires local maintenance, technical oversight, and predictable operational financing, which points to cooperation modules focused on regulation, supervision, and asset management (UNHCR 2022, 2024b). For protection and GBV, cooperation can support intersectoral protocols, team training, and accessible accountability and complaints mechanisms, with an emphasis on prevention and response (WHO 2022; UNHCR 2024b). The standardization of targets and audits should be accompanied by sex and age disaggregated data, enabling equity assessments (UNHCR 2022; WHO 2022). Success ultimately depends on routines that outlast project cycles and budget fluctuations (UNHCR 2025b, 2024b).

It is proposed that cooperation protocols be formalized — Technical Cooperation Agreements (TCAs) through the Brazilian Cooperation Agency/Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABC/MRE), Complementary Arrangements, Memoranda of Understanding, and Brazil–UN–partner country trilateral cooperation projects — with implementation supported by UNHCR/UNICEF/IOM/WHO and, where appropriate, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). It is also recommended to establish a WASH Sector/Cluster with co-leadership by the government and a UN agency, articulated with national and municipal committees and civil defense authorities, under the principle of "one plan, one budget, one monitoring framework".

In Brazil, the National Civil Defense, the Ministry of Health, state level sanitation companies, and military engineering units can act as a technical bridge in the initial phases, with a planned transition to local civilian management; in the African partner country, Ministries of Water/Health, municipal services, and regulators assume ownership. For financial viability, mobilize the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and UN thematic

funds; for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), establish public dashboards, streamlined audits, and social participation, incorporating climate resilience and data governance as cross-cutting pillars.

In the livelihoods and self-reliance agenda, evidence points to the need to adopt graduated targets and territory specific strategies, acknowledging constraints related to land, capital, technical assistance, and local market linkages (U-LEARN and REACH 2023; Mastrorillo et al. 2024). Cooperation efforts should organize value-chain-based portfolios anchored in local public procurement, inclusive financial services, and skills development, using realistic income and employment indicators (U-LEARN and REACH 2023; UNHCR 2025b). Urban integration and formalization programs should be calibrated to local economic structures, avoiding the prescription of linear income trajectories (Mastrorillo et al. 2024; UNHCR 2022). The guiding principle is not to idealize the "Uganda model", but to reapply its coordination mechanisms with feasible parameters (U-LEARN and REACH 2023; UNHCR 2024b).

Financing constitutes a condition of possibility for cooperation and should combine humanitarian and development windows, with purpose-specific funds linked to targets and audits compatible with the RPRF (UNHCR and World Bank 2024; OPM and UNHCR 2024). Co-financing instruments and territorial equalization funds can mitigate asymmetries and smooth resource volatility during shocks (UNHCR 2024a; AUC and IOM 2024). Interannual predictability reduces service discontinuities and protects social floors, particularly in education, health, and WASH in hosting districts (UNHCR 2024b, 2025b). Financial governance should mirror the principle of "one plan, one budget", with transparency in contracting and delivery (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024).

Data governance is a high-return axis of cooperation, encompassing biometric verification, database integration, public dashboards, and monitoring and evaluation routines with comparable indicators (OPM and UNHCR 2024; UNHCR 2022). South-South exchange can prioritize M&E methodologies and data quality standards, with an emphasis on interoperability across levels of government and partners, as well as social accountability (UNHCR 2024b, 2025b). Transparency improves targeting, reduces fraud, and enables the calibration of targets in annual cycles, thereby protecting vulnerable groups (UNHCR 2022; WHO 2022). The replicability of dashboards and protocols strengthens regional coordination (AUC and IOM 2024; IGAD and EAC 2023).

Territorial calibration of policies should take into account land quality, market access, population density, and the presence of partners, anchoring targets by district and settlement and linking coordination to local development plans (UNHCR 2022; AUC and IOM 2024). This approach enhances efficiency and equity by allowing the customization of instruments without breaking with national and regional standards, therefore preserving accountability and comparability (Republic of Uganda 2020; UNHCR 2024b). International support should finance transition costs for service integration, strengthening municipal and district capacities (UNHCR 2022, 2025b). Cooperation that ignores territorial heterogeneity tends to produce regressive effects (AUC and IOM 2024; UNHCR 2024b).

Finally, the strategic dimension of the South Atlantic suggests that cooperation should incorporate climate and human security risk management, integrating disaster preparedness, civil protection, and continuity of essential services in host districts (AUC and IOM 2024; UNHCR 2024b). Convergence with UA/IGAD commitments and national multi-year plans ensures the coherence of the arrangement, while budgetary coordination and data governance support the durability of outcomes (IGAD and EAC 2023; UNHCR 2025b). Uganda's institutional pragmatism indicates that clear mechanisms, measurable indicators, and predictability matter more than ideal designs, especially under persistent shocks (UNHCR 2022, 2024a). This constitutes the core of lessons applicable to Brazil-Africa cooperation in the Atlantic perimeter (AUC and IOM 2024; UNHCR 2024b).

The analysis of Uganda, therefore, does not represent a thematic digression from Brazil's projection agenda in the South Atlantic, but rather an analytical mirror through which convergences and gaps in Brazilian foreign policy and cooperation with coastal African countries can be identified. By examining how African regional norms on the protection of forcibly displaced persons are operationalized in a context of strong international engagement and with an emphasis on self-reliance, it becomes possible to assess the extent to which Brazil-Africa South-South cooperation has incorporated, or failed to incorporate, this normative and institutional repertoire. The Ugandan case shows that Brazilian initiatives aimed at the South Atlantic tend to engage only partially with the refugee and forced displacement agenda, opening space for a more strategic insertion aligned with regional priorities defined by the AU, IGAD, and the African states themselves.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that coherence between African frameworks and domestic arrangements is a necessary condition for translating principles into tangible outcomes, but sufficiency depends on fiscal predictability, local capacities, and robust coordination mechanisms throughout the policy cycle (UNHCR 2022; OPM & UNHCR 2024). The 2013–2025 trajectory demonstrates that integration into national systems can reduce duplication and transaction costs, yet it remains sensitive to security, climate, and price shocks that pressure services and budgets (UNHCR 2024a, 2024b). The stability of the arrangement requires realistic combinations of humanitarian and development financing that safeguard essential social standards and ensure operational continuity in host districts (UNHCR 2022, 2025b).

The CRRF and UCRRP functioned as a bridge between regional commitments and domestic implementation, organizing sectoral targets, responsibilities, and indicators, with annual reviews that allowed incremental adjustments without institutional disruption (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). The Refugee Policy Review Framework provided reputational and financial incentives for regulatory convergence, reinforcing transparency and comparability across first-asylum countries (UNHCR and World Bank 2024). This combination explains the relative predictability of the response, even amid fluctuations in flows and funding, by anchoring coordination in clear rules and results oriented monitoring routines (UNHCR 2024b, 2025b).

In the sectors, integration in health and education confirmed governance and access gains when accompanied by strengthened personnel, supplies, and logistics, whereas the absence of stable financing generated risks of service discontinuity and local regressivity (WHO 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). In health, recent evidence indicates that full incorporation into the national system improves the coherence of care pathways but requires continued support for human resources and health information (Komakech et al. 2024; WHO 2022). In education, the continuity of ERP II has shown that outcomes depend on multisectoral coordination and the regular provision of infrastructure and materials in priority territories (Republic of Uganda 2023; UNHCR 2022).

Livelihood self-sufficiency remains a policy objective, conditioned by land quality, access to capital, technical assistance, and market linkages, recommending gradual targets and territorial differentiation rather than linear trajectories (U-LEARN and REACH 2023; UNHCR 2025b). Effective multiyear strategies prioritize skills development, local productive linkages,

and public procurement, mitigating dependence on volatile transfers and enhancing the economic resilience of households and host communities (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). Overall results suggest caution against celebratory readings, emphasizing verifiable metrics at the settlement and district levels (UNHCR 2024b; U-LEARN and REACH 2023).

Data governance and programmatic integrity are structural elements of the model, as they enable targeting, accountability, and course correction through biometric verification, database integration, and audits compatible with the RPRF (UNHCR and World Bank 2024; OPM and UNHCR 2024). Safeguards for vulnerable groups, prevention protocols and response to gender-based violence, and accessible complaint mechanisms should be embedded in service routines and administrative records (WHO 2022; UNHCR 2024b). Strengthening subnational capacities is essential to prevent territorial regressivity and protect minimum quality standards (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024).

From a political economy perspective, the sustainability of an inclusion regime depends on shared responsibility and budgetary coordination that align funding sources with the "one plan, one budget, one monitoring" approach, safeguarding essential public goods under constrained conditions (UNHCR 2022; OPM and UNHCR 2024). The regional and continental framework provides legitimacy and guidance for international cooperation, reducing information asymmetries and reinforcing medium-term commitments (IGAD and EAC 2023; AUC and IOM 2024). The durability of the arrangement also requires financial instruments that smooth cycles and protect services during demand shocks (UNHCR 2024a, 2025b).

In terms of its contribution to African studies, the article demonstrates that the Kampala Convention and its institutional developments cannot be understood merely as an abstract legal framework, but rather as an arrangement that concretely reconfigures the relationships between normative frameworks, domestic capacities, and sectoral outcomes (African Union 2009, 2017; Adeola 2019; Addadzi-Koom 2023). For the literature on refugee issues in contexts of regional integration, the Ugandan case illustrates how the rhetoric of self-sufficiency and inclusion in national public policies coexists with territorial asymmetries, tensions between humanitarian and development governance, and disputes over the very definitions of "dependency" and "autonomy" (World Bank Group 2016; Doyel 2022; U-LEARN and REACH 2023, 2025). By integrating these elements, the article provides an analytical framework that connects African regional refugee governance

to Brazil's foreign policy and South-South cooperation options with the continent, particularly in the South Atlantic region.

In light of these findings, the expansion of Brazil's engagement with South Atlantic countries should build on a strategic cooperation agenda guided by mechanisms rather than isolated projects, aligning institutional arrangements with AU/IGAD/CRRF frameworks, integrating sectoral support into national multi-year plans, and adopting auditable metrics by territory (UNHCR 2022; IGAD and EAC 2023). Such an agenda should combine technical cooperation and trilateral modalities with UN agencies, establish territorial equalization financial instruments, and prioritize data governance and accountability, maintaining the "one plan, one budget, one monitoring" logic (UNHCR and World Bank 2024; OPM and UNHCR 2024). This approach allows lessons from Uganda to be transformed into a Brazil-South Atlantic action platform for WASH, health, education, protection, and livelihoods, with a focus on fiscal sustainability, territorial calibration, and accountability for results (AUC and IOM 2024; UNHCR 2024b).

Finally, the study's limitations are acknowledged, stemming from reliance on publicly available documentation and potential temporal mismatches between reports and data dashboards, which call for cautious interpretation and continuous updating of series and indicators (UNHCR 2024a, 2025a). The future research agenda includes counterfactual evaluation of implementation modalities by territory and micro-level analysis of income trajectories and service access under different cooperation arrangements (UNHCR 2022; UNHCR and World Bank 2024). Consolidating a Global South perspective on forced displacement requires expanding comparable databases and sectoral studies that link norms, financing, and outcomes over multi-year horizons (AUC and IOM 2024; IGAD 2022).

REFERENCES

Abdenur, Adriana Erthal, and Danilo Marcondes de Souza Neto. 2013. "Brazil's Development Cooperation with Africa." *SUR – International Journal on Human Rights* 10 (19): 1–30. https://sur.conectas.org/en/cooperacao-brasileira-para-o-desenvolvimento-na-africa.

Addadzi-Koom, Maame Efua. 2023. "Breathing Life into the Kampala Convention: Towards Workable Enforcement Mechanisms." *Journal of African Law* 67 (3). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021855323000219.

Adeola, Romola. 2019. "The Impact of the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa." *African*

Human Rights Law Journal 19 (2): 591–607. https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/adeola-r-2019-2.

African Union. 2009. *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)*. Addis Ababa: African Union. https://au.int/en/treaties/african-union-convention-protection-and-assistance-internally-displaced-persons-africa.

African Union. 2017. *Harare Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Kampala Convention, 2017–2022*. Addis Ababa: African Union https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20170406/plan-action-implementation-kampala-convention-adopted-conference-states.

African Union Commission (AUC); International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. *Africa Migration Report – Second Edition: Connecting the Threads*. Addis Ababa/Genebra: AUC/IOM. https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-second-edition.

Aguilar, S. X. 2013. *Brasil e África: uma análise da cooperação em defesa e segurança*. Editora Unesp.

Doyel, Sarah. 2022. "Paragon of 'Self-Reliance': A Critical Narrative Analysis of Refugee Self-Reliance Policies in Uganda." *New Sociological Perspectives* 1 (1). https://nsp.lse.ac.uk/articles/56.

East African Community (EAC); Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). 2023. *IGAD–EAC Ministerial Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa*. Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda: IGAD/EAC. https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2023-IGAD-EAC-Ministerial-Declaration-on-Durable-Solutions-for-Refugees-English.pdf.

Grzeskowiak, Maciej. 2024. "When Legal Inclusion Is Not Enough: The 'Uganda Model' of Refugee Protection on the Brink of Failure." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 43 (1): 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdad020.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development. 2022. *IGAD Regional Strategy and Action Plan on Durable Solutions for Refugees, Returnees, and Host Communities*. Djibouti: IGAD Support Platform. https://igad.int/events/launch-of-the-south-sudan-durable-solution-strategy-and-action-plan-for-refugees-idps-returnees-and-host-communities/.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development. 2023. *IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection*. Djibouti: IGAD Support Platform. https://igad.int/download/igad-policy-framework-on-refugee-protection/.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). 2012. *Domesticating and Implementing the Kampala Convention in Uganda: Report of the Pilot Workshop*. Geneva: Norwegian Refugee Council/IDMC. https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/au-idmc-uganda-kc-pilot-workshop-report-2012.pdf.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). 2016. *Translating the Kampala Convention into Practice: A Stocktaking Exercise*. Geneva: ICRC. https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc_99_20_0.pdf.

International Crisis Group. 2015. *South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process. Africa Report n. 228*. Bruxelas/Nairobi: ICG. https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/228-south-sudan-keeping-faith-with-the-igad-peace-process.pdf.

International Organization for Migration. 2016. *"If We Leave We Are Killed": Lessons Learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites, 2013–2016*. Genebra/Juba: IOM. publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/if_we_leave_0.pdf.

Komakech, Henry; Shatha Elnakib; Lama Bou Karroum; et al. 2024. "Examining the Integration of Refugees into the National Health System in Uganda: An Analysis Using the Policy Triangle Framework." *Conflict and Health* 18 (Suppl 1): 78. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-024-00640-2.

Mastrorillo, Massimo, Andrea Guariso, Hannes Mueller, and Matia Makline. 2024. "Is the Self-Reliance Strategy Sustainable? Evidence from Four Refugee Settlements in Uganda." *Food Security* 16: 1587–1617. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-024-01467-8.

Mattos, B. R., Matos, G. C., and Kenkel, K. M. 2017. *Brasil e a Governança Global de Refugiados: entre a retórica e a prática*. PUC-Rio.

Moreira, J. B. 2016. *Refugiados e Direitos Humanos: a política brasileira em perspectiva comparada*. Editora CRV.

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2018. *South Sudan – Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*. Juba/Nairobi: OCHA. https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1420002/1930_1513684869_south-sudan-2018-humanitarian-needs-overview.pdf.

Office of the Prime Minister – Uganda (OPM); UNHCR. 2024. *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan – Detailed Planning 2024–2025*. Kampala/Genebra: OPM/ACNUR. data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106734.

Republic of Uganda. 2006. *Refugees Act, 2006 (Act 21 of 2006)*. Kampala: Government of Uganda. https://media.ulii.org/media/legislation/17969/source_file/5505edef022dd6db/2006-21.pdf.

Republic of Uganda. 2010. *The Refugees Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No. 9 of 2010)*. Kampala: Government of Uganda. https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1237978/1930_1414507514_544e4f154.pdf.

Republic of Uganda. Ministry of Education and Sports (Uganda). 2023. *Second Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda (ERP II)*, 2021/22–2024/25. Kampala: MoES. https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ERP-II-_Final-Printed-Version_24052023.pdf.

Republic of Uganda. National Planning Authority (Uganda). 2020. *Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21–2024/25*. Kampala: NPA. npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/NDPIII-Finale_Compressed.pdf.

U-LEARN; REACH. 2023. *The Realities of Self-Reliance within the Ugandan Refugee Context: An Assessment of Livelihood Barriers and Enablers for Refugees and Host Communities in Urban and Settlement Locations*. Kampala: U-Learn. https://charter4change.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/u-learn-and-reach_livelihoods-assessment-report_final_final.pdf.

U-LEARN; REACH. 2025. *Reviewing the Journey of Self-Reliance in the Uganda Refugee Response*. Kampala: U-Learn/Global Disaster Preparedness Center. https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/reviewing-journey-self-reliance-uganda-refugee-response.

UNHCR. 2018. *South Sudan Situation – Regional Overview of Population of Concern (31 July 2018)*. Operational Data Portal. Genebra: ACNUR. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/65238.

UNHCR. 2022. *Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2022–2025*. Kampala/Genebra: OPM/ACNUR. data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92447.

UNHCR. 2024a. *89th Meeting of the Standing Committee – Update on UNHCR Operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes*. Genebra: ACNUR. https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/ehagl-89-sc-english.pdf.

UNHCR. 2024b. *Update on UNHCR Operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region (75th ExCom)*. Genebra: ACNUR. https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/East-Horn-Africa-75-ExCom-English.pdf.

UNHCR. 2025a. *92nd Standing Committee – Update on UNHCR Operations in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes*. Genebra: ACNUR. unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/EHAGL-92-SC-English.pdf.

UNHCR. 2025b. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024*. Genebra/Copenhague: ACNUR. unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024.

UNHCR; World Bank. 2024. *Refugee Policy Review Framework (RPRF) – Country Summary: Uganda*. Washington/Genebra: Banco Mundial/ACNUR. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107228.

WFP. 2025. *Uganda Country Brief and Food Security Update – January 2025*. Roma/Campala: WFP. www.wfp.org.

World Bank Group. 2016. *An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management*. Washington: World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c855c9d1-557a-5fc7-b06f-46ead1486395.

World Health Organization (WHO). 2022. *World Report on the Health of Refugees and Migrants*. Genebra: OMS. who.int/publications/i/item/9789240054462.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Uganda's response to forced displacement stemming primarily from the conflict in South Sudan, articulating the domestic legal and institutional framework, African regional commitments, and recent programmatic implementation. The discussion focuses on the capacity of a model oriented toward inclusion in national systems and livelihood self-sufficiency to produce sustainable outcomes under budgetary constraints and recurring regional shocks. Methodologically, the article conducts a documentary and normative analysis of interagency plans (2020–2025), planning updates (2024–2025), sectoral assessments, and peer-reviewed literature, complemented by regional frameworks and global reports. The results indicate: (a) institutionalization and predictability gains derived from sectoral governance and multi-year planning; (b) significant territorial variation in outputs and outcomes, associated with the heterogeneity of settlements and local capacities; (c) structural dependence on external financing and sensitivity to shocks (conflict, climate, prices), which put pressure on the path to self-sufficiency. The conclusion is that the combination of regulatory coherence, interagency coordination, and integration in public policies is a necessary condition for sustainability, but insufficient without fiscal predictability, local economic linkages, and robust protection and accountability mechanisms. Implications are derived for Brazil-Africa (South Atlantic) South-South cooperation in institutional design, sectoral integration, and livelihoods, with a focus on operational modules and results-based monitoring, in line with contemporary African regionalism.

KEYWORDS

Uganda. Forced displacement. Refugees. IGAD/EAC. UCRRP. Public policies. East Africa.

Received on August 26, 2025
Accepted on December 22, 2025[2]

Translated by Isabella Cruzichi

2 How to cite: Grigoli, Guilherme de Araujo. 2025. "Refuge, Integration and Regional governance in Uganda: implications for Brazil-Africa South-South Cooperation in the South Atlantic." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies,* 10 (20): 31-57. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.149809.

PEACE IN PIECES: THE POLITICS AND PITFALLS OF PEACEMAKING IN SOUTH SUDAN

Ibrahim Bangura[1]

Introduction

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has remained one of the world's most fragile states and has been engulfed in cycles of violence. The euphoria of independence was short-lived, as internal contestations among local ethnic groups quickly surfaced. As stated in a speech by the Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres, "All the dark clouds of a perfect storm have descended upon the people of the world's newest country, and one of the poorest" (UNDP 2025, 1).

The rivalry between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and his deputy, Dr. Riek Machar, has persistently plunged the country into civil war and a humanitarian crisis since 2013 (de Waal 2014; Craze 2019). The political violence has been fuelled by ethnic rivalries, especially between the Dinkas, of which Kiir is a member, and the Nuer, of which Machar is one. Both national and international efforts at peacemaking have so far failed to end the conflict.

The failures of both the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) in 2015 and the Revitalised ARCSS (R-ARCSS) in 2018 point to the weaknesses of peace processes that are elite-driven and facilitated by external actors (Vertin 2018). This situation has been further precipitated by the killing of General Majur Dak during a United Nations evacuation in Nasir County in March 2025 and the detention of Machar (Radio Tamazuj 2025). The renewed clashes between government forces

1 Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone. E-mail: bangural@yahoo.co.uk. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9070-5391.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.152132

and opposition-aligned militias, particularly in Upper Nile, have led to grave concerns over the targeting of civilians and the obstruction of humanitarian access (Sudans Post 2025). As of October 2025, more than nine million people, or over two-thirds of the population, require humanitarian assistance due to acute food insecurity, mass displacement, and climate-related shocks, which have compounded the crisis (Agaba et al. 2025). Moreover, based on interviews conducted, the transitional government remains paralysed by mistrust, delayed elections, and the absence of meaningful accountability mechanisms. These conditions raise urgent questions about the viability of the peace process and the future of South Sudan's statehood.

The key questions that this study answers are: (i) Why have peace agreements signed in South Sudan failed so far?; (ii) What are the underlying socio-political and economic factors that contribute to these failures? (iii) What roles have regional and international actors played in enabling or undermining the achievement of sustainable peace? How can locally rooted initiatives be employed to complement peace efforts?

This paper interrogates the politics and challenges of peacemaking in South Sudan, examining why peace has been difficult to achieve despite commitments under the R-ARCSS. It argues that the peace process in South Sudan has been elite-centred and transactional rather than addressing the root causes of the conflict. Therefore, the conflict is usually postponed rather than addressed (Kiranda et al. 2016), a phenomenon this paper refers to as the 'revolving-door' syndrome. This syndrome speaks to the continuous relapse into violence due to the unresolved root causes of a conflict. Additionally, violence is often reconfigured and not addressed, with it gradually institutionalised and normalised over the years (Kiranda et al. 2016).

Over three decades of conflict, combined with the militarisation of political life and the absence of a functional state system and structure, created immediate challenges that prevented the country from remaining united and peaceful (Johnson 2012). As a result, the approach to independence and peacebuilding became militarised, relying on elite bargaining and power brokering, often with the support of international actors. Elite bargaining primarily concentrates on the interests and aspirations of political elites, with compromises made to end the violence. These agreements tended to sideline the wider society and overlooked the necessity of establishing the institutional foundations of a legitimate state.

This paper adopts a critical political economy approach to provide more profound reflections on peace-making and peacebuilding in South Sudan. Using this approach, the paper argues that peace agreements are not

neutral instruments of peace-making but are usually instruments shaped by the interests and intended outcomes of political elites. Thus, the paper challenges state-centric and elite paradigms of peace. It argues that conflict resolution efforts should seek to understand the entanglements of peace and power, be people-centred, and confront the critical questions of political transformation, justice, and legitimacy.

Methodologically, this paper adopts an interpretive and exploratory approach, grounded in the need to interrogate the politics and challenges of peace-making in South Sudan. Between October 2024 and September 2025, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 53 respondents (34 males and 21 females), most of whom are currently based in South Sudan and work for government, civil society, academic institutions, and international organisations. Additionally, to triangulate findings, the study analysed a wide range of secondary sources, including policies of the government, peace agreements, academic literature, reports by international organisations and civil society, and resolutions by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Agency on Development (IGAD). Interviews were conducted virtually, with some conducted in the capital city by the author during field visits to the country in 2024 and 2025.

This paper is structured as follows: Section two presents the historical and structural roots of conflict in South Sudan; Section three interrogates the main peace agreements and their limitations; Section four examines the politics of inclusion and exclusion within peace processes; Section five assesses the role of regional and international actors; Section six examines bottom-top peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan; and Section seven assesses the factors that undermine long-term stability, accountability and statebuilding in South Sudan. The conclusion proposes a shift towards a more organic, inclusive, context-specific, and sensitive approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in South Sudan.

The Context of Conflict: Historical and Structural Roots

Writing on the intractability of the conflict in South Sudan requires a deeper historical reflection on the effects of colonialism on the country and the structural challenges that state-formation and legitimacy continue to contend with. Thus, this section argues that decades of deprivation by the North, civil wars, ethnic fragmentation, and manipulation by political elites

all contributed to undermining South Sudan's ability to have a united front post-independence.

South Sudan's chequered history can be traced back to colonialism and its legacies. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1956) administered the country using what was referred to as the "Southern-Policy", which was an indirect system of administration through tribal authorities (Collins 2008). The policy limited contact with the North, which the British paid much attention to, developing systems and elites that eventually took over after independence was gained in 1956. With independence, the Northern--Arab Islamic elites dominated the state, which eventually fuelled rebellion by the Southerners. Consequently, the country experienced two protracted civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005), led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Eventually, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed with the North in 2005, paving the way for South Sudan's independence in 2011. However, it was quickly realised that the South was plagued with ethno-political rivalries that affected a smooth transition, with nation-building consequently stalled. As argued by a senior government official in the country:

> South Sudan's path to chaos was shaped decades before independence. It was apparent, even with the way some armed groups were changing their forms and challenging the SPLM/A, that trouble was ahead. Colonialism left the South deprived and marginalised. Politics was militarised, and the formation of what eventually became a state was achieved through a liberation movement that became the government. There was no time to carefully think through and prepare the country for independence and the realities a new state would face.[2]

Most respondents noted that the death of John Garang, who was widely accepted as the leader of the liberation struggle, in a helicopter crash in 2005, deepened the contestation for power in South Sudan. As noted by a veteran of the SPLM/A:

2 Interview of a senior government official from South Sudan conducted virtually by the author on 3 April 2025.

> John Garang was a very charismatic and educated man. Although some of his Generals intermittently challenged him, he was accepted as the leader of the liberation struggle. He was also able to bring together people from the respective ethnic groups. However, Salva Kiir (a Dinka) and his vice president, Dr Riak Machar (a Nuer), have been locked in a rivalry that has deepened mistrust between them, plunging the country into a spiral of violence.[3]

The failure to focus on the internal challenges that were facing a society that had been trapped in decades of violence may have been an underestimation of the potential they may have to undermine the expectations of liberation and independence. As most respondents noted, South Sudan went into independence as a traumatised and wounded country, and there was a need to heal that trauma. Apparently, as they argued, the North was perceived as the common opponent, without an adequate analysis of the internal divisions and rivalries in the South. When interviewed on the post-independence challenges that South Sudan is contending with, a medical doctor working in the capital city, Juba, had this to say:

> When analysing the conflict and violence in South Sudan, academics and practitioners usually tend to neglect the impact of the compounded transgenerational trauma that affects people in the country. South Sudan is a country where violence was normalised, with children growing up in a culture of war and violence. Thus, it was easier to transition from a civil war with the North to ethnic violence and political struggles after independence. There was limited capacity to focus on statebuilding. What was expected of the leaders in terms of peacebuilding was something they could not provide. There was no time to heal, and the trauma persists.[4]

The effects of trauma, especially prolonged and compounded trauma, on a society are usually understudied or focused on by academics when societies in conflict are studied. Writing on post-war Sierra Leone, Bangura (2024) argued that there is a tendency for violence and brutality to be reproduced in different forms in post-conflict countries if peacebuilding is not grounded in healing and reconciliation efforts.

A culture of violence has entrenched over the years, with young people socialising with it, a challenge that is fuelled by their marginalisation from socio-economic opportunities. Alongside this, most of them participa-

3 Interview of a veteran of the SPLM/A conducted virtually by the author on 23 May 2025.

4 Interview of a medical doctor working in Juba conducted virtually by the author on 15 April 2025.

ted in armed groups and are still affiliated with them, as mobilisation along ethnic lines continues. Alongside the security challenges, poverty, and the dependence on oil and the rentier economy that emerged, the conflict in the country and the elites' desire to dominate their rivals were exacerbated (International Crisis Group 2021b).

Efforts to quell the tension between the president and Machar led to the signing of a peace agreement, the ARCSS, in 2015, paving the way for Machar to be the Vice President of the country, with members of his faction, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition (SPLM-IO), provided with several positions in government. Despite this arrangement, there were intermittent tensions due to limited trust between the two groups. In 2016, Machar had to flee Juba when government troops attacked him after he was accused of plotting a coup against the president (Deutsche Welle 2016). The violence lasted almost two years, and another agreement, the R-ARCSS, signed in 2018, allowed him to return to Juba and be reinstated as the country's Vice President. However, the government's failure to plan and hold elections as agreed in the R-ARCSS has deepened mistrust in the country. According to most respondents, the Dinkas within the government are consolidating power and, at the same time, isolating other ethnic groups. These developments, in the face of an incomplete Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) process of ex-combatants, provide a conducive environment for the prolongation of the conflict in the country.

As the contentions over delayed elections intensified, international engagements have not succeeded in ending hostilities and inducing dialogue between the two primary principals, Machar and Kiir. Since March 2025, there have been two AU Peace and Security Council sessions on South Sudan, visits to Juba by the AU Commission, its Panel of the Wise, IGAD Council of Ministers meetings, a UN Security Council session on South Sudan, statements from the UN Secretary-General, as well as other high-profile visits, including South Africa and Kenya. Instead, the R-ARCSS has practically collapsed, with many SPLM-IO leaders, including Riek Machar, in detention and South Sudan again on the brink of a full-scale war. In a Reuters report by Denis Logonyi:

> The government placed Machar under house arrest in March ... Machar has denied the allegations. His detention reignited fears of a return to full-blown civil war, with his supporters accusing the government of violating a 2018 peace and power-sharing agreement. Analysts say that Kiir's repeated shake-ups of the government and security apparatus are aimed at consolidating his hold on power and keeping various factions satisfied (Logonyi 2025, n.p.).

A few weeks after Machar's detention, President Kiir reinstated the veteran General Paul Nang Majok as Chief of Defence Forces, after initially sacking him in July 2025. It remains unclear what the president's intentions are. The respondents indicated that there has been a recent buildup of the military, as the conflict with the Nuers is expected to escalate, leaving open the question of what the future holds for South Sudan. Regional efforts to secure Machar's release have not been successful so far. An aid worker in Juba appeared shocked by the detention of Machar:

> With the experience of 2016, I found it hard to believe that the president would attempt another arrest and detention of Riek Machar. The government should have considered the security and political implications, but it believed the Nuers could be quickly contained.[5]

Peace Agreements and Political Settlements: A Fragile Framework

Most respondents argued that there is a plethora of reasons for the failure of peace agreements in South Sudan, and that these reasons are structural, with limited implementation of agreed-upon commitments (Gai 2025). Mechanisms such as the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the Compensation and Reparation Authority, though legislated, remain stalled or under-resourced, reflecting more profound governance deficits and resistance to accountability (Akech 2020).

A total of forty-three respondents indicated that there is limited sincerity on the part of conflicting parties. Furthermore, the respondents argued that the agreements are tailored to accommodate elites rather than to focus on lasting solutions in the search for peace. A teacher in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) expressed her frustration:

5 Interview of an aid worker in Juba conducted virtually by the author on 23 April 2025.

> Agreements are signed to temporarily halt violence and satisfy the elites' egos. We all know that the wars fought are driven by the need of warlords to position themselves and either secure access to power or further grip it. The Dinkas and the Nuers have not sat down to have a sincere dialogue on the need to give the country a genuine opportunity to emerge as a nation, united under one flag. Until that dialogue is held, with the elites realising that the nation is bigger than the egos and aspirations, violence will continue looming.[6]

This paper examines three key agreements signed in the last 20 years, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) of 2015, and its revitalised version (R-ARCSS) of 2018.

After several attempts at peace, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005. Most respondents in this study indicated that the agreement was elite-based and that international actors also sought to see the South freed from the North. They argued that the agreement did not adequately prepare the South for independence. By this, they meant that the internal dynamics within the South were not adequately considered by those negotiating peace and independence. The ability and readiness of Southerners to move from militarised politics to national and local governance were not adequately examined, as respondents argued. Thus, political and economic interests, especially over oil revenues, led to immediate factionalism and competition for a place in the executive, thereby weakening the young state and undermining its effective formation (de Waal 2014). The stage was therefore set for internal strife and political violence.

After decades of a violent civil war between the North and the South, the CPA, signed in 2005, sought to address the historical grievances of the South. Thus, formulae were developed to facilitate wealth and power sharing, and a referendum was organised, paving the way for South Sudan's independence (Young 2012). While the agreement succeeded in ending the conflict between the North and the South, respondents argued that the negotiators mainly focused on ending the violence but did not try to understand the power and resource dynamics among the southerners. Some respondents even indicated that for decades, the North preyed on the vulnerabilities of the South and the contentious relationships that were emerging among ethnic and belligerent factions, to tighten its grip on the region and further marginalise them. Thus, to them, the CPA was a bargain among competing elites,

6 Interview of a teacher in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) conducted virtually by the author on 30 September 2025.

leaving out the wishes and aspirations and the need for democratic inclusion, national healing, and reconciliation. Consequently, state formation was weak, and the South was not adequately mentored toward independence by the international actors who had brokered the peace.

The contested status of the Abyei Special Administrative Area between Sudan and South Sudan exemplifies these unresolved tensions, as despite its strategic importance and symbolic weight, its final status remains undecided (Kumar et al. 2020). As Johnson (2012) highlights, the CPA's failure to address the complexities of border communities and identity-based claims leaves Abyei in a state of legal and political limbo. This omission is further compounded by the ongoing crisis in Sudan and its spill-over effect in border regions such as Abyei, which have exacerbated insecurity, disrupted humanitarian access and stalled diplomatic efforts to resolve territorial disputes.

The emergence of the SLPM/A as the government of an independent South Sudan presented its own challenges, as warlords from other factions questioned the SPLM/A's dominance and the need for a broader, more inclusive approach to governance. Governance became mainly militarised, with Kiir seeking to satisfy the SPLM/A and Dinkas at the expense of other groups. This created dissension, leading President Kiir to indicate in 2013 that his deputy, Machar, was plotting a coup against him. The violence that erupted led to the death of approximately 400,000 people, with over 4 million displaced (Center for Preventive Action 2025). Both regional and international actors, especially the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), are involved. Became instrumental in negotiating ceasefires and the ARCSS in August 2015.

Unlike the CPA of 2005, the ARCSS included components addressing the need for transitional justice mechanisms, including the establishment of a Hybrid Court to try perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity (IGAD 2015). Additionally, it called for a transitional government of national unity, the decentralisation of power, Security Sector Reform (SSR), and DDR. While power sharing initially appeared to work, a trust deficit between the two leaders emerged, with negative consequences. In July 2016, there was a relapse into violence as the two forces clashed in Juba, with Machar forced to flee the city (International Crisis Group 2021a).

As with previous efforts, after several attempts to broker a cease-fire agreement, regional and international actors succeeded in brokering a peace agreement. The R-ARCSS was signed in September 2018, this time with broader components, including a constitutional reform process, the conduct

of elections involving all identified armed and opposition groups, and strengthened commitments to the transitional justice process. A vital addition was the need to integrate armed groups into the national army (R-ARCSS 2018). The agreement brought renewed hope, as national actors, including religious leaders, were vocal in encouraging the belligerent factions to sign and respect it. However, shortly after the signing of the agreement, structural and other factors affecting the implementation of the previous agreement surfaced. There were delays in implementing the agreement and key commitments, including the establishment of the unity government, which was not achieved until 2020. Coupled with this, the SSR and Hybrid Court processes never picked up, and DDR stalled after initial attempts.

With numerous armed groups and militias, for instance, the National Salvation Front (NAS) and the South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A), formed along narrow ethnic or opportunistic agendas, some of which are active in combat, maintaining a unified army became difficult. Most remain loyal to their commanders or ethnic groups and are unsure of the government's intentions (International Crisis Group 2021a). Despite this, the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) was subsequently established, with portfolios at the various levels of government provided to the signatories of the agreement. However, the bulk of the respondents agreed that public confidence had remained low in the ability of peace agreements to succeed. As argued by a peace expert interviewed:

> Peace agreements are products of political will and interests. They can only succeed if the elites are willing to see them succeed. If that will is not available, it is just a matter of time before there is a collapse. It takes a while to build trust, and this has not been given much attention in South Sudan.[7]

By 2024, the government and international partners agreed that there was a need to incorporate armed groups that were not part of the 2018 Agreement. Kenya hosted what became known as the Tumaini Initiative to respond to the need for an inclusive approach to peace and stability in South Sudan (United Nations Mission in South Sudan 2024). However, the process remains inconclusive.

It has become clear over the years that the lack of consequences for violations of the agreements has led to limited compliance by elites on all sides of the conflict. Additionally, international actors such as Uganda have openly

7 Interview of a peace expert conducted by the author on 11 September 2025.

taken the government's side and deployed troops in the country upon the president's request (Assessment Capacities Project 2025). Most respondents stated that the elites expected to enforce the agreements are the ones most keen to violate them. They emphasised that holding democratic elections, or even having state institutions that could hold elites responsible for their actions, runs counter to what some elites would like to see. As such, it becomes difficult for any agreement to succeed, and peace is usually temporary because it is not grounded in accountability, local ownership, and legitimacy.

The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

Most respondents in the study stated that there is exclusionary politics in South Sudan, which has deepened the country's divide over the years. They stated that there are three common factors on which exclusion is premised: political control, economic dominance, and ethnic marginalisation.

Speaking on political control, an academic in Juba had this to say:

> The Dinka elites who emerged in post-independence South Sudan believe that they own the state, and it is their private property. They cannot live with the thought that other ethnic groups want them to share power. They want total control of the state, and to them, that also means control over its institutions. This level of dominance they want to maintain could be based on their experience with the North.[8]

The Dinkas who dominate the SLPM/A believe that they have liberated the country and should continue holding on to power. Based on interviews, Kiir is believed to share that view and has been strategically positioning his people, while his relationship with Machar has remained lukewarm over the years. This could be seen in the frequency of the tensions between them that erupt in violence.

It must be noted that during the liberation struggle, the Nuer and the Dinka clashed on several occasions, with Machar intermittently switching sides with the North, an act that undermined the trust in him by the Dinka. As reported by the BBC:

8 Interview of an academic in Juba conducted virtually by the author on 11 September 2025.

> Mr Kiir labelled him as a "prophet of doom", continuing his actions of the past - an apparent reference to the fact that he had challenged the authority of Mr Garang, the SPLM's founding leader, in the early 1990s. That challenge resulted in Mr Machar forming a breakaway rebel group, eventually signing his own peace accord with Sudan's Omar al-Bashir's government in 1997, before becoming an assistant to the president. Even after he left to re-launch a rebellion, Mr Garang's SPLM remained deeply suspicious of him, accusing him of receiving covert support from the Khartoum government - a charge he denied (BBC 2018, n.p.).

Some respondents referred to Machar as keen to seize power and as not genuine in his approach to the country's peace process. Whatever the case may be, the influence of the two leaders on their respective ethnic groups has culminated in a sharp divide that fosters exclusionary politics, with the Dinkas currently dominating the political landscape.

Closely tied to political control is economic dominance, especially given the resources generated by the country's vast oil deposits. The struggle for independence was based on the political and economic marginalisation of the South by the North, and independence gave the Southern elites access to resources they had not had before. Furthermore, the lack of institutions to regulate the economy and enhance accountability and transparency led to an elite drive to control the country's wealth. Other ethnic groups also began competing for the state's resources, leading to clashes.

Some respondents stated that the need for both economic and political control by the elites in power has made it difficult for the government to conduct constitutional reviews and hold elections. The delays frustrate other ethnic and political groups, with them justifying violence as the only means of communicating their grievances. For instance, elections slated for 2024 were postponed to 2026, with reasons proffered including allowing "the South Sudanese government to address crucial prerequisites for a successful election, including conducting a comprehensive constitutional review, establishing election laws, and completing a national census" (Dicken 2025, 1). While the government argued that these steps were important for preparing for the stable democratisation process, most respondents stated that elites are unwilling to face the potential or unintended consequences of democratic elections.

Ethnic marginalisation has been central to politics and violence in South Sudan. Since independence, there has been a primary focus on integrating Nuers in government. However, it is not only the Nuers who have been prone to exclusion, but also others, including the Murle, Equatorians,

and Shilluk. In fact, they have largely been excluded from decision-making processes and dialogues in the country (Schomerus and Aalen 2016). The Dinkas have maintained ethnic hegemony, deepening exclusion and inequalities in the country. The Nuers have strong ethnic militias that persistently challenge the state, which keeps them actively involved in power-sharing exercises, a strength the others do not necessarily have. Some respondents stated that there must be a formula for decentralising power, with states taking responsibility for their governance and opening the space for inclusivity and participation by all ethnic groups.

With the three areas of exclusion examined above, this point is reinforced: inclusion and participation in leadership and decision-making processes in South Sudan are based on an elite bargain that also shapes the outcomes of peace agreements. This approach enhances co-optation but not genuine participation. It also reinforces the fact that armed mobilisation and violence are the secured path to political relevance and inclusion, which is something that peace agreements should seek to discourage, rather than foster (de Waal 2014). Additionally, it normalises impunity and presents difficulties in bringing to book those who commit war crimes. Hence, the failure to implement the transitional justice mechanisms agreed on.

Most respondents also noted that while some women participated in the dialogues that led to the 2018 agreement, the approach to leadership and governance has been gerontocratic and patriarchal. Even with the women who participated in negotiations, whom some respondents argued were tokenistically included, to avoid the criticisms of the 2015 agreement, their contributions have not been fully recorded or presented, as stated by Bazugba et al. (2018, n.p.):

> To date, insufficient attention has been paid to the significant contribution of South Sudanese women's groups and representatives to the peace process. Not only did they play important roles in ensuring that the process moved forward and that women and other key constituencies were included in the talks, but they also made significant contributions to the peace agreement's content, including gender-specific provisions.

Decades of marginalisation and infantilisation of both youth and women will take years of investment in structural changes and civic education to be turned around, as argued in the section below. Despite this, the failure to achieve peace has limited the country's ability to address critical questions related to the rights, freedoms, welfare, and dignity of the South Sudanese.

The Role of Regional and International Actors

International and regional actors have been playing leading roles in the quest for peace in South Sudan. However, interviews and secondary sources observed that the roles have both enabling and constraining effects. The *Troika*, consisting of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway (US Department of State 2025), the AU and its Regional Economic Community (REC), IGAD, and the UN have been playing a leading role in supporting the peace processes in South Sudan. In fact, the UN has one of the longest and largest ever-deployed missions in the country, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Beyond the three actors named above, there have been international organisations and regional governments, including Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, that have been serving as moral guarantors.

As indicated above, Uganda's role has been conflicting, as it supports the government militarily and takes sides in active combat when the regime is threatened (Al Jazeera 2025). According to respondents, Yoweri Museveni has positioned himself as a regional leader and has military and economic interests there, as was previously seen in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Thus, having formed strategic ties with the regime in South Sudan, he prefers to keep that regime in power, while playing a negotiating role. Given that Uganda shares a strategic border with South Sudan and imports large quantities of goods and services from Uganda, the alliance is beneficial to Museveni. This paradox raises questions about the interests, legitimacy, and efficacy of external actors' support for the search for peace in South Sudan.

IGAD has been central to the negotiations and signing of the ARCSS in 2015 and the R-ARCSS in 2018. With the support of the AU, IGAD has the legitimacy to convene warring factions and negotiate peace. However, competing political interests within the organisations undermine their ability to make unilateral decisions and to hold accountable actors who violate the agreements. The AU, which should support IGAD during difficult moments, lacks both the human and financial resources to intervene and ensure accountability in the implementation of agreements in South Sudan (Levi 2025). Resolutions issued are usually ignored, which weakens the Union's position and leaves South Sudanese with limited confidence in the AU's actions, as most respondents stated.

The UNMISS has been plagued with challenges since its deployment in the country. While most of its role is operational, for instance, with the pro-

tection of civilians, it has been criticised, especially by the public, for several reasons. For instance, most respondents indicated that they expected that the mission should have been much more responsive in saving lives where there were outright attacks against civilians. It was also observed during field visits to South Sudan that civilians expected more than what the mission's mandate allowed. However, beyond the mandate, South Sudan is a vast country and challenging to monitor fully. Thus, logistical and terrain-related constraints limit the UN's ability to respond quickly when needed. Furthermore, the UN, like civilians, have been constantly attacked by both government forces and other factions, with accusations of taking sides. This has succeeded in quietly cornering the mission to be much more sensitive to the realities on the ground, with reliance placed on diplomatic rather than military pressure on the parties to the conflict (Duursma 2021). The posture of the mission leaves an open field for the factions to operate in, thereby entrenching resistance to reform and the required political changes.

China remains a key partner of the government and focuses on economic diplomacy. At the same time, the US, the United Kingdom and Norway continue to provide financial and technical support to peace efforts in the country (International Crisis Group 2021b). However, donor funds for the country are dwindling, especially with the abrupt stop of support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Additionally, some respondents stated that donor fatigue is setting in, as the conflict persists. This has led to cuts in peace and development projects. The private sector remains weak, and economic activity outside Juba is informal due to insecurity. As such, the contributions of the private sector to peace initiatives remain minimal.

Sudan, on the other hand, is currently engulfed in its own crisis and is less focused on South Sudan. As observed by respondents, the multiplicity of international actors and their divergent interests provide room for the elites to play them, with relationships shifting. Thus, there has not been a common approach among international actors in the country.

It is also worth noting that the international actors intended the reduction in oil production in 2012 to pressure a new agreement with Sudan, which is responsible for transporting oil produced in the South. Without oil revenues to buy loyalty from numerous tribal leaders, the clientelist system created by Salva Kiir collapsed, and his government started to face challenges, including from Riek Machar. Besides being an immediate cause of the 2013 conflict between the SPLA and the SPLA-IO, this fact also helps explain the

interplay among political, economic, and ethnic disputes in the country (Silva 2025; Day et al. 2019).

Peace from Below? Civil Society, Women, and Local Initiatives

Decades of violence have appeared to be stimulating an organic, grassroots-led search for peace in communities across South Sudan. Excluded from formal peace processes and leadership roles, organisations owned and led by women and youth have been actively implementing peace initiatives. As a youth activist stated:

> It reached a point where we, the young people, needed to take our destiny into our hands. We formed the Youth for Peace organisation in Juba and have been working with our peers to build a culture of peace. The more we engage our peers, the better for the future of our country. Peace, like violence, is a mindset, and can be positively inculcated by our generation, and the time is now.[9]

The words of the interviewee are in line with the mantra of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO 1966, 1), The consciousness that is evolving is helping to have young people and women engage their peers on the need to resist being influenced to join armed groups.

Some respondents stated that the vulnerabilities of young people and the exposure to, and socialisation with, violence are leading to some in major towns forming or becoming members of gangs and cliques. Consequently, awareness of peacebuilding efforts focuses on creating safer communities and educating young people to adopt positive lifestyles. The European Union (EU) is one of the leading funders supporting grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in South Sudan, with communities trained to create the changes they would like to see. For instance, in 2024, the author assessed an EU-funded project titled "Supporting community resilience and non-violent conflict management in conflict and flood-affected areas of Upper Nile and Jonglei States, South Sudan". This was a three-million-euro project implemented by

9 Interview of a youth activist conducted by the author in Juba on 24 March 2025.

Solidarités International for two years[10]. Projects such as these help provide communities with the tools they need to self-mobilise and undertake conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts.

Respondents stated that religious leaders have been promoting peace and reconciliation in the country. In 2015, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) published an Action Plan for Peace that has, over the last decade, served as a framework for local-level engagement, especially where the state's presence is limited (South Sudan Council of Churches 2023). The moral leadership provided is critical, especially given the influence of religion in the lives of South Sudanese. Tied to this, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church uses trauma counselling and public forums to promote interethnic dialogues.

While civil society is still in its infancy and less developed, local NGOs are seen to play an active role in supporting peace and reconciliation efforts in communities. Researchers such as Bedigen (2021) have written on the increasing role that local women play in peacebuilding in South Sudan. However, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) face financial resource challenges that limit their ability to sustain or expand their activities. They are also disconnected from national peace initiatives, thereby limiting the potential that an integrated and inclusive approach could have provided the country.

The limited presence of the state has led most people to rely on traditional leaders and their structures for dispute resolution. These elders facilitate intercommunal dialogues, broker peace, and keep communities together, usually guided by customs and tradition (Ndonga 2024). The local justice mechanisms are much more accessible, known and trusted by the locals than the formal justice system.

The availability of grassroots initiatives for peace and reconciliation presents an opportunity for the government and development partners to explore a more sustainable approach to peacebuilding in South Sudan. Thus, investments should target these organisations and structures at the local level, with connections made between them and national efforts. Additionally, CSOs, traditional leaders, and religious leaders should be recognised as integral components of peacebuilding efforts and empowered to own the process. Their contributions will help shape the future of South Sudan for the better.

10 The author monitored EU-funded projects for over a decade in South Sudan as part of the Result-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) missions of the Union.

Beyond Peace Agreements: Long-Term Stability, Accountability and Statebuilding

While peace agreements have succeeded in providing short-term relief through elite-bargaining and positioning, South Sudan has, as indicated above, continuously suffered from a relapse to violence. The post-peace agreement periods are usually fraught with tension, with a limited focus on security, stability, and state-building. Respondents provided recommendations on how to promote reconciliation and statebuilding in the country.

A total of 41 respondents stated that there needs to be a national dialogue organised and facilitated by local actors, including religious and traditional leaders, to discuss both the present and future of the country. Some respondents suggested that the facilitators review all previous peace agreements and the reasons for their failures to prepare better to address historical grievances. A lawyer in Juba said:

> What South Sudan should avoid moving forward with are arrangements that are mainly elite-driven. We need to move beyond peace agreements to national dialogues that take into account grievances and frustrations from across the country. The process should be inclusive and owned, especially by the country's youth and women, who are the most affected by conflicts.[11]

Coupled with the national dialogue process, most respondents stated that the country needs a transitional justice process that will promote healing, reconciliation, and justice for victims of the conflicts. All the mechanisms recommended by the agreements, including the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA), and a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), have not been established. This undermines public trust and confidence in peace agreements, and as argued by the respondents, they are not people-centred or owned. This is especially given the fact that the outcomes benefit the elites and leave citizens with limited hope, with impunity entrenched. Respondents, however, recommended that any transitional justice programme invest in psychosocial support and reparations for victims. Experiences from countries such as Sierra Leone show that victims of civil wars are usually provided with limited support to address their psychosocial challenges, thereby leaving communities traumatised and with the potential of relapsing into violence.

11 Interview of a lawyer in Juba conducted by the author in Juba on 13 March 2024.

Most of the respondents stated that it will be difficult for South Sudan to achieve sustainable peace without a transition from a militarised approach to governance to one embedded in democratic good governance. This will require structural transformation and the re-engineering of the state to embrace diversity and inclusivity. Central to this process should be the constitutional review process and the establishment of peace infrastructure that will adopt an organic approach to peacebuilding. A new and democratic constitution will be instrumental in creating institutions of state that would help promote accountability and discourage inequalities. As of 2025, the constitution-making process has not commenced, and many transitional institutions have been weakened by political interference, delays, and lack of financial resources (Kuol 2025). The process requires political will and interest to succeed, and this has been a challenge so far. Furthermore, the commissioners were nominated by the parties to the agreement, reinforcing another elite arrangement for a constitution that should support a democratic transition while addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Most of the respondents argued that for any peace process to succeed, there should be improvements in the country's socio-economic conditions. The increasing vulnerability stemming from limited access to economic opportunities is preyed on by armed groups, with a ready-made army of young people available for recruitment. Peace agreements by themselves do not guarantee peace; they provide a roadmap that could foster it, and commitments need to be transformed into action (Kane 2019).

The absence of a peace dividend and the continued absence of the state in the lives of most citizens raise doubts about the relevance of peace agreements. What most respondents indicated that they would like to see is a shared vision for democratic good governance in South Sudan that is centred on healing, inclusivity and participation, justice and accountability. These changes will help to promote public trust in the peacebuilding process in South Sudan.

Conclusion

In 2011, South Sudan gained independence after decades of civil war with the North. The agreement signed in 2005 ended the war and paved the way for independence, but did not provide a framework that took into consideration internal grievances in the South, beyond those against the North. Independence ushered in militarised governance with the SPLM/A leading a

unity government alongside the Nuers. However, the lack of a national vision and agenda, and an elite-driven power-sharing approach, minimised the focus on nation-building and addressing historical grievances. The fragile political arrangement, which was transactional rather than transformational, quickly crumbled in 2013 as it was unsustainable. The two agreements signed in 2015 and 2018 have not succeeded, with violence looming across the country.

The use of the critical political economy approach strengthened the conclusion that peace agreements are political processes whose success or failure depends on the parties' willingness to comply with them. Additionally, the case of South Sudan remains complex, as agreements are transactional and elite-centred, and lessons from the 2013 crisis did not lead to an overhaul of the approach used when the 2018 agreement was developed. Thus, there was no pathway to inclusive nation-building and structural transformation. Key components of the 2018 agreement, including those related to transitional justice and the constitutional review process, remain unimplemented. Also, the struggle for political and economic dominance has led to the ostracisation of smaller ethnic groups from governance arrangements.

International actors need to use context-specific, local and home-grown approaches to promote sustainable peacebuilding in the country. There needs to be a shift from a reactive, state-centric approach to a longer-term investment in infrastructures for peace. The inclusion of vital groups such as civil society, religious and traditional leaders will go a long way in enhancing local ownership and the legitimacy of the process.

The paper concludes that there is a need for a national dialogue to broaden participation and re-engineer the political space to promote a culture of peace and inclusive governance. Without this approach, peace will remain elusive and the promise of independence unachieved.

REFERENCES

Agaba, H., C.B. Umeh, C. Elekwachi, and C. Akinsola. 2025. "The United Nations' Role in Managing the Conflict in South Sudan, 2013-2022: A Focus on Protection of Civilians (POC) and Humanitarian Assistance." *Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 8(2): 45–60. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.jpsir.20250802.13.

Akech, J.G. 2020. "Rethinking Transitional Justice in South Sudan: Critical Perspectives on Justice and Reconciliation." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 14(3): 586–592. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijaa015.

Al Jazeera. 2025. "Uganda deploys troops in South Sudan as civil war fears grow." *Al Jazeera*, March 11. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/11/uganda-deploys-troops-in-south-sudan-as-civil-war-fears-grow.

Assessment Capacities Project. 2025. *South Sudan: Potential for Escalation of Conflict*. ACAPS Thematic Report, June 11. https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20250611_ACAPS_Sudan_-_potential_for_escalation_of_conflict.pdf.

Bangura, I. 2024. "Connecting the dots – poverty, marginality, and the production of aggression and violence in post-war Sierra Leone." *Conflict, Security & Development* 24(3): 227–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2024.2349066

Bazugba, A.M., J. Poutanen, P.E. Riak, and A. Möller-Loswick.. 2018. "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013–2018." Nairobi: National Transformational Leadership Institute (NTLI), Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) and Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA).

BBC. 2018. "Riek Machar: South Sudan warlord turned peacemaker?" *BBC*, June 21. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25402865.

Bedigen, W. 2021. "Honyomiji: the local women's peacebuilding institution in South Sudan." *Peacebuilding* 9(4): 457–476. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2021.1895613.

Collins, R.O. 2008. *A History of Modern Sudan*. Cambridge University Press.

Craze, J. 2019. "Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's Civil War, 2014–19." Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

Center for Preventive Action. 2025. "Instability in South Sudan." *Global Conflict Tracker*. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan.

Day, A., C. Hunt, H. Yin, and L. Kumalo. 2019. "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)." Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. https://www.cccpa-eg.org/pdf_read_download.php?type=read&newFileName=Assessing+the+Effectiveness+of+the+UN+Mission+in+South+Sudan+%28UNMISS%29&file=6532_26011213.pdf.

De Waal, A. 2014. "When Kleptocracy Becomes Insolvent: Brute Causes of the Civil War in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 113(452): 347–369. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu028

Deutsche Welle. 2016. "South Sudan's Machar turns up in Khartoum." *DW*, October 23. https://www.dw.com/en/south-sudans-former-vice-president-turns-up-in-khartoum-one-month-after-fleeing-juba/a-19496414.

Dicken, S.F.W. 2025. "South Sudan Postpones Elections To 2026: A Move Toward Inclusivity and Stability." *Wilson Center*, February 6. https://www.

wilsoncenter.org/article/south-sudan-postpones-elections-2026-move-toward-inclusivity-and-stability.

Duursma, A. 2021. "Pinioning the Peacekeepers: Sovereignty, Host-State Resistance against Peacekeeping Missions, and Violence against Civilians." *International Studies Review* 23 (3): 670–695. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa063.

Gai, P.G. 2025. "Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan: Reflecting Success, Failure, and Potential Consequences." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 30(2): 18–23. https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.30-Issue2/Ser-3/D30020317 29.pdf.

International Crisis Group. 2021a. Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan. Africa Report n. 300. February 10. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/south-sudan/300-toward-viable-future-south-sudan.

International Crisis Group. 2021b. *Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances*. Africa report n. 305. October 6. https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/305-south-sudan-oil_0.pdf.

IGAD. 2015. *Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan*. Addis Ababa: Intergovernmental Authority on Development. https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/final_proposed_compromise_agreement_for_south_sudan_conflict.pdf.

Johnson, D.H. 2012. "South Sudan: A New History for a New Nation: The Search for South Sudan's Usable Past." Keynote address given at the 9th International South Sudan and Sudan Studies Conference, Bonn, 23-25 July 2012. https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/RVI-A-New-History-for-a-New-Nation.pdf

Kane, S. 2019. *Peace Agreement Provisions and the Durability of Peace*. Zurich: Centre for Security Studies (CSS), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and ETH Zurich.

Kiranda, Y., Mathias Kamp, M. B. Mugisha, and Donnas Ojok. 2016. "Conflict and State Formation in South Sudan: The Logic of Oil Revenues in Influencing the Dynamics of Elite Bargains." *Journal on Perspectives of African Democracy and Development* 1 (1): 30–40.

Kumar, S., P. Santos, and P. Khannawalia. 2020. "Geocultural Understanding in Abyei: Contested Territories, Proselytisation and Evangelists." *The African Journal of International Affairs* 26 (1-2): 45–60. https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/ejc-ijas_v26_n1_2_a3.

Kuol, L.B.D. 2025. "South Sudan: The bumpy road to democratic transition." *International Relations and Diplomacy* 13(5): 275–307. https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2025.05.005

Levi, B. 2025. "Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Interventions and the Attainment of Peace in the East African Region: A Case Study of

IGAD in the South Sudan Peace Efforts." *International Journal of Geopolitics and Governance* 4(1): 227-241. https://doi.org/10.37284/ijgg.4.1.3455.

Logonyi, D. 2025. "South Sudan president fires military chief after three months, reinstates predecessor." *Reuters*, October 9. https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/south-sudan-president-fires-military-chief-after-three-months-reinstates-2025-10-09/.

Ndonga, A. 2024. "Some Level of Peace': Addressing intercommunal violence through customary justice in South Sudan." New York: International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).

Radio Tamazuj. 2025. "SSPDF commander, UN crew killed in Nasir." *Radio Tamazuj*, March 7. https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/sspdf-commander-un-crew-killed-in-nasi.

R-ARCSS. 2018. *Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan*. Addis Ababa: IGAD. https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/02/South-Sudan-Peace-Agreement-September-2018.pdf.

Schomerus, M. and L. Aalen. 2016. *Considering the State: Perspectives on South Sudan's Subdivision and Federalism Debate*. Overseas Development Institute.

Silva, J. 2025. "Protection of Civilians in South Sudan: the Contribution of Special Operations." *Revista Brasileira de Estudos de Defesa* 12 (1): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.26792/rbed.v12i1.75433.

South Sudan Council of Churches. 2023. "Action Plan for Peace (APP) Vision 2023." South Juba: Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). https://cpn.nd.edu/assets/299324/sscc_action_plan_for_peace_vision_2023.pdf.

Sudans Post. 2025. "SPLAIO generals killed in clashes with RSF in Renk County village." *Sudans Post*, March 7. https://www.sudanspost.com/spla-io-generals-killed-in-clashes-with-rsf-in-renk-county-village/.

Syamkumar, V. 2024. "Conflict Situation in South Sudan and Related Challenges to Humanitarian and Human Rights." New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377222572_Conflict_Situation_in_South_Sudan_and_Related_Challenges_in_Humanitarian_and_Human_Rights_Situation.

UNESCO. 1966. The UNESCO Courier: A Window Open on the World, XIX, 7/8, p. 6–7, illus.

UNDP. 2025. "South Sudan at a crossroads: Resilience amidst Crisis." *UNDP*, May 7. https://www.undp.org/stories/south-sudan-crossroads.

United Nations Mission in South Sudan. 2024. "Tumaini peace talks between South Sudan Government and hold-out groups resume in Nairobi." *United Nations Peacekeeping*, December 5. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/tumaini-peace-talks-between-south-sudan-government-and-hold-out-groups-resume-nairobi.

US Department of State. 2025. *Joint Statement from Troika Capitals on South Sudan*. Media note, Office of the Spokesperson. https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/joint-statement-from-troika-capitals-on-south-sudan.

Vertin, Z. 2018. *A Rope from the Sky: The Making and Unmaking of the World's Newest State*. Hurst.

Young, J. 2012. *The Fate of Sudan: The Origins and Consequences of a Flawed Peace Process*. Zed Books.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the politics and difficulties of peacemaking in South Sudan, analysing why it remains elusive despite commitments under the R-ARCSS. The key questions examined are: (i) why have the peace agreements signed so far failed; (ii) what underlying socio-political and economic factors contribute to these failures; and (iii) what roles have regional and international actors played in promoting or hindering the realisation of sustainable peace. Moreover, it asks how locally rooted initiatives can support peace efforts. Methodologically, the paper adopts an interpretive and exploratory approach focused on analysing the politics and challenges of peacemaking in South Sudan. Additionally, it employs a critical political economy perspective to deepen understanding of peacemaking and peacebuilding within the country. By applying this approach, it is argued that peace agreements are not neutral tools but are often shaped by the interests and goals of political elites. In this regard, the paper challenges state-centric and elite-focused paradigms of peace. It is further argued that the peace process has been dominated by elites and driven by transactions rather than addressing the root causes of the conflict. As a result, conflicts are more often postponed than resolved — a phenomenon described as the "revolving-door" syndrome. It is also argued that conflict resolution should seek to understand the complex relationship between peace and power, be people-centred, and tackle crucial issues related to political transformation, justice, and legitimacy. It is concluded that a national dialogue is essential to expand participation and reshape the political space, fostering a culture of peace and inclusive governance. Without such an approach, peace will remain out of reach, and the promise of independence will remain unfulfilled.

KEYWORDS

South Sudan. Peace Agreements (R-ARCSS). Political Economy of Peace. Conflict Resolution.

Received on December 24, 2025
Accepted on January 24, 2026[12]

12 How to cite: Bangura, Ibrahim."Peace in pieces: the politics and pitfalls of peacemaking in South Sudan." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 10 (20): 58-81. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.152132.

THE CONFEDERATION OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL (CAF) AND THE AFRICAN CUP OF NATIONS (AFCON) AS EXAMPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE PAN-AFRICANISM: A BRIEF DISCUSSION

Guilherme Silva Pires de Freitas[1]
Felipe Antonio Honorato[2]

Introduction

Africa's main men's football tournament, the African Cup of Nations ("AFCON" as it is popularly known), was born in the wake of independence on the continent. Played for the first time in 1957 by just three teams — Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia —, the event grew and over the years began to encompass new countries that were emerging: the number of participating nations increased to 24 in the 1978 edition and, for the 2026 edition, 52 confederations registered for disputing the qualifying phase.

AFCON, which is organized by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), has consolidated itself as an international mega-event, offering in 2024 a record prize pool of US$ 7 million to the winners (CAF 2024) and expanding its popularity internationally - the edition had a global audience of approximately 2 billion people (Gyimah 2024).

1 School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities, University of São Paulo (EACH-USP). São Paulo, Brazil. Email: guilhermespfreitas@alumni.usp.br. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8833-3672.

2 School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities, University of São Paulo (EACH-USP). São Paulo, Brazil. Email: felipe.honorato@alumni.usp.br. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3732-6533.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.150089

This paper aims to demonstrate, through an analysis and synthesizing of the existing research, that AFCON and CAF are examples of an effective Pan-Africanism in the decades following decolonization. For this, an historical overview of the timelapse from the end of European colonialism in Africa (1950 and 1960 decades) to nowadays is made, showing how both AFCON and CAF have been used for reinforcement of national and regional identities, regional integration and international projection of Africa.

The strengthening of CAF, which went from four founding members in 1957 to the current 54 members in 2012, and the popularization of AFCON (Agostino 2011), helped not only to strengthen the ideal of continental unity and self-affirmation in the face of former colonizers, but also to reduce ethnic differences and national antagonisms (Hayatou 1998). Important political leaders from the period of the African decolonization, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, saw football as a vector of national identity in newly independent nations and as an element that could unite the entire African continent through a common practice between these States in search of international affirmation (Hayatou 1998). As examples, it is possible to mention the African boycott to the 1966 World Cup (Freitas 2022; Darby 2019) and also the continent's massive support for the Brazilian João Havelange's candidacy for FIFA presidency against the British Stanley Rous in 1974 (Rocha 2019; Darby 2019).

The article is divided into four parts: in addition to this introduction and the conclusion, there are section two, which discusses the "The Pan-Africanist ideal", and section three, which addresses "CAF and AFCON as examples of an effective Pan-Africanism in the decades after decolonization".

Finally, it is worth explaining that regional integration is understood here as the process by which territories that were not or were only slightly connected to each other gradually form a distinct regional group. CAF represents what is called formal regional integration: the countries that are members of the organization enter into a regional agreement and form a common space, in this case, the football confederation. This is a top-down process determined by national administrations (Richard 2014).

The Pan-Africanist Ideal

Pan-Africanism is an ideology that has two basic ideas at its core: "the common heritage of people of African descent throughout the world and the mandate of African peoples to work for each other's interests and

well-being everywhere" (Khapoya 2015, 210)[3]. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the popularization of this ideology was stimulated by a "lasting historical experience shared by almost all Africans" (Khapoya 2015, 194): the continuation of colonial imperialist capitalism, which awakened in the African people under the rule of colonial powers the desire to regain their self-determination. It was further catalyzed by five other specific factors: the missionary churches, the First World War, the Second World War, the ideology of Pan-Africanism, and the League of Nations/United Nations (Khapoya 2015). The primary goal of Pan-Africanism was the total liberation and unification of all Africans and people of African descent under African communalism (Okhonmina 2009).

Pan-Africanism's slogan was "Africa for the Africans". The origin of the phrase isn't well known, but it was almost certainly coined in America; later it gained reputation as the slogan of Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. However, "Africa for the Africans" life began long before then, not in America but in Nyasaland and South Africa. The person who first gave it meaning was Joseph Booth. Born 1851, Booth emigrated to New Zealand, where he became a successful farmer, and came to work in Nyasaland in 1892 as a Baptist missionary. He befriended John Chilembwe and became the political mentor and benefactor of Nyasaland's first nationalist leader; Chilembwe made the slogan his own. Between 1895 and 1896, Booth wrote a book called "Africa for the African" in which he argued for both African emancipation and the end of Europe's scramble for Africa (Legum 1965).

The Pan-African ideology spread mainly in English-speaking countries and centralized its development and diffusion in three names: Henry Sylvester-Williams, W.E.B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey. Starting on a meeting of Africans and West Indians called by Henry Sylvester-Williams, a lawyer from the West Indies (Caribbean), in London, England, to protest British colonial rule and the racial discrimination Africans endured in the city, the term "Pan-Africanist" gained popularity around 1900 (Khapoya 2015). Sylvester-Williams died shortly after this meeting and W.E.B. Dubois took over the role as informal leader of Pan-Africanism (Khapoya 2015).

DuBois was introduced to Pan-Africanism in this meeting in London (Legum 1965). It was there that he spoke his famous lines: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the

3 Translation made by the authors. Original version: "*a herança comum das pessoas de descendência africana em todo o mundo e a incumbência dos povos africanos de trabalhar pelos interesses e pelo bem-estar uns dos outros em qualquer lugar*" (Khapoya 2015, 210).

islands of the sea" (Legum 1965, 26). After the independence processes in the Americas, Black people on the continent were relegated to a second-class citizenship and suffered with extremely racist societies and official segregation regimes, as happened in the southern USA, for example. For Dubois, one of the most important ways for people of African descent to oppose racial discrimination was racial pride: valuing and claiming their African origins. This, in addition to combating colonialism and the demand for recognition of the contribution that African soldiers made to the victory of the Western European powers against Germany in the First World War, revived W.E.B. Dubois's fight for the Pan-Africanist ideal (Khapoya 2015).

Along with William E. Burghardt DuBois, Marcus Aurelius Garvey was a dominant voice in Pan Africanism during the first quarter of the 20th Century. Garvey, a black Jamaican, preached, through his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), "Back to Africa" to the Black masses of the New World, while DuBois fiercely resisted this idea: he had a dual goal of lifting the life standarts of Black peoples around the world in association with a freed, independent African Continent. In 1920, Garvey founded his Negro Empire in New York and created a large international convention which he called the first Black Parliament; he proclaimed himself "Provisional President of a Racial Empire in Africa". Also, he cooperated with the Ku Klux Klan, who shared his ideas of expatriating all the Afro-Americans (Legum 1965).

Although controversial, Marcus Garvey was very popular and important to Pan Africanism: Kwame Nkrumah once said that he was influenced more by Garvey's ideas than by anything in the United States. After serving a long prison sentence, Garvey died almost unnoticed in London in 1940 (Legum 1965).

One of the results of this controversy between DuBois and Garvey was a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the West Indies and the United States. These ideas were subsequently spread to Europe and to Africa through the Pan-African congresses and African students (Legum 1965). DuBois was responsible for organizing all the Pan-Africanist congresses in the early twentieth century. Vincent Khapoya (2015, 211) highlights that these congresses "influenced the growth of African nationalism in several significant ways".

There were five Pan-Africanist congresses held in total. The first of them happened in Paris, in 1919, and concluded with a petition to the Allied Powers to place the former German colonies under international supervision in order to prepare them for self-government. The Pan-African Conference also called for education to be provided, for "slavery", forced labor, and corporal punishment to be outlawed, and for some form of political participation

to be permitted (Khapoya 2015). This conference was a first step towards establishing a black internationalism that would flourish in the years after World War II (Maloney 2019).

The second Pan-African congress took place in 1921 in three sessions held in London, Brussels and Paris, capitals of countries that were colonial metropolises, in order to raise awareness about the situation of their possessions in Africa (Khapoya 2015). The main political demand made was for "local self-government for backward groups" (Legum 1965, 29). The third Congress was composed of two separate sessions which took place in 1923 in London and Lisbon. The most important political demand was for Africans to have "a voice in their own Governments" (Legum 1965, 29). The fourth Pan-African congress, for its turn, was held in New York in 1927 and was marked by a negative attitude of communists towards the growth of Pan--African ideas: they tried to discredit both Garvey's and duBois' movements — the UNIA and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), respectively — and called the Pan-Africans "petit-bourgeois black Nationalism" that were "blocking the dissemination of Communist influence" among the black community (Legum 1965, 30). The last and most important Pan-African congress took place in Manchester, England, in 1945 (Maloney 2019).

The 5th Pan-African Congress

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1934 had great symbolic significance: the attack was on one of the only two independent states in the African continent. The invasion ended up galvanizing pan-African protests in Africa and throughout the diaspora (Adi 2022). The year of 1934, thus, became a watershed moment that consolidated a new type of Pan-Africanism, now more militant: the period between 1935 and 1945 introduced a new mass movement not only in response to Italy's actions, but also in opposition to colonial rule in general, especially in West Africa and the Caribbean (Adi 2022).

Although this change was interrupted by the war years, it intensified demands for political transformations throughout Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and Europe. This conjuncture culminated in the organization of the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England (Adi 2022).

During the 1930s and 1940s, Britain became a centre of Pan-African activity, since many of those in the diaspora were subjects of the British Empire, and for economic and political reasons gravitated towards its centre

(Adi and Neto 2022). In 1944, following the initiative of the International African Service Bureau (IASB), formed in London by George Padmore in 1937, representatives of various African and British-based organisations gathered in Manchester to form "a Pan-African united front movement", to be known as the Pan-African Federation (PAF). This was the organisational basis for the Manchester Pan-African Congress in the following year (Adi and Neto 2022).

In the latter stages of the Second World War, African activists and anti-colonial organisations were concerned to formulate policies for the post-war time, which could place Africa and the diaspora at the centre of world affairs, and which might enhance the struggle against racial discrimination, and for economic development and self-government. In particular, they were concerned to make sure that Article III of the Atlantic Charter, which addressed the right to self-determination, applied to all countries including the colonies. As the war came to a close, W.E.B. Du Bois had begun to investigate the possibility of holding a Pan-African congress either in London or in Africa itself (Adi and Neto 2022).

On the eve of the decolonization process, the event gathered many of the leading names of the independentists movements in Africa (Maloney 2019) - among others: Kwame Nkrumah, from the Gold Coast; Jomo Kenyatta, from Kenya; Wallace Johnson, from Sierra Leone; Dr. Raphael Armattoe, from Togo; and the South African novelist and poet Peter Abrahams. There were now a few Afro-American attendants; for the first time it was a congress of Africa's young leaders (Legum 1965).

It has been widely acknowledged that the proceedings of the 5th Pan-African Congress gave rise to a new type of anti-imperialist and internationalist Pan-Africanism. The post-war Manchester Pan-Africanist ideology attempted to base itself on the interests of the masses of the people in the colonies and saw the workers and farmers as the main force in the anti-colonial struggle (Adi and Neto 2022).

Pan-Africanism as a Driver of Regional Integration

Pan-Africanism as a vector of regional integration gained momentum in the 1920s. It was at this time that the activities of the Congress of British West Africa began, leading to the formation of the British West African University, the West African Press Union, and the British West African Cooperative Association. In the 1940s, Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore

in London, and specially the Senegalese Alioune Diop gave new vigor to the integration impetus of Pan-Africanism (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

In 1947 *Presénce africaine* was born. It was a cultural movement that revived the ideas of both Pan-Africanism and the First Pan-African Congress. Black and European intellectuals gathered around Alioune Diop, originating some very influential works, such as *Nations nègres et cultures*, by Cheikh Anta Diop. For the militants of *Presénce africaine*, it was a matter of proving that the flourishing of the Black culture was inconceivable in a context without political independence and that Black people had to unite and show solidarity for this struggle. They should, therefore, distinguish from the "other" (the colonizer), affirming themselves as black (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

Despite the integration efforts undertaken throughout the 1930 and 1940 decades, there were no concrete results in this regard until 1957. This is because it was only with Ghana's political independence and under the auspices of Nkrumah, the first president of the nation, that Pan-Africanism as an integration movement truly defined its objectives and *modus operandi* (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

Kwame Nkrumah's first initiative was to establish the Ghana-Guinea union (1958) and the Ghana-Guinea-Mali union, the first step towards the "Union of African States". The second was to organize the first Conference of Independent African States (CIAS), held in Accra, in April 1958. All the independent African states at that time attended the conference: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010). The CIAS demanded the complete independence and liberation of the continent (Mulugeta 2025).

The first Conference of Independent African States was succeeded by the first All-African People's Conference (AAPC), also held in Accra, from 8 to 12 December 1958 (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010). AAPC emerged in part as a response to complaints from independence movements about their exclusion from the CIAS and was organised by Nkrumah, his advisor George Padmore, and Ras Makonnen, key figures in the Fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945. It gathered anti-colonial and civil rights activists, trade unionists, Cold War diplomats, students, refugees, and spies: among its notable attendees were Patrice Lumumba, from the Belgian Congo, Frantz Fanon representing Algeria's National Liberation Front, Holden Roberto, from Angola and the already cited Alioune Diop, from the Journal Présence Africaine (Mulugeta 2025).

AAPC was a landmark event for forging African agency in the international system. Firstly named the Sixth Pan-African Congress, the All-African People's Conference later had its name changed as an effort from Nkru-

mah to highlight its significance as the first of its kind in the continent. The conference represented a pivotal moment in the evolution of the Pan-African movement, shifting its focus from mere resistance against colonial dominance to a multifaceted agenda centred on African empowerment: Nkrumah and Padmore sought to imbue it with new meanings, showing its connection to the broader international communist movement, especially the Soviet Union and Afro-Asian Solidarity, and charting a distinct course from that of the West (Mulugeta 2025).

Subsequently, the Guinea-Liberia summit took place in Sanniquelli, in July 1959; followed by the second CIAS, held in Monrovia, in August 1959; and the third CIAS, held in Addis Ababa, in 1960 (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010). These conferences recommended the political integration of Africa. They also proclaimed the need for establishing a vast common market of continental scale; it was precisely to reinforce this economic aspect that the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was created in 1958. For Kwame Nkrumah, unity and a common market were indispensable prerequisites for the rapid and complete development of each of the independent African states and of the continent as a whole (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

Because of its connection to the political unification movement, the project of a continental common market faced much resistance. For many African leaders, neocolonialism was not considered a threat significant enough to justify measures that would transfer part of the sovereignty to a central political authority. Thus, the 1960 conference in Addis Ababa highlighted the existing divisions among states in Africa regarding the paths to continental unity (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

After many African countries achieved independence between 1960 and 1964, regional integration through Pan-Africanism became much more difficult and complex. The new political leaders of Africa were divided horizontally into two blocs (one pro-Western and the other pro-socialist), as well as vertically into revolutionaries, progressives, reactionaries, capitalists, socialists, traditionalists, and moderates (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

In 1961, Ghana, Guinea, Egypt, Mali, Morocco, Libya, and the Algerian government-in-exile formed the Casablanca Group, while other former French colonies, along with Nigeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, formed the Monrovia Group. Generally, the Casablanca Group favored a strong political union, while the Monrovia Group favored a "flexible" confederation of sovereign and independent African states that would encourage voluntary participation and cooperation in cultural exchanges and economic interaction. Both groups, however, remained true to their historical commitment to the

complete liberation of the last colonies in the continent and to non-alignment (Asante and Chanaiwa 2010).

CAF and AFCON as Examples of an Effective Pan-Africanism in the Decades after Decolonization

The Confederation of African Football (CAF)

To Okhonmina (2009), Pan-Africanism transformed into a mobilizing ideology: a development project and a strategy to achieve political unity in Africa through continental cooperation. In this way, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) can be seen as a concrete result of this mobilizing force of unity on the continent.

CAF was founded in 1957 and only four countries participated in the officialization of the continental entity: South Africa[4], Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. At that time, Africa was going through the decolonization process and, as time went by, new countries gained their independence. Once a sovereign state, one of the first measures adopted by many political leaders was to join CAF and later the International Football Federation (FIFA): one important part of the independence processes was obtaining international recognition, and the affiliation to an international sports entity was part of this search for legitimacy (Rocha 2019).

In this way, each new country that gained independence tried to create its national football confederation. In Africa, this was a constant. Ghana became independent on March 6, 1957; weeks later, it created a national confederation and the following year it was the first in the continent to be affiliated to FIFA (Portela 2018). Similar situations occurred with Mali, Senegal and Ivory Coast, among others. There were cases of confederations created even before the proclamation of independence, such as Cameroon, which became independent in 1960, but created its football confederation the previous year, and Nigeria, which gained its independence in 1963, but its confederation had existed since 1945, when the country was still a colony (Okolie-Osemene and Okoh 2014). As Boniface (1998) points out, for these new States a football team was essential:

4 Due to the segregationist Apartheid regime in force since 1948, South Africa was excluded from the inaugural edition of AFCON in 1957 and suspended from the CAF after refusing to use Black and mixed-race athletes in its main team. The ban on South Africans lasted until 1991 when the racist regime was abolished.

> Independent States included the request for membership in FIFA, as if it were as natural and as necessary as that of the UN; as if the definition of the State was no longer limited to the three traditional elements, a territory, a population, a government, and that a fourth had to be added: a national football team; as if national independence was characterized by the possibility of defending its borders, minting currency and competing in international football events. (Boniface 1998, 17).[5]

The creation of a new national confederation was not only to adapt to the rules of international football, but also an element of national identity (Freitas 2022) and a way to help forge the feeling of nationhood (Boniface 1998).

According to Agostino (2011), in some African countries there has always been a clear link between sport and the State; one example is Ivory Coast. In the early 1960s, Germain Coffi Gadeau simultaneously held the position of Minister of the Interior and President of the Ivory Coast Football Federation (Agostino 2011). His successor in the entity was Mathieu Ekra, a political leader and one of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's closest collaborators (Kamate and Banégas 2010).

The reason why these politicians controlled the Ivorian football was the fact that sport is seen in the country as "an important vector of unity and national sovereignty" and "a field of political and identity confrontation, used by representatives of power and the opposition to consolidate their regime or mobilize their troops against it" (Kamate and Banégas 2010, 86-87). In fact, the link between politics and football in Ivory Coast "is old and almost organic, where sports leaders are mostly senior politicians and close to the government" (Kamate and Banégas 2010, 94).

Many newly-independent nations have few or no symbols of national identity. The case of African nations was even more emblematic due to the consequences of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), which aimed to regulate European colonization and trade in Africa by imperial powers. In the meeting, many African borders were delimited solely based on the various treaties signed by the foreign powers; the majority of these territorial limits are still valid even after the end of colonization (Ferro 2017). In this way,

5 Translation made by the authors. Original version: "*États indépendants figurait la demande dádhésion á la FIFA, comme si elle était aussi naturelle et aussi nécessaire que celle à ONU; comme si la définition de l´Etat ne se limitait plus aux trois éléments traditionnels, un territoire, une population, un gouvernement, et quíl faille en ajouter un quatrième: une équipe nationale de football; comme si líndépendance nationale se caractérisait par la possibilité de défendre ses frontières, de battre monnaie et de disputer des épreuves internationales de football*" (Boniface 1998, 17).

strong nationalist symbols, such as a national football team, was an alternative found by these new states to reinforce their sovereignty.

This strategy was used by political leaders and influential figures in Africa. Algeria offers some examples of this: the so-called Muslim clubs, often designated "*club musulman*" or "*union sportive musulmane*" (Everett 2022), were created to oppose the French colonial propaganda of Algeria's assimilation to France (the myth of *l'Algérie-Francaise*) (Freitas and Honorato 2025). They then housed the Algerian nationalist movements: nationalist leaders sought the help of these teams in order to strengthen nationalist drive for independence. Also, in 1957, the National Liberation Front (FLN) decided to establish the FLN national team (*Équipe FLN*). The FLN team took the white and green flag and uniform, and the *Kassamen* abroad, spreading to the allies of the Algerian independence struggle the forbidden symbols of Algeria and doing so, denying that Algeria was France (Freitas and Honorato 2025).

According to Li (2023, 45), "Pan-Africanism has fostered a distinct footballing environment in Africa, characterized by strong connections between national teams"; Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana and the main name behind the Pan-African integration efforts, "has sought to cultivate a 'brotherhood' across West African countries through sport" (Li 2023, 45).

A football enthusiast, Nkrumah believed that the sport possessed essential characteristics to aid in the integration of African nations, promoting fraternity and unity among its members (Acheampong and Raspaud 2021). In a speech in 1960, he stated:

> Not only can sports contribute towards the development of unity and understanding between the regions of Ghana, they have another even more important role to play in present day Africa. Through international competition with other African states, sports can provide that necessary basis of mutual understanding which can so greatly assist the realisation of our ideal of African unity (Darby 2019, 9).

Among his many integrationist actions in support of football are the creation of the West African Football Federation (Freitas 2022), the encouragement of the Dr. Kwame Nkrumah Gold Cup, an event that brought together national teams from already independent states between 1959 and 1967 (Darby 2019), and the creation of continental club competitions aimed at giving the continent more respect and universal recognition (Portela 2018).

Nkrumah was also one of the protagonists in the famous case of the 1966 World Cup boycotting by African national teams. At the time, African

teams needed to go through a play-off against teams from Asia and Oceania to reach the final stage of the World Cup, and CAF directors argued that the continent should have at least one direct qualification spot. However, FIFA refused to grant this request, and the African teams abandoned the qualifying tournament in a collective and symbolic act endorsed by CAF (Darby 2019).

African countries considered it unfair to have to go through a global play-off against nations from Asia and Oceania, classifying FIFA's position as "decisions [that] resemble methods of intimidation and repression" (Darby 2019, 12). Even after receiving a fine of 1000 Swiss francs imposed for their rebellion, the African countries did not back down in the face of FIFA's authoritarian stance and continued their protest.

The fact that CAF fully supported the boycott and used football as a political arena against the structure inherited from colonialism can be interpreted as an act of Pan-Africanist integrationism in the sporting sphere, seeking for solidarity and emancipation of African states through the main international football championship.

In the following World Cup, in 1970, Africa and Asia earned direct qualification for the event. It's important to note that the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded by the French lawyer, sports activist and Christian Democrat Jules Rimet, and "was at the helm of the mission to 'civilize' the world through sport". In the French colonial enterprise, football was used to link France's ideologies of universalism with imperialist expectations of social cohesion and mobility through cultural assimilation (Everett 2022).

João Havelange's election to FIFA's presidency in 1974 can also be seen as an act of Pan-African unity and integrationism throughout CAF. FIFA had an increase in its number of member countries from 54 in 1950, to 143 in 1974 with the emergence of new States after the Second World War (Rocha 2019). Many of these new members were recently independent nations of Africa, and CAF saw in this situation an opportunity for greater protagonism in the football world.

Havelange's victory over Britain's Stanley Rous, head of the organization since 1961, wouldn't be possible if countries affiliated to CAF hadn't voted massively for him, seeking a greater space within FIFA. He was the president of the Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD) and still until now the only South American to serve as president of FIFA — which gives not only a sense of African unity, but also a sense of "Third World unity".

This continental unity through football continued to strengthen CAF. In 1977, Tunisia had the honor of hosting the first edition of the U20 World

Cup. Then, in 2010, South Africa was the first African nation to host the World Cup, which will return again to the continent in 2030, when Morocco will jointly organize the event with Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Also, Africa had the right to nine direct places plus one in the playoffs for the 2026 World Cup, which will be held in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Over the decades, CAF gained international prominence and space in the political scene of football. After Joseph Blatter resigned as FIFA president due to corruption allegations, in 2015, Cameroonian Issa Hayatou took over as interim president of the organization until the election of the current president Gianni Infantino in 2016. Hayatou was CAF president for 29 years - from 1988 to 2017. Between 2016 and 2023, Senegal's Fatma Samoura held the position of FIFA's General Secretary, being the first woman and representative from Africa to occupy this position. And also, it's important to highlight that CAF has now seven members on the FIFA Council, a number only inferior to the quantity of representatives from European football.

The African Cup of Nations (AFCON)

The African Cup of Nations, popularly known as AFCON, became one of the most important vectors of Pan-Africanism. Reverberations of Pan-African integrationism, for example, can be observed in the choices of AFCONS' venues by CAF.

As of 2026, 35 editions of AFCON have been played and 20 different countries have hosted the championship at least once. In some cases, CAF chose to accommodate the tournament in more than one country. The first time this happened was in 2000, when Ghana and Nigeria jointly hosted the tournament after Zimbabwe, the expected host, withdrew. It is worth mentioning that both countries do not border each other, but at the time they were the only ones capable of receiving the event. The experience was repeated in 2012, when the neighbors Equatorial Guinea and Gabon hosted the competition.

In 2027, AFCON will be played in three countries for the first time: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. These neighboring states are located in Eastern Africa and have a history that oscillates between harmony and strong rivalry among them. The three were founding countries of the East African Community (EAC) and have signed many mutual cooperation agreements throughout their history (East African Community n.d.). The entity was created after the signing of the East African Community Treaty, in 1967, which

aimed for the harmonization of the economic policies and the constitution of common institutions and a common market (Kasaija 2009). The community faced moments of turbulence in the 1970s mainly due to both ideological differences and economic divergences regarding the common market among the member nations (Eken 1979). In 1977, the EAC collapsed and was dissolved.

During this turbulent period, there were also some episodes of political and military conflicts in the region. Between 1978 and 1979, Uganda and Tanzania fought a war that culminated in the fall of the then Ugandan president Idi Amin (Cheeseman et al. 2018). In fact, Amin is also considered one of those responsible for the collapse of the EAC due to his nationalist economic policy (Kasaija 2009). Uganda also had territorial disputes with Kenya, with diplomatic relations between the countries being severed in the late 1980s due to conflicts in the northern and eastern regions of Uganda (Cheeseman et al. 2018).

After years of regional tension, the situation began to normalize in the late 1980s, with the signing of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community in 2000 (Kasaija 2009) and the reestablishment of the relations among the countries.

Football was eventually used to improve these relations, as the three nations put aside their past full of rivalries and their joint bid to host the 2027 AFCON was accepted by CAF. They are working to successfully host the event, which requires some shared commitments such as renovating stadiums and offering a good hotel network.

In addition to these infrastructure issues, another point that has been helping to bring the countries closer together is tourism. Tourism is one of the main economic forces in the East African region, especially tourism that explores the region's exuberant nature (Kibara et al. 2012). Hosting sport events has served as an alternative to boost the arrival of foreign visitors, since on days when football matches are not taking place, these individuals tend to visit tourist sites (Nyikana and Tichaawa 2020); the so-called "sports tourism" is a strategy that has been adopted by emerging countries to diversify their economies (Nyikana and Tichaawa 2018).

The joint organization of the AFCON by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda can be conceived within the framework of sports diplomacy, that is, can be seen as the strategic use of sporting events to foster cooperation, mutual understanding, and positive relations between states (Bettine 2023). In the literature, sports diplomacy is understood as the use of sport by state and non-state actors to establish international relations, enhance national image, and build cross-border cooperation networks, as part of bro-

ader public diplomacy strategies (Bettine 2023; Ilevbare and McPherson 2025; Postlethwaite et al. 2023). This diplomatic perspective considers that mega-sporting events can create opportunities for political engagement and symbolic solidarity that extend beyond the sporting sphere, contributing to regional integration and shared identity. In this sense, the joint organization of AFCON by three neighboring East African countries, which share a history of turbulent relations, is not only interstate cooperation, but also a platform to promote regional unity and project a collective presence on continental issues (Postlethwaite et al. 2023). Thus, it materializes, through sport, a continental aspiration for unity, shared identity, and institutional collaboration in African terms, constituting a practical and contemporary manifestation of the Pan-Africanist ideals.

This idea is in line with the thinking of one of the main African sports directors: Ethiopia's Yidnekatchew Tessema, former president of CAF between 1972 and 1987. During the 1974 AFCON, he gave a powerful speech preaching for the use of football for continental unity:

> I'm issuing a call to our general assembly that it affirm that Africa is one and indivisible, that we work towards the unity of Africa together... That we condemn superstition, tribalism, all forms of discrimination within our football and in all domains of life. We do not accept the division of Africa into Francophone, Anglophone, and Arabophone. Arabs from north Africa and Zulus from South Africa, we are all authentic Africans. Those who try to divide us by way of football are not our friends (Ross 2013, n.p.).

Tessema's speech illustrates how football was also conceived by African leaders as a political space for building continental unity. By rejecting colonial divisions and affirming that "we are all authentic Africans," Tessema mobilizes the Pan-Africanist thought, which defends solidarity and the indivisibility of the continent. Through Anderson's (2008) conception, "we are all authentic Africans," can be understood as an expression of an "imagined community," where the members of this collectivity, although dispersed across multiple states, come to perceive themselves as belonging to a common identity through shared narratives, symbols, and rituals. In this context, AFCON and CAF function as institutional arenas that symbolically materialize this community, transforming football into means of producing continental belonging.

AFCON as a Space for Contesting Neocolonial Practices and Exercising African Pride

As a space for the strengthening of the Pan-Africanist ideal, AFCON has also been used to expose neocolonial dynamics that exist in the football world. Popularized by Kwame Nkrumah ([1965] 2023), the concept of neocolonialism refers to the condition in which formally colonial states remain subject to indirect forms of external domination, especially in economic, political, and cultural matters, but also in other spheres, as is the case of sports. Neocolonialism operates through structural mechanisms of dependence, such as financial flows, technological development and military apparatus that constrain the autonomy of peripheral countries, mainly those located in the Global South.

The effects of neocolonialism in the sports are felt in African football, which occupies a peripheral position in the global football system (Giulianotti 2010). One of the best examples is the increasing number of athletes from Africa that go to European clubs (some of them at a very early age).

In the 2004 AFCON, held in Tunisia, 67% of the players who competed in the tournament played for a European club. Considering the number of different Africans who participated in an edition of AFCON between 2004 and 2017 and who, at the time of the tournament, played in one of the most prestigious European leagues[6], the figure reaches 488 athletes (Pérez 2018). In this context, AFCON becomes a space of recurring tension, where African players, national teams and confederations face structural pressures from neocolonialism.

After South Africa lost the dispute for hosting the 2006 World Cup to Germany, Roger Milla, an historic player of the Cameroonian national team, stated that "Africa produces some of the best players for the world and gets nothing in return. The world still sees us as slaves. We live in a second slavery" (Agostino 2011, 201). For centuries, European powers exploited the African continent through colonization. As Ferro (2017) points out, in its first phase, colonialism aimed to explore resources in occupied territories and used enslaved labor for this. In the second phase (the imperialist era), the goal of economic gain continued to be achieved, however, a new strategy was put into practice: the idea of civilizational superiority (Ferro 2017). The "civilizing mission" imposed by Europeans on Africans and Asians tried to

6 Bundesliga (Germany), La Liga (Spain), Ligue 1 (France), Premier League (England), Serie A (Italy) and Primeira Liga (Portugal).

demonstrate to non-white and non-western peoples that Europe was culturally superior and should "educate" them.

Although the idea of a "civilizational superiority" is still alive in the form of the myth of the superiority of European football, AFCON has been serving as a space for contesting these neocolonial practices and exercising African pride by athletes from Africa. During a press conference in 2021, Ivorian striker Sébastien Haller was asked by a journalist if he would rather remain playing for Ajax, his club, than answer a call-up from Côte d'Ivoire to play in the AFCON[7]. His response to the reporter was the following one: "This question shows the disrespect for Africa. Would this question ever get asked to a European player ahead of the Euros? Of course I am going to the Africa Cup of Nations" (Gallagher 2021, n.p.).

This idea of placing European football above all others isn't new. An example of this is the *Ballon D'Or* award, an honor created by France Football magazine and which for 39 years was given only to European or naturalized athletes. The award was opened to players from all over the world in 1995; however, African players already had an "alternative" *Ballon D'Or* since the 1970s, which awarded only African athletes and had Malian Salif Keita as the first winner (Stein 2023).

Another field where the effects of neocolonialism in African football can be seen is in the position of head coach of the national teams. Coaches of African teams in World Cups and AFCONs between the 1990s and 2010s were mostly European, with the exception of the Maghrebian countries, which usually employed native coaches[8]. However, with the greater globalization of football and, consequently, many African athletes migrating to coaching careers after playing football in Europe, the number of Europeans as heads of African teams has been decreasing.

Africans' criticism of the hiring of foreign coaches, mostly white and European, is long-standing. Former Nigerian national team coach Stephen Keshi was in charge of the team between 2011 and 2015. Shortly before the start of the 2013 AFCON, held in South Africa, Keshi gave an interview to the BBC and criticized the fact that African national federations prefer white coaches over local ones (BBC Sports 2013). According to Keshi, "The white

7 AFCON is commonly held during the European football season, between January and February.

8 Between 1990 and 2019, 16 editions of the AFCON were held. In seven of them, the coach of the winning team was European and in the other nine, the coaches were African. During this period, Maghreb teams won seven editions: Egypt four, Algeria two and Tunisia one. Among them, only Tunisia had a foreign coach. In the 2024 AFCON, 10 out of the 24 teams had European coaches (Menai and Stevens 2024).

guys are coming to Africa just for the money. They are not doing anything that we cannot do. I am not racist but that's just the way it is" (BBC Sports 2013, n.p.). The Nigerian coach also criticized the pressure imposed on coaches from Africa, given the patience granted to foreign professionals:

> African coaches - when [federations] employ them, [the federations] want them to win the World Cup, the Africa Cup of Nations and every game. Meanwhile, if you give a white person the same job, you tell the white person they need a year to adapt, to know the country and the players - they are told 'don't worry, take your team'. That is unprofessional and is one thing that is killing African football (BBC Sports 2013, n.p.).

It's very symbolic to remember that the 2013 edition of AFCON was won by Keshi's Nigeria, who beat the Burkina Faso team, coached by Belgian Paul Put, in the final.

This practice of reserving the position of national team coach for a foreigner, the vast majority of them white and European, can be seen as an extension of the colonial civilizational ideal, where the white man would bring progress to occupied lands and have the mission of civilizing Black people (Ferro 2017). Therefore, the AFCON can be interpreted as a space for post-colonial affirmation in Africa, where football operates as an instrument of continental identity, regional solidarity, and symbolic projection of institutional autonomy (Darby 2019; Giulianotti 2010). The championship challenges historical hierarchies of the global football system, marked by Eurocentrism.

Conclusion

Pan-Africanist thought and integration of the African continent are reflected in the African Cup of Nations and the Confederation of African Football through the creation of the organization and the tournament themselves: AFCON is a competition that involves all African football and CAF is a strong international entity that over the decades has known how to manage the differences between its members and create a continental union through sports. Both were important not only for the development of African football, but also for regional integration and the strengthening of a regional identity through the sport.

The fierce stance of African countries against FIFA's Eurocentrism, which led to a boycott due to the lack of places for teams from the continent at the 1966 World Cup and guaranteed a fixed place for Africans at the following World Cup, was an initial demonstration of the strength of African unity. With this attitude from Africans, international football began to see the continent in a different way, even seeking to take advantage of the situation, as Havelange did in his campaign for the FIFA presidency. Regional unity was also present at other times, such as in the stance of former CAF president Yidnekatchew Tessema, who called for Pan-Africanism at the 1974 AFCON and the union between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, which have a long history of partnerships and moments of tension, for the campaign to jointly host the AFCON in 2027.

Indirectly, AFCON and CAF have also served as spaces where Africans have challenged neocolonialism in football: the contestation of the participation of top African players in the tournament by their European clubs and the insistence of African dirigeants on having European as head coaches of their national teams generate protests and fruitful reflections within the European and African societies. This can also be indicated as ways in which the presence of Pan-Africanist thought and the ideal of integration of the African continent are reflected in the African Cup of Nations and the Confederation of African Football.

REFERENCES

Acheampong, Ernest Y., and Michel Raspaud. 2021. "Kwame Nkrumah's Overthrow and Its Effect on National Team Players (1957–1980)." *African Historical Review* 52 (1): 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/17532523.2022.2047282.

Adi, Hakim. 2022. Pan-africanismo: uma história. Edufba.

Adi, Hakim, and Mario S. Neto. 2022. "Pan-Africanism and Internationalism in 1945: "Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." *Revista Direito e Práxis* 13 (2): 830–860. https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2020/49493i

Agostino, Gilberto. 2011. *Vencer ou morrer: futebol, geopolítica e identidade nacional*. Mauad X.

Anderson, Benedict. 2008. *Comunidades imaginadas: reflexões sobre a origem e a difusão do nacionalismo*. Companhia das Letras.

Asante, S. K. B., and David Chanaiwa. 2010. "O Pan-africanismo e a Integração Regional." In *História geral da África, VIII: África desde 1935*, edited by Ali A. Mazrui and Christophe Wondji. Brasília: UNESCO.

BBC Sports. 2013. "Keshi raises concerns over white coaches in Africa." *BBC Sports,* January 04. https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/20899458.

Bettine, Marco. 2023. *3'S dos Megaeventos esportivos - soft power, sportswashing and sports diplomacy: as Copas do Mundo e os países periféricos*. Annablume.

Boniface, Pascal. 1998. *Géopolitique du football*. Editions Complexe.

CAF. 2024. "CAF Increases AFCON Prize Money by 40%." *CAF*, January 04. https://www.cafonline.com/caf-africa-cup-of-nations/news/caf-increases-afcon-prize-money-by-40/.

Cheeseman, Nick, Michaela Collord, and Filip Reyntjens. 2018. "War and democracy: The legacy of conflict in East Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 56 (1): 31-61. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000623.

Darby, Paul. 2019. "Politics, resistance and patronage: the African boycott of the 1966 World Cup and its ramifications." *Soccer and Society* 20 (7-8): 936-947. https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2019.1680494.

East African Community. n.d. "History of the EAC." *East African Community*. https://www.eac.int/eac-history.

Eken, Sena. 1979. "Breakup of the East African Community." *Finance & Development* https://www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/journals/022/0016/004/article-A010-en.pdf.

Everett, Sami. 2022. "The beautiful game between Algeria and France." *Middle East Report Online*, October 25. https://merip.org/2022/10/the-beautiful-game-between-algeria-and-france/.

Ferro, Marc. 2017. *A colonização explicada a todos*. Editora UNESP.

Freitas, Guilherme S. P. de. 2022. "A relação entre a Copa do Mundo de futebol FIFA 2022 e o projeto "ano do retorno" em Gana." *Revista África(s)* 9 (18): 106-122. https://www.revistas.uneb.br/index.php/africas/article/view/17831.

Freitas, Guilherme S. P. de, and Felipe A. Honorato. 2025. "The Role of Football in the Algerian Independence: A Revolutionary Case of FLN Football Team." In *Arab and Middle Eastern Sport: Critical Muslim Perspectives*, edited by Adam E.Ali and Umer Hussain. Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1476-285420250000027003.

Gallagher, Danny. 2021. "'Of course I will go... I hate choosing between club and country': Furious Sebastien Haller slams the 'disrespect' shown to the Africa Cup of Nations after being asked if he will pick the Ivory Coast over Ajax in January." *Daily Mail,* December 29. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-10353549/Sebastien-Haller-slams-disrespect-AFCON-Ajax-question.html.

Giulianotti, Richard. 2010. *Sociologia do futebol: dimensões históricas e socioculturais do esporte das multidões*. Nova Alexandria.

Gyimah, Edmund O. 2024. "Close to 2 billion people watched AFCON 2023-Motsepe." *The New Times,* February 10. https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/14413/sports/afcon-2023/close-to-2-billion-people-watched-afcon-2023-motsepe.

Hayatou, Isaa. 1998. "L'importance du football dans les pays africains." In *Géopolitique du Football*, edited by Pascal Boniface. Editions Complexe.

Ilevbare, Solomon, and Gayle McPherson. 2025. "Isomorphism in sport diplomacy: examining the nexus between international law, sportswashing and the contested role of mega events owners." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 17 (3): 553-568. https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2025.2457755.

Kamate, Abdramane, and Richard Banégas. 2010. "Football, clivages identitaires et conflit politique en Côte d'Ivoire." *Politique africaine* 118 (2): 85-102. https://shs.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2010-2-page-85?lang=fr.

Khapoya, Vincent B. 2015. *A experiência africana*. Vozes.

Kibara, Obadiah N., Nicholas M. Odhiambo, and Josephine M. Njuguna. 2012. "Tourism And Economic Growth In Kenya: An Empirical Investigation." *International Business & Economics Research Journal* 11 (5): 517-528. https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v11i5.6970.

Legum, Colin. 1965. Pan-Africanism: a short political guide. Frederick A. Praeger.

Li, Tianyue. 2023. "Miracle or Debacle? Anti-Colonialism, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism in Reports of the Friendly Football Match between Kenya and Ghana in 1965." *Journal of Social Science Humanities and Literature* 6 (6): 41-50. https://doi.org/10.53469/jsshl.2023.06(06).08.

Maloney, Wendy. 2019. "African-American History Month: First Pan-African Congress." *Library of Congress Blog,* February 19. https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2019/02/african-american-history-month-first-pan-african-congress/.

Menai, Sara, and Rob Stevens. 2024. "Afcon 2023: Ivory Coast triumph 'revenge' for Emerse Fae after early retirement." *BBC Sports Africa,* February 14. https://www.bbc.com/sport/africa/68289633.

Mulugeta, Daniel. 2025. "Continental Pan-Africanism: The First All-African People's Conference and the Struggle for Africa's Independence." *Critical African Studies* 17 (2): 223–40. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21681392.2024.2443407

Nkrumah, Kwame. (1965) 2023. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Marxists Internet Archive. Edition ePub. https://www.marxists.org.

Nyikana, Siyabulela, and Tembi M. Tichaawa. 2020. "Revisiting sport and tourism interrelationships: the case of Cameroon." *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites* 29 (2): 756–771. https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.29229-504.

Nyikana, Siyabulela, and Tembi M. Tichaawa. 2018. "Sport Tourism as a Local Economic Development Enhancer for Emerging Destinations."

Euro Economica 1 (37): 70-83. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327308092_Sport_Tourism_as_a_Local_Economic_Development_Enhancer_for_Emerging_Destinations.

Okhonmina, Stephen. 2009. "The African Union: pan-africanist aspirations and the challenge of African unity." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3 (4): 85-100. https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol3no4/3.4AfricanUnion.pdf .

Okolie-Osemene, James, and Rosemary I. Okoh. 2014. "The Role of Nigeria Football Federation in the Denouement of Premier League Seasonal Disputes: Issues and Prospects." *Recreation and Society in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 5 (1): 1-14. https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/rasaala/article/view/3150.

Kasaija, Philip. 2009. "The State of Constitutionalism in East Africa: The Role of the East African Community – 2007." In *Constitutionalism in East Africa Progress, Challenges and Prospects in 2007*, edited by Wanza Kioko and. Kituo cha Katiba.

Pérez, Levi. 2018. *The Impact of the Africa Cup of Nations on European Professional Football*. UEFA Research Grant Programme 2017/18. N.p.: UEFA Academy.

Portela, Jonathan D. 2018. "Os Black Stars chegam ao mercado: o jogador ganês na geopolítica das relações internacionais entre Inglaterra e Gana no pós colonialismo (1996-2014)." Master's diss., Universidade Federal de São Paulo. https://repositorio.unifesp.br/handle/11600/52171.

Postlethwaite, Verity, Claire Jenkin, and Emma Sherry. 2023. "Sport diplomacy: an integrative review." *Sport Management Review* 26 (3): 361-382. https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054.

Richard, Yann. 2014. "Integração regional, regionalização, regionalismo: as palavras e as coisas." *Confins* 20. http://journals.openedition.org/confins/8939.

Rocha, Luiz G. B. S. P. 2019. "A dança das cadeiras: a eleição de João Havelange à presidência da FIFA (1950-1974)." Phd diss., Universidade de São Paulo. https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-28022020-175445/pt-br.php.

Ross, Elliot. 2013. "Africa Cup of Nations: A brief history." *The Guardian,* January 17. https://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/jan/17/african-cup-nations-history.

Stein, Leandro. 2023. "Salif Keita inaugurou uma história de craques e fincou a bandeira de Mali na Europa." *Trivela*, September 06. https://trivela.com.br/africa/salif-keita-obituario/.

ABSTRACT

Pan-Africanism is an ideology that has two basic ideas at its core: "the common heritage of people of African descent throughout the world and the mandate of African peoples to work for each other's interests and well-being everywhere". Through the years, it was transformed into a mobilizing ideology: a development project and a strategy to achieve political unity in Africa through continental cooperation. This paper discusses, through an analysis and synthesizing of the existing research, how the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) are examples of an effective Pan Africanism in the decades following decolonization. For this, an historical overview of the timelapse from the end of European colonialism and the dissemination of Pan-Africanism within Africa to nowadays is made, showing how both AFCON and CAF have been used for reinforcement of national and regional identities, regional integration and international projection of Africa. The Confederation of African Football was founded in 1957 by only four countries. It gained important political independence over the decades and today is one of the most influential and wealthiest organizations in Africa. Africa's main men's football tournament, the African Cup of Nations, popularly known as AFCON, was also born in the wake of independence on the continent. Played for the first time in 1957 by just three teams — Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia —, the event grew and over the years began to encompass new African nations that were emerging from the emancipation struggle, helping to sow the ideal of Pan-Africanism. Football quickly proved to be an important diplomatic, political and integration tool for the leaders of independent Africa. This could be seen, for example, through the support given by African confederations for the candidacy of Brazil's João Havelange for the presidency of FIFA.

KEYWORDS

African Cup of Nations. Confederation of African Football. Football. Pan-Africanism. Regional integration.

Received on September 8, 2025
Accepted on February 24, 2026[9]

9 How to cite: Freitas, Guilherme Silva Pires de, and Felipe Antonio Honorato. 2025. "The Confederation of African Football (CAF) and the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) as examples of an effective Pan-Africanism: a brief discussion." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies,* 10 (20): 82-104. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.150089.

PAN-SOMALISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND CRISIS OF THE SOMALI STATE: INTEGRATION AND IRREDENTISM

Rafaela Pinto Serpa[1][2]

Introduction

The collapse of the Somali State in 1991 constitutes one of the most emblematic episodes of state disintegration on the African continent, with the country remaining embroiled in a civil war that is still present in some regions today. In this regard, Somalia in the 1990s can be defined as a "Collapsed State", that is, an extreme version of "Failed State". According to Rotberg's (2003) classification, the State in collapse is characterized by a complete authority vacuum within its borders, resulting in the division of sub-regions under the control of substate actors that privatize the security apparatus, markets, trade and external political-economic relations. These actors became known as Warlords.

The literature on this process (and on the African statehood in general) has been marked by interpretations that privilege identitary aspects of the Somali society — the idea that permanent clan fragmentation has made the construction of a modern nation-state impossible (Lewis 1988). Therefore, at times as the cause, at times as the effect, the debates about "Failed States" and "identitary disputes" are majorly present on the analysis about the post-colonial states crisis.

1 Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: rafaela.p.serpa@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1128-6796.

2 This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001, through a post-doctoral fellowship granted under the research project "Segurança e Defesa na África: Características, Mudanças e Impactos no Entorno Estratégico Brasileiro", funded by the Academic Cooperation Program in National Defense (Pro-Defense) - Notice no. 36/2023.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.154960

Conversely, this work starts from an idea of broad identity that existed in the region — the *somallitude*[3]. The existence of both identitary forms, though conflicting (fragmented on one side and cohesive on the other), does not explain the matter in itself, and demonstrates the necessity of shifting the analytical focus. Therefore, this article maintains that the state collapse must be understood based on the inherent contradictions of the State-building process in Somalia amid the underdevelopment condition.

In this sense, it is argued that the pan-somalism — understood as the political project of reunification of the territories inhabited by Somali populations in the Horn of Africa — constituted the ideological axis of the formation of the Somali State, simultaneously operating as the national cohesion vector and the structural fragilization factor. The central hypothesis of this article is that pan-somalism assumed a contradictory character throughout the State formation process. If, at its origin, it acted as a nation-building mechanism, by providing a common political horizon and legitimizing the nascent state, its transformation into an irredentist project by the Somali elite shifted the priority from internal construction to external territorial projection. This shift not only exceeded the material capacities of the Somali State, but also reconfigured the very content of the national interest. In this manner, pan-somalism, by binding itself to the territorial reunification agenda, ceased to express a collective project of integration and development, reflecting instead the interests of elite fractions that used nationalism as an instrument of political legitimacy.

The objectives of this article consist, therefore, in analyzing pan-somalism in its dual dimension — as a national integration project and as an irredentist project —, highlighting how the tension between these dimensions contributed, dialectically, to the construction and crisis of the Somali State. To this end, this article examines, firstly, the origins of pan-somalism in Somali politics following the Second World War, emphasising its role in the formation of a relatively cohesive national identity, which oriented the process of unification between the British and Italian Somalilands, from 1960 onwards. Subsequently, it analyzes the external projection of this project, evidenced by the tensions and conflicts with neighboring states, such as Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya, in the context of the irredentist agenda. Finally, it seeks to demonstrate how the prioritization of this expansionist dimension, to the detriment of the internal construction, contributed to the

3 The idea of *somallitude* exemplifies a sense of unity present among the peoples of the region, something as "being Somali". There was a collective consciousness of belonging that surpassed the fixed territorial limits imposed after (Farah and Eno 2022).

fragilization of the State and its subsequent crisis, as reflected in the Ogaden War and its consequences.

From the methodological point of view, this article adopts a hypothetico-deductive approach, drawing on a historical and materialist analysis, and therefore qualitative. The analysis is structured in three levels — national; regional; and systemic —, which overlap in concentric circles of mutual dependency. It is understood that the articulation of the three levels of analysis (systemic, regional, and national) can contribute to the perception, on the one hand, of the constraints offered by the structure, while simultaneously, on the other, allows for the observation of the states' (and of social forces that compose them) capacity for agency in face of these restrictions (Pereira and Serpa 2024).

In that regard, pan-somalism's development and its implications for Somali politics are understood as products of this interaction: at the regional level, the territorial disputes and power asymmetries in the Horn of Africa imposed limits and intensified its conflictive character; at the systemic level, the Cold War reconfigured alliances and expanded the Somali state's room for maneuver. Thus, pan-somalism's trajectory is situated at the intersection of these dynamics, which conditioned both its possibilities and its destabilizing effects.

The Origins of Pan-Somalism: Identity and Territory

Somalia is a different case from the majority of African States in terms of the presence of a common identity before the colonial divisions. While most of the independent African countries were composed of states created under the colonial regime that fought to become more coherent nations, Somalia, in contrast, was seen as a nation that fought to transform itself into a more stable and integrated state (Ki-Zerbo 1972; Elaigwu and Mazrui 2011).

In fact, even before the consolidation of state borders, there was a collective consciousness of belonging that surpassed the fixed territorial limits later imposed. The so-called "*somallitude*" — anchored in a common ethnolinguistic matrix, in the sunni islamism as the dominant religion, in pastoral sociocultural practices and in similar colonial experiences — configured a potential base for the constitution of a robust national character (Touval 1963; Carrillo 2011; Lewis 2008).

The common language played a fundamental role in the construction of Somali nationalism, with Somalia being one of the rare cases in Africa of a nation with linguistic homogeneity, where about 95% of the population shares the same maternal language, which is therefore not that of the colonizer. Even before the development of an official writing in the 1970s, the oral literature and the poetry were the main foundations of the national identity (Metz 1992; Chonka and Healy 2021). Known as the "land of poets", the oratory and the poems — exemplified by the artworks of the nationalist leader Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, known throughout the whole territory — were powerful political and cultural instruments for mobilizing different groups and disseminating a sense of unity that clearly differentiated the Somalis from their neighbours (Samatar 1982).

The Islam practice, majorly sunni with Sufi orientation, functions as an unifying bond of universalist character (Carrillo 2011). Traditional religious orders, such as Qadiriyah and Salihiyah, historically worked hard to eradicate tribal divisions, emphasizing the common religious bond. But Islam goes beyond its religious dimension, projecting itself as a structural pillar of the very social, political and symbolic Somali organization. On the one hand, the Somali national fundamental myth, the common genealogy, which connects the different clan lineages to two mythical ancestors — Samaale and Sab[4] —, dates back to the Qurayshi, the direct lineage of the Prophet Mohammed (Lewis 2008; Samatar 1988). On the other hand, the sultanates represented the first form of centralized and supraclanic political organization among the Somalis, though without territorial expression. They were organised around cities such as Zeila and Mogadishu, which flourished as commercial and religious centres between the IX and XII centuries, a product of the encounter between local inhabitants and Arab and Persian immigrants[5] (Fasi and Hrbek 2010; Samatar 1988).

The sense of islamic unity also manifests as a political and military resistance vector among the Somalis. Historical conflicts, such as the cam-

4 According to the traditions, from these common ancestors, the Somali people branches out into two lineage groups: the Sab and the Samaale. However, the social divisions based on lineages are also based on the economic vocation: the Sab are partially sedentary, based on a mixed economy (agriculture and animal husbandry) and live in the South; while the Samaale are nomadic herders predominant in the rest of the territory. Therefore, it becomes evident that there is an interdependence relation between the mode of production and the identity (Samatar 1988).

5 Which gave birth to a coastal elite linked to regional powers such as Yemen and Oman (Samatar 1988).

paigns conducted by the Imam Ahmed Grand[6] against christian Ethiopia in the XVIth century, illustrate how the islamic faith was mobilized as the organizing principle of war and political cohesion. Such historical experiences consolidated a tradition of struggle against what is perceived as foreign domination and infidelity, simultaneously reinforcing the internal unity and the distinction between the Somalis and their neighbours (Diallo 2021; Carrillo 2011).

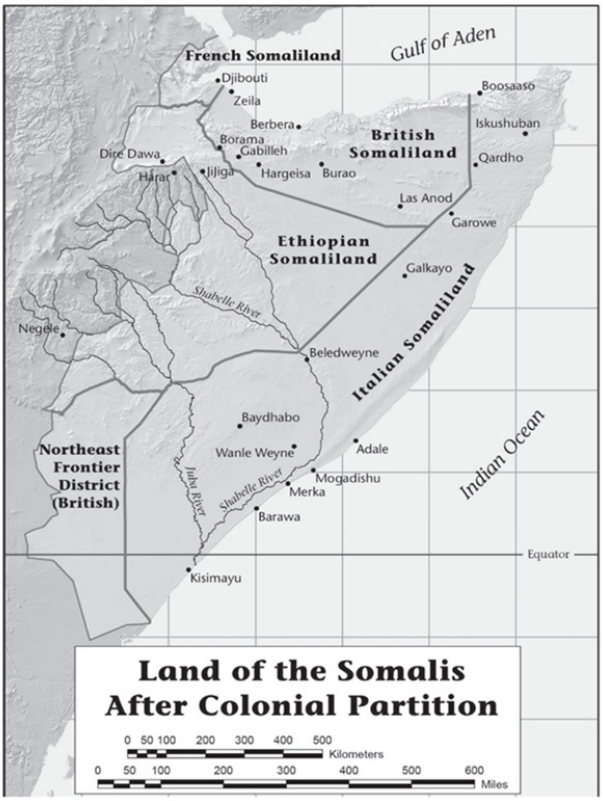
The historical association of the Somali people with the territory of the Horn of Africa is another pillar of their identity, with the region being historically known as the "land where the Somalis live". This territorial connection is inseparable from the nomadic way of life and the pastoral economy, which are common to the great majority of the population and have molded the occupation of the space throughout the centuries. The arid nature of the region, defined by vast savannas and scarcity of hydric resources, demands constant seasonal migrations for the subsistence of the livestock, which established a profound interdependence between the pastoral mode of production and the identity of the people. These two last aspects were visibly the most affected by the colonial divisions in the XIXth century (Samatar 1988; Cassanelli 1982).

The impact of colonialism over the Somali people represented a profound rupture in their historical trajectory, disrupting their socioeconomic and political reality to serve the interests of imperial powers (Acosta 2011; Wallerstein 2005). Unlike other African regions, where colonization grouped together distinct peoples, in the Horn of Africa it fragmented a pre-colonial identity, dividing it in five territorial jurisdictions: the British Somaliland, the Italian Somaliland, the French Somaliland (Djibouti), the Ogaden (under Ethiopian rule) and the Northern Frontier District (in British Kenya)[7] (Andrés and Ledesma 2023; Yuusuf 2021; Lewis 1988).

6 The stories of Ahmed as a popular Somali hero were told for generations and would be emphasized in the context of the construction of Somali nationalist movements from the 20th century. He represented the three fundamental pillars of the construction of Somali nationality: i) the common Somali genealogy and the leadership over the different traditional groups; ii) Islam as an unifying force; and iii) the fight against the rival Ethiopia (Carrillo 2011; Touval 1963).

7 The systematic exploitation of the Horn of Africa and the deepening of colonialism in the region were decisively driven by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. By linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, the construction of the canal connected Europe directly to the Indian Ocean, India and the Far East, transforming the Somali coast into an area of extreme geostrategic importance (Pankhurst and Cassanelli 2011).

Figure 1: The five somali territories after the colonial division



Source: Samatar (2019).

Colonialism also promoted a deep transformation in the Somali way of life, particularly by disrupting pastoral nomadism, which constituted the economic base of approximately 80% of the population. The imposition of borders interrupted traditional seasonal migrations in search for water and pastures (Samatar 1988; Cassanelli 1982). Simultaneously, European powers reconfigured the social organization by using typical "divide and rule" strategies: on the one hand, they promoted hierarchization and reification of clan identities previously more fluid, instrumentalizing rivalries to facilitate political control, especially in the context of the British indirect government; on the other hand, they fomented the formation of co-opted local elites and of an urban bureaucratic bourgeoisie responsible for mediating the access to resources and power, which contributed to the deepening of the cleavage between the commercialized urban centres and the predominant nomadic interior (Chazan et al. 1999; Clapham 2023; Visentini et al. 2014).

A singular aspect of colonialism in Somalia was the role of Ethiopia. Under the command of Menelik II, the Ethiopian Empire expanded its borders into the lowlands inhabited by Somalis (Ogaden and Harar) as a defensive strategy to create a "strategic depth" against the Europeans. The Ethiopian victory against Italy at the Battle of Adwa (1896) consolidated Ethiopia as a sovereign state, consequently, it actively participated in the partition of Somali territory through treaties with the British and Italians. For the Somalis, Ethiopia came to be seen as a colonialist power whose territorial claims were based on national myths of an ancient Abyssinian Empire (Clapham 2023; Ki-Zerbo 1972; Andrés and Ledesma 2023).

In the face of European domination and the pressure of the Ethiopian Empire (both linked to Christianity), Islam re-emerged as a patriotic and unifying force of resistance. Religious orders and Muslim authorities became the main opposition poles, utilizing faith to mitigate tribal divisions and to mobilize the population against what they considered a foreign and infidel invasion. The Somali resistance against colonial rule reached its zenith with the Dervish Movement, led by Sayyid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, known to the colonizers as "Mad Mullah", which insurrection, spanning about two decades, went so far as to achieve recognition of a territory of its own under the authority of Mohamed himself (Samatar 1979; Bade 2020; Sheik-Abdi 1977). The Movement's defeat in 1920, including even the pioneering use of aerial bombardments, secured colonial rule, but did not eliminate the political and symbolic legacy of the resistance (Irons 2013). On the contrary, Hassan's figure was progressively elevated to the condition of national myth, appropriated and mobilized by the nationalist movements, which would emerge amidst the aftermath of the Second World War as the foundational symbol of the struggle for the creation of a sovereign Somali State (Chonka and Healy 2021; Yuusuf 2021).

Simultaneously, the ideal of a Greater Somalia, based on the unification of the divided Somali territories, gained force amidst the geopolitical dynamics of the Second World War. After the conquest of Ethiopia by the Italians in 1936, the *Africa Orientale Italiana*, a vast territory that grouped together various provinces, was established under fascist regime. In this period, between 1936 and 1941, the Ogaden region was, in the sole instance since the colonial partition, administratively reunited to Somalia by Italian hands. Mussolini utilized pan-somalism sentiments to justify this territorial expansion and part of the Somali nationalist movement allied itself with the Italians, believing that this unification would be the first step towards a future total independence (Sheik-Abdi 1977; Touval 1963).

After the victory over the Italians in 1941, Great Britain established a British Military Administration (BMA) over the Somali territory and the occupied Ethiopian Empire. Under British mandate, the Ogaden region and the "Reserved Areas" (such as the Haud[8]) remained linked to Mogadishu's administration, and the idea of a "Greater Somalia" became an obsession to the English, who would have an important role in the construction of the pan-somali movement by directly supporting the creation of Somali political parties (Clapham 2023; Ahmed 1995; Yuusuf 2021).

Figure 2: "Greater Somalia" map and its divisions among the current states of the Horn of Africa

Source: Møller (2009).

8 The Haud is a region of rich pastures, responsible for sustaining 50% of the total population of the British Somaliland protectorate. In 1897 and in 1954 (after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the Second World War), the British transferred the Haud to the Ethiopian administration, even under protests of the Somali population (Lewis 1988).

In 1946, amidst the negotiations for the end of the Second World War, the British politician Ernest Bevin proposed what would become known as "Bevin Plan", which suggested the incorporation of Italian Somaliland and parts of Ethiopia to the British Somaliland, creating a single unity under the trusteeship of the Great Britain. Although the plan aimed to maintain the monopoly of British influence in the region, it was widely celebrated by the Somalis, as it internationally legitimized the objective of the unification of the Somali inhabited territories. However, a commission formed by the four victorious powers of the Second World War — USA, USSR, France and Great Britain — decided, in 1948, for the restoration of the pre-1936 borders, ending the plans of maintaining British rule over the whole region and keeping Somalia divided (Touval 1963; Clapham 2023; Barnes 2007).

In 1950, the territories of the former Italian Somaliland were, once again, placed under Italian trusteeship, though with an independence date guaranteed by the UN for 1960. During these ten years, the Europeans would have to gradually insert Somalis in the administration. Concerning the territories in dispute with Ethiopia, in 1950 the Ogaden returned to Ethiopia. The Haud also did return to Ethiopian sovereignty, but only in 1954, amidst intense protest of the population of the protectorate (Millman 2014; Touval 1963).

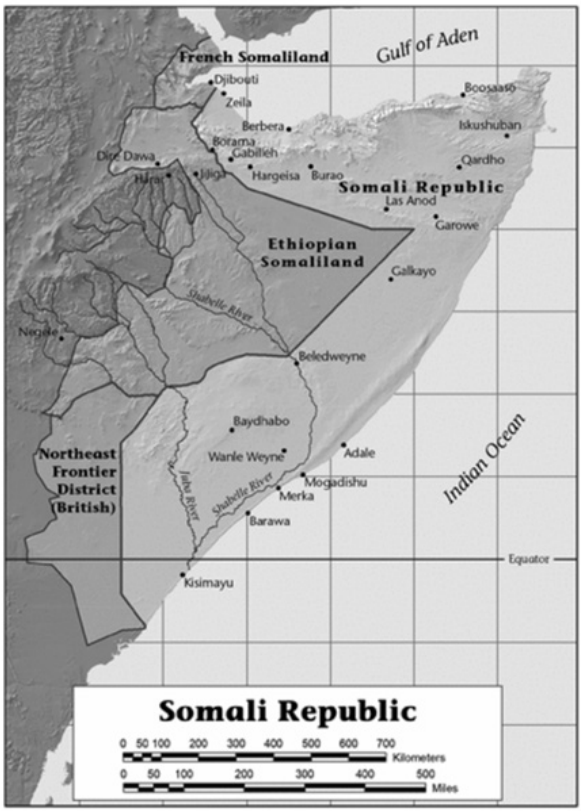
The Union of the Two Somalias: Pan-Somalism as National Integration

The independence and unification of two of the five Somali territories in 1960 was a historic milestone. The creation of a State led by Somalis was being made four decades after Mad Mullah's resistance. For the Somalis, the victory over colonialism and the division imposed by it was unfolding. The merger of the legislatures of both Somalilands in Mogadishu, on July 1st, 1960, under the principle of "one banner, one president, one parliament and one government" symbolized the political triumph of the pan-somalist project as a national unifying ideology (Samatar 2016).

However, according to Nkrumah (2025), the conquest of the "political reign" and the formal integration of the two territories represented only the first step of a much deeper process of state building and national edification, which, in general, marked the post-colonial African States (Elaigwu and Mazrui 2011; Wallerstein 2005). Despite the existence of a Somali identity prior to colonialism — a central element for the unification —, such identity

was not enough to ensure, by itself, political stability and the institutional consolidation of the new state. In this sense, it becomes necessary to theoretically situate the limits of this previous identity, distinguishing it from the expressive historical form adopted by the nation under capitalism.

Figure 3: Map of the Somali Republic in 1960, showing the union of British and Italian Somaliland



Source: Samatar (2019).

In pre-modern contexts, the collective identity was predominantly associated with cultural, linguistic and ethnic shared elements, approaching what is understood today as "ethnicity" (Rivas 1981; Amin 2006). However, under capitalism, the nation is intrinsically linked to the state, therefore, it starts to constitute itself as not only a society, but also as a delimited territory, an integrated economy, and a centralized political apparatus (Bresser-Pe-

reira 2008; Arrighi 2016; Amin 2006). This process corresponded to the formation of the European modern state, in which the constitution of the nation and the consolidation of the state occurred in a relatively articulated and endogenous manner, resulting in the shaping of the nation-state as a political-territorial unity, a defining key of capitalism[9] (Tilly 1996; Hobsbawm 2008; Arrighi 2016).

Yet, this trajectory assumes distinct characteristics in the periphery of the system, where the formation of national States was frequently subordinated to colonial expansion and global capitalist dynamics (Amin 2006; Acosta 2011; Wallerstein 2005). In this regard, the Republic of Somalia faced the challenge of consolidating its national identity while fighting to establish a cohesive and functional state, amidst the search for overcoming underdevelopment, and under the geopolitical conditionings of the Cold War. Along these lines, according to Brucan (1983), this process is not something spontaneous or natural, but the result of a deliberate political project, in which the State action acts as a catalyst for the construction of a national consciousness, the definition of common interests and the mobilization of power resources necessary for its affirmation[10].

In the case of Somalia, the unification also brought the concrete challenge of integrating two distinct colonial formations. There were 70 years of British and Italian rule on each Somali territory, creating and accentuating regional differences. Distinct economic, political, and administrative patterns created significant social disparities, primarily among the urban elites. In the institutional plan, divergent administrative systems coexisted, marked by the heritage of the British common law in the north and by juridical Italian forms and customary law in the south (Yuusuf 2021). The very Somali

9 In this process, the nation-state functions as the source of political legitimacy and as an element of social cohesion in the domestic level; while in the international scenario, it acts as an instrument for projecting its own interests, hence, organizing and sustaining the capitalist expansion in international scale (Arrighi 2016; Brucan 1983).

10 Brucan (1983) utilized three concepts to explain this process: national character, national interest, and national power. The first one pertains to the historical production of a common political consciousness, capable of expanding the restricted identitary horizons and linking them to the authority and the political community represented by the state. The second one refers to the formulation of strategic objectives which orient state action, being able to express both particularistic interests of the dominant fractions and a collective development and national cohesion project. The third one corresponds to the state's capacity of concentrating and mobilizing material, administrative, coercive and infrastructural resources necessary for the internal integration and external projection. In this perspective, such dimensions do not emerge spontaneously, but are historically produced by political and institutional state action within the process of national formation.

language remained, until 1972, exclusively oral, which compelled the state administration to operate in English and Italian, creating a barrier between the state and its population. Only a few public officials were bilingual, precluding the majority of the administration from communicating in written form (Samatar 1988).

Those difficulties were aggravated by concrete material limitations. The infrastructure inherited from the colonial period was oriented towards the connection to the metropoles, rather than to the internal integration of the territory. Communications between the north and the south were extremely precarious: the land-based connection between Mogadishu and Hargeisa, of approximately 850 km, could take days to traverse and was frequently disrupted during rainy seasons; direct telephonic networks did not exist for months after the unification, and the aerial transportation was limited. On the economic front, commerce between the two regions was practically inexistant, tariffs and currencies were distinct, and the circulation of goods and services remained restricted. The very standardization of salaries, administrative systems and security forces implied elevated political costs, insofar as they could favor one region in detriment of the other (Lewis 1988; Metz 1992).

Integration, thus, was not only an administrative task, but a deep political process in which the control of the state apparatus became the object of dispute between regional elites. In this sense, while collective identity was relatively consolidated among the Somalis, the state authority needed to be built and legitimized in the whole territory[11] (Lewis 1988; Samatar 2016; Touval 1963). But the process of independence in Somalia was not unified under a great national party, just as there was not a leadership with unanimous support and representative of all subnational differences — the Wallerstein's so-called integrating institutions[12]. Furthermore, the centripetal force of nationalism, initially propelled by the independence process, started to weaken in the face of the persistent socioeconomic disparities and

11 It is precisely this tension that Elaigwu and Mazrui (2011) define as identity and authority "twin crises": the former has as its primary theatre the nation, that is, the production of a sense of common political belonging; the latter manifests itself above all in the state, to the extent that it seeks to affirm its institutional legitimacy, coordination capacity and monopoly of coercion. In pre-colonial contexts, both tend to reinforce one another: the fragility of national integration weakens state legitimacy, while the institutional weakness of the state compromises the consolidation of a sense of shared political community.

12 According to Wallerstein (2005), "integrating institutions" are symbolic and political structures through which the new state diffuses norms, produces common loyalties and makes its presence tangible in the everyday life of the population. In the post-colonial African context, above all, the national party and the national hero stand out, both originating from the anticolonial struggle and being central to the construction of political unity.

the incapacity of the state to produce an effective integration (Amin 2006; Wallerstein 1973; Nkrumah 1977).

Therefore, the expansion of the horizontal and vertical belonging character — that is, the incorporation of different groups into a broader and equal political community — did not occur. According to Brucan (1983), the vertical dimension refers to the progressive acceptance of the legitimacy of a central government by the members of a pre-existing entity, by identifying this central government as the symbol of the nation. This process involved not only the acceptance of the coercive authority of the state, but also the symbolic identification with the political community represented by the central government[13] (Brucan 1983). In turn, the horizontal dimension implies the acceptance of equality between all members of the civic corps, recognizing the rights of all to share a common history, resources, moral values and other state aspects.

This horizontal belonging is even harder to construct, since it is related to the development of the state and its broadening across all sectors of society, a process opposed to the functioning of the capitalist state (Pereira and Xerri 2020). As Amin (2006) and Wallerstein (1973) indicate, the absence of material transformation of life conditions limits the horizontal character of national belonging, making the consolidation of long-lasting national projects difficult.

According to Nkrumah (2025, 120), "every independence movement in a colonial context has two elements: the demand for political liberty and the revolt against poverty and exploration"[14]. Therefore, overcoming underdevelopment becomes central to state building in Africa and defines the political positions within the state. Giovanni Arrighi (2006) emphasizes that Africa inherited from the colonial and pre-colonial phases an economic and political structure that left little room for the construction of viable national economies. The economic power remained controlled by the international capital, for the unequal insertion of Africa into the international labour division through colonialism prevented the formation of a strong local bourgeoisie (Amin 2006). The contemporary African elite — the governing class —, thus, is born out of colonial structures, emerging from co-opted elites, and maintains its ties to foreign capital (Nkrumah 1977; Samoff 1982).

13 Secession attempts constituted, thus, challenges to the central government authority and to the sense of common identity (Elaigwu and Mazrui 2011).

14 Our translation. From the original: "*todo movimento de independência em uma situação colonial contém dois elementos: a demanda por liberdade política e a revolta contra a pobreza e a exploração*" (Nkrumah 2025, 120).

Reflecting this logic, Somalia inherited a fragile economy, marked by a strong external dependency and limited capacity. The absence of an autonomous national bourgeoisie and the centrality of foreign capital implied that the economic control remained, to a large extent, beyond the productive reach of the state (Samatar 2016; Samatar 1988). The governing elite, derived from colonial structures — characterized as "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" — found in the control of the state apparatus the main means of reproduction of its own interests. In this sense, the state became not only the national integration instrument, but also a privileged space of dispute and accumulation (Samoff 1982).

As a fraction of the capitalist class, the internal bourgeoisie is part of the class alliance that composes the structure of political-economic domination. This class legitimizes itself as such through its dominance over the state, thus, the national interest in this moment resides in the interests of maintaining the capitalist socioeconomic structures (Brucan 1983).

In this manner, throughout the 1960s the civil governments maintained, to a large extent, the economic structures inherited from colonialism, deepening the dependence on foreign investments and external aid. The capital attraction policy and the maintenance of foreign control over strategic sectors, such as the banana industry, restricted the possibilities for an autonomous development. Furthermore, the few development projects focused on urban areas and depended almost entirely on external aid, while the government marginalized and taxed the nomads. Despite the influx of millions of dollars from various international donors to cover commercial deficits, expenses concentrated in bureaucracy and defense, increasing the external debt to 48 millions dollars by 1968 (Laitin and Samatar 1984; Samatar 1987).

At last, the electoral process in 1969, in which dozens of parties and more than a thousand candidates disputed only 123 seats, exposed the logic of bargaining for public offices as the easiest path to the enrichment of the elite. The perception of the state as a mere object of dispute between competing groups corroded the credibility of institutions and deepened the structural fragility of the post-colonial model. This scenario of exhaustion culminated in rupture in 1968, with the rise to power of Siad Barre through a military coup (Laitin 1976; Samatar 1988).

Inserted in a broader context of crisis in post-colonial states and rise of socialist oriented military regimes in Africa[15], the new regime presented itself as an alternative capable of overcoming the limits of the previous period, articulating a project of political centralization, economic reorganization and ideological mobilization under the banner of "scientific socialism". The socialist oriented regime in Somalia rose to power, therefore, by a coup d'état (Visentini 2020). In fact, the Armed Forces were one of the few developed institutions in the young states and assumed the role of national unifying entity, above tribal divisions and mindful of the social reality of the country. While a great number of these military leaders had little or no Marxist theoretical formation, they saw in the socialist model a way of centralizing power, asserting national sovereignty and promoting development (Markakis 1986; Visentini 2020). Above all, the USSR was a "model" of development and centralized, sovereign and multinational state (Visentini 2025).

Therefore, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine became appealing to the African states in the 1970s because it offered a series of solutions adapted to the political, economic and social necessities of these countries. In its first years, Mohamed Siad Barre's regime sought to implement a range of measures to promote what they called self-sufficiency: nationalization of strategic sectors, formulation of development plans and expansion of state presence in the rural areas (Samatar 1988; Laitin 1976). One of the greatest milestones of this period was the alphabetization campaign in 1974, which officialized a latin writing form to the Somali language and mobilized students to promote literacy among nomadic populations, elevating the alphabetization rate from almost zero to more than 50% in a few months, and strengthening the bond between the state and the rural population (Samatar 1988). Simultaneously, the regime sought to utilize nationalism — and, in particular, pan-somalism — as an instrument of cohesion, with the objective to replace subnational loyalties with an identity centered around the state (Ledesma 2018).

However, despite these advances, the structural limitations that marked the formation of the Somali state were not substantially overcome. The economic base remained fragile, external dependency persisted, now linked to the socialist countries, and the administrative capacity of the state showed itself to be insufficient to sustain, in the long term, the proposed

15 The crisis of young African states was amplified by the economic crisis which spread throughout the periphery of the capitalist system (Clapham 1996), triggering social mobilizations propelled by leftist and nationalist forces, strengthening revolutionary movements in the Third World and fueling a wave of anti-imperialist and socialist revolutions (Halliday, 1989). Thus, the balance of power at a global level and the economic crisis affecting the capitalist powers deepened the internal African crisis and inspired socialist responses.

transformation project. Gradually, the initial impulse of the regime was getting contained by these restrictions, and the strategy of centralization and ideological mobilization started to reproduce, in new forms, patterns that were already present in the previous decade (Samatar 1987, 1988).

In this regard, even though the 1970s were marked by relative advances concerning the strengthening of the state apparatus and the attempt to reorganize the economy, such initiatives proved to be, ultimately, limited. The intensification of the state's external projection, articulated with the maintenance of the irredentist pan-somali ideal, by the state elite, led to direct involvement in the conflict against Ethiopia. The magnitude of the Ogaden War, as well as the subsequent defeat, not only acutely exposed the material limits of the Somali state, but also compromised the very advances previously achieved. The rupture with the Soviet Union and the consequent distancing from the socialist project contributed to the disarticulation of the regime's political and ideological bases (Samatar 1987). Hence, the state reconfiguration efforts undertaken throughout the decade ended, to a large extent, buried under Ogaden sands, evidencing the persistence — and the aggravation — of the contradictions embedded since the very formation of the Somali state.

The Lost Territories: Irredentist Pan-Somalism

Pan-somalism's regional projection did not constitute a late outcome of Somali's politics, but an element constitutive of the state itself since independence. The unification of the British and Italian Somalilands, in 1960, represented the first institutional materialization of Somali nationalism, yet it also consolidated the perception that the national project would remain incomplete without the incorporation of the remaining territories inhabited by Somali populations in the Horn of Africa. The five-pointed star present in the national banner precisely expressed this horizon: the two unified colonies, the Ogaden (Ethiopia), the Northern Frontier District (NFD, Kenya) and Djibouti. This irredentist commitment, however, placed the state on a trajectory of geopolitical collision (Chonka and Healy 2021; Lewis 1988).

Since the 1940s, the unification of the Somali territories had already been defended, but the process initiated in April 1960 strengthened this demand by bolstering the defense of self-determination for Somali peoples in the remaining divided regions. The entirety of Somali external policy in these first years was guided by the matter of "missing territories" (Chonka and

Healy 2021; Mohamed 1992). However, as we will see, the Greater Somalia project again did not obtain external support, even within the continent. By defending the expansion of borders over other independent African states, pan-somalism did not converge with the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) pan-africanist project, and even less with the interests of western powers (Lewis 1963; Yuusuf 2021).

Regarding the British, the initial support to pan-somalism did not endure through the period of the independences. Seeking to safeguard its position in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, preserving its "friendship" with former colonies, London opted not to assume any responsibility referring to the concretization of the pan-somali project. However, the matter of the Somalis in Kenya constituted an obstacle (Thompson 2015; Yuusuf 2021).

In the case of Kenya, the political mobilization of the Somalis in the Northern Frontier District resulted in constant demands for secession and integration to Somalia[16]. In support of the activities of Somali parties in Kenya, in 1961, the Republic of Somalia concentrated its forces on pan-somalist exigencies from the Kenyan province, with discourses and protests taking place in Mogadishu supporting the secession and unification. The strategy of the Somali government was to hold the British administration accountable for the decision on the future status of NFD, since, until 1963, Kenya was under its colonial control (Yuusuf 2021; Thompson 2015). Several times, London had supported pan-somalism and, although it later changed positions, still represented a more viable alternative than to try to convince a multinational nationalist movement, which claimed independence in the region, to accept the loss of part of its territory. Even though a British commission had largely recognized this desire, Kenyan, Ethiopian and French pressure (hostile to pan-somalism) led to the maintenance of the territory under Kenyan sovereignty in 1963, causing the severing of diplomatic relations between Mogadishu and London until 1967 (Thompson 2015).

As for French Somaliland, the colonial administration deliberately acted to contain the advance of Somali nationalism. In the territory of today's Djibouti, the Somalis inhabited the south, along the border with British Somaliland, while the population was divided almost equally between the Afar people, in the north, and a European urban population concentrated on the coast. With the strengthening of the pan-somali movement in the region,

16 In 1960, a series of petitions began being sent to the British authorities in Kenya, requesting the secession of NFD and its incorporation into the Republic of Somalia. In the same year, the Northern Province Popular Progressive Party (NPPPP) was created, defending the separation from Kenya and union with the Somalis (Thompson 2015).

in the years prior to independence, Paris would favor the entry of the Afars in the state's bureaucracy with the objective to secure the French influence area outside the Somali integration project[17] (Clapham 2023; Touval 1963).

In the case of the Ogaden, the matter assumed even more complex dimensions. Integrated to the rest of Ethiopia's territory, the region was mostly inhabited by Somalis, but inserted in a multi-ethnic state whose cohesion largely depended on the maintenance of its borders. The Amhara elite controlled a diverse, multi-ethnic Muslim and Christian population that was also impoverished and deprived of rights. The Somalis were a considerable part of these minorities, but there were other peoples in the same conditions within the Ethiopian state. The demands of the Somalis could open a "Pandora box" of micronationalisms within the country. To the Ethiopians, Somali Irredentism was the denial of Ethiopia's right to exist as a multi-ethnic state (Clapham 2023; Woodward 2002).

From the beginning of the 1960s onwards, local rebellions, followed by violent repression, triggered increasingly intense border clashes. Haile Selassie's government employed aerial bombings and brutal punitive expeditions against nomadic Somalis, resulting in sporadic confrontations with the Somali army along the border, until the escalation in 1964. The Somali defeat in this episode evidenced the disparity between the great Ethiopian Imperial Army and the nascent Somali National Army, reinforcing the centrality of the matter of defense in Somali politics, also inserted in the context of the Cold War (Lewis 1988). In the face of the priority conceded by the United States to Ethiopia and Kenya, Somalia drew closer to the Soviet Union, obtaining military and technical support for the expansion of its armed forces. This process, however, contributed to the intensification of the Security Dilemma in the Horn of Africa, stimulating a regional arms race and elevating the potential for conflict escalation (Lefebvre 1991).

At the continental level, the relation between Somalia and pan-africanism proved to be equally contradictory, mainly for its connection to the Ethiopians: for the Somalis, Ethiopia was seen as a colonialist power (Laitin 1979). Although Somalia did seek, independently, to insert its claims into the framework of the African institutions, the creation of the OAU in 1963 crystallized the maintenance of the colonial borders and, thus, legitimized Ethiopia's demand over the Ogaden (Akokpari 2016). Indeed, the defense of pan-somalism clashed with the principle of the intangibility of colonial borders, resulting in a progressive isolation of Mogadishu within inter-A-

17 Only in 1977, Djibouti became independent through United Nations and OAU's mediation (Woodward 2002).

frican relations. The project of a "Greater Somalia" ceased to be seen as an expression of self-determination and started being interpreted as a threat to regional stability (Zoppi 2015; Mohamed 1992).

Under the regime of Siad Barre, the pan-somali agenda did not receive substantial changes in its content. What changed was the perception, within the Somali political-military elite, that the regional and international conjuncture finally made the irredentist project feasible. The crisis of the Ethiopian state after the revolution of 1974, with the weakening of central power in Addis Ababa amidst the advances of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) in the Ogaden, was seen as an opportunity by sectors of the civilian, military and bureaucratic elites in favor of a direct intervention by the Somali government (Woodward 2002; Laitin 1979; Samatar 1987). Added to this was the fact that Somalia had consolidated, over the 1970s, one of the largest and best equipped armies of the African continent, a direct result of the military investments accumulated since the previous decade (Lefebvre 1991).

But the Ethiopian civil war turned into a socialist revolution, altering the dynamics of the region with the superpowers (Halliday and Molineux 1981). From then on, the Horn of Africa emerged as a strategic battlefield of the Cold War, with the United States and the Soviet Union disputing influence (Jackson 2010; Ottaway 1982; Halliday 1977). Initially, the socialist superpower tried to maintain its alliance with the two states of the region and intensively acted to stem a direct conflict, including the deployment of the Cuban president, Fidel Castro, to Africa to broker a negotiation (Valenta 1980; Porter 1984).

However, the increasing willingness of the United States to secure an ally in the Horn of Africa, coupled to the pressure from regional partners, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, reinforced the perception that there was international space to sustain a Somali offensive over the Ogaden. In other words, the decision for war resulted not only from the military opportunity, but also from the conviction that Somalia could realign its systemic supports in favor of its territorial cause, given that the Socialist Bloc refused to endorse Irredentism (Jackson 2010; Mitchell 2016).

Nevertheless, the systemic dimension was decisive for the unfolding of the conflict, given the role of the Socialist Bloc. The Soviet Union and Cuba, from a broad and decisive perspective, started to sustain the war effort of Ethiopia. The Soviet-Cuban support involved armaments, military advice, operational reorganization of the Ethiopian army, and direct presence of 18,000 Cuban soldiers and more than 1,000 Soviet military advisors, profoundly altering the correlation of forces on the ground (Gleijeses 2006; Valenta

1980; Jackson 2010). In contrast, the Somali expectation of compensating this loss through a rapid realignment with the United States and the Capitalist Bloc turned out to be illusory. Washington's support remained superficial, diplomatic, and above all promising, with no immediate material equivalent to the engagement offered by the Socialist Bloc to Ethiopia[18] (Mitchell 2016; Lefebvre 1991). The result was a progressively isolated Somalia on the battlefield, facing an Ethiopia backed by one of the greatest international military support efforts in the African continent in that period. This commitment asymmetry between the Blocs was decisive for the Somali failure (Ottaway 1982).

In this sense, the Ogaden conflict, from 1977 to 1978, must not be understood as a simple product of Siad Barre's will, since it was part of a pan-somalist project constructed even before independence which, in that moment, converged with internal and external pressures, regional opportunity, and strategic calculation (Laitin 1979; Cardoso 2020).

Hence, the Ogaden War represented the highest and lowest points of the pan-somali ideal (Yuusuf 2021). The attempt to territorially concretize pan-somalism proved incompatible with the state's material capacities and with the limits imposed by the regional and systemic order. The defeat, in this regard, had a devastating political and symbolic effect: what indeed was buried under the Ogaden sands were simultaneously the main axis of the regime's national legitimization, the credibility of the armed forces as an instrument of integration, and a substantial part of the advances produced by the socialist project in the 1970s.

Conclusion

The argument developed in the course of this article was that pan-somalism operated simultaneously in two dimensions: as an internal force of national integration and as an external project of territorial reunification. The tension between these two dimensions constituted the contradictory core of the Somali state building process.

18 The election of Jimmy Carter reinforced a North-American foreign policy approach that, at that moment, prioritized the easing of tensions with the USSR, but that mostly reflected the Vietnam Effect (Jackson 2010). The emphasis on human rights and in peaceful settlement of disputes made so that the relations with the Third World were not linked to the bipolar dispute, and Carter preferred not to jeopardize the *détente* to strongly support the Somali cause (Colucci 2012). Furthermore, the main objective of the North-Americans had already been materialized: distancing Somalia from the Soviets.

In this sense, the analogy between union and Somali unity formulated by Farah and Eno (2022) helps to illustrate the conclusion of this research. Somali unity — rooted in the language, historical memory, and shared political culture — preceded independence and constituted a social and político fact recognized among its people. As for the union, it referred to the political project of state centralization and of territorial reunification under a single sovereign authority. In the Somali case, this passageway proved to be historically more complex because broad sectors of the society had not yet constituted a long-lasting experience of a centralized government in territorial scale based on this unity. Thus, the historical problem was not the absence of unity, but the assumption that the union could emerge almost automatically from this sociocultural base, without the gradual construction of the material, institutional, and political mediations inherent to state authority.

It was precisely in this dislocation that pan-somalism ceased to operate primarily as an integration horizon and started to absorb resources and legitimacy in the direction of Irredentism. The matter of territorial union became stronger than the internal consolidation of effective national unity. The result was the progressive subordination of the development of state capacities to the search for an external solution for a contradiction that remained internal.

There is still a historical-structural element that turned the attempt to convert the Somali unity into a long-lasting state union more complex. The secular predominance of pastoral and nomadic ways of life, associated with decentralized mechanisms of political regulation based on pacts between lineages, meant that broad sectors of the Somali society had not experienced, before colonialism, centralized authority forms in territorial scale comparable to the modern European state. This does not imply any supposed intrinsic incapacity for state building, but indicates that the project of political union after 1960 required not only the integration of distinct colonial territories and the overcoming of peripheral underdevelopment, but also the historical production of new mediations between decentralized social forms and a centralized state apparatus.

In this regard, the setback of Somali national integration was not linked to the essential antagonism between "clan" and "state", that is, in the existence (or inexistence) of local identities in itself. The challenge, therefore, lies in the absence of political and institutional mechanisms capable of articulating these symbolic forces with a universalist state authority. Consequently, the central authority remained fragile, excessively dependent on leadership, on the coercitive apparatus and on external resources.

Thus, when the pan-somali project was defeated in the Ogaden and the developmentalist impulse of the regime disintegrated, the structural void of a political union that had never fully taken root in the social bases of Somali unity was revealed. In this sense, the Ogaden was the condensation point of internal, regional, and systemic contradictions of the Somali state. The defeat in the conflict also represented the simultaneous defeat of both the external "expansionist" project and the internal development project. Likewise, buried under the Ogaden sands were the main instruments of national integration constructed since 1960: the legitimacy of the armed forces, the self-sufficiency promise, the integration between north and south, and the state's very capacity to act as a universalist authority. The defeat of 1978 must, therefore, be understood as a historical catalyst, and not as an isolated cause, of the later crisis. The defeat rendered visible the structural void that the union project had masked: the absence of an autonomous economic base, the persistence of external dependency, the institutional fragility, and the capture of the state by bureaucratic-military elites.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, Ali Jimale, org. 1995. *The Invention of Somalia*. Red Sea Pr.

Akokpari, John. 2016. "África do Sul e a Arquitetura de Paz e Segurança da Uniao Africana: Velhas Responsabilidades e Novos Desafios." *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos* 1 (2): 30-50. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.65626.

Acosta, María Elena Álvarez, org. 2011. *África subsahariana: sistema capitalista y relaciones internacionales*. Colección Sur-Sur. CLACSO.

Amin, Samir. 2006. *Os Desafios da Mundialização*. Editora Ideias e Letras.

Andrés, César García, and Pablo Arconada Ledesma. 2023. "Colonial Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: From European Presence to Ethiopian Imperialism (1880-1930)." In *Examining Colonial Wars and Their Impact on Contemporary Military History,* edited by Miguel Madueño. IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7040-4.ch004.

Arrighi, Giovanni. 2006. "A crise africana: aspectos regionais e sistêmicos do mundo." In *Contragolpes,* edited by Emir Sader. Boitempo.

Arrighi, Giovanni. 2016. *O longo século XX: dinheiro, poder e as origens de nosso tempo*. Contraponto.

Bade, Zakarie Abdi. 2020. "Dynamics of Religion and Nationalism in Somalia: Allies and Opponents." *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches* 7 (8): 38–54. https://www.ijcar.net/assets/pdf/Vol7-No8-Au-

gust2020/4.-DYNAMICS-OF-RELIGION-AND-NATIONALISM-IN-SOMALIA-ALLIES-AND-OPPONENTS.pdf.

Barnes, Cedric. 2007. "The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, c. 1946–48." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1 (2): 277–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050701452564.

Bresser-Pereira, Luiz Carlos. 2008. "Nacionalismo no centro e na periferia do capitalismo." *Estudos Avançados* 22 (62): 171–194. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40142008000100012.

Brucan, Silviu. 1983. *La disolución del poder: sociología de las relaciones internacionales y política*. Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Cardoso, Nilton César Fernandes. 2020. *Segurança Regional no Chifre da África: conflitos, atores, agendas e ameaças*. 1st ed. Série Africana. CEBRAFRICA; CEGOV.

Carrillo, Norberto Carlos Escalona. 2011. "Somalia: Proceder de los actores internos, regionales e internacionales y su impacto sobre el conflicto en el período". In *África subsahariana: sistema capitalista y relaciones internacionales,* 1 ed., edited by María Elena Álvarez Acosta. Colección Sur-Sur. CLACSO.

Cassanelli, Lee V. 1982. *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600–1900*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Chazan, Naomi, Peter Lewis, Robert Mortimer, Donald Rothchild, and Stephen John Stedman. 1999. *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*. 3rd ed. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14490-7.

Chonka, Peter, and Sally Healy. 2021. "Self-Determination and a Shattered Star: Statehood and National Identity in the Somali Horn of Africa." *Nations and Nationalism* 27 (1): 61–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12646.

Clapham, Christopher. 1996. *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511549823.

Clapham, Christopher. 2023. *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay*. Hurst Publishers.

Colucci, Lamont. 2012. *The National Security Doctrines of the American Presidency: How They Shape Our Present and Future*. Praeger.

Diallo, Mamadou Alpha. 2021. "War and Conflict in the African Sahel Fruit of Historic and Permanent War between Two Empires: The Arab-Islamic Empire and the Western Empire." *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 10 (19): 19. https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.108448.

Elaigwu, J. Isawa, and Ali Al'Amin Mazrui. 2011. "Construção da nação e evolução das estruturas políticas." In *História Geral da África VIII: África desde 1935,* 2nd ed., edited by Ali Al'Amin Mazrui and Christophe Wondji. Cortez; UNESCO.

Farah, Abdulkadir Osman, and Mohamed A. Eno. 2022. *Theorising Somali Society: Hope, Transformation and Development*. Vol. 1. Pluriverse of Creativity: New Horizons of Planetary Realizations. Authorspress.

Fasi, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid al-, and Ivan Hrbek. 2010. "O advento do Islã e a ascensão do Império Muçulmano." In *História Geral da África III: África do século VII ao XI,* edited by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid al-Fasi, and Ivan Hrbek. UNESCO.

Gleijeses, Piero. 2006. "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975–1988." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (4): 98–146. https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2006.8.4.98.

Halliday, Fred. 1977. "US Policy in the Horn of Africa: Aboulia or Proxy Intervention?" *Review of African Political Economy* (10): 8–32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3997918.

Halliday, Fred. 1989. *Génesis de la Segunda Guerra Fria*. Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Halliday, Fred, and Maxine Molineux. 1981. *The Ethiopian Revolution*. NLB.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. 2008. *Nações e Nacionalismo desde 1780: programa, mito e realidade*. 50 ed. Paz e Terra.

Irons, Roy. 2013. *Churchill and the Mad Mullah of Somaliland: Betrayal and Redemption 1899-1921*. Pen and Sword.

Jackson, Donna R. 2010. "The Ogaden War and the Demise of Détente." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 632 (1): 26–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210378833.

Ki-Zerbo, Joseph. 1972. História da África Negra II. Publicações Europa-América.

Laitin, David D. 1976. "The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14 (3): 449–68. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00053519.

Laitin, David D. 1979. "The War in the Ogaden: Implications for Siyaad's Role in Somali History." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 17 (1): 95–115. http://www.jstor.org/stable/159897.

Laitin, David D., and Said S. Samatar. 1984. "Somalia and the World Economy." *Review of African Political Economy* 11 (30): 58–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056248408703584.

Ledesma, Pablo Arconada. 2018. "From Irredentism to State Disintegration: Greater Somalia during Siad Barre Regime (1969-1991)." *Revista Universitara de Sociologie* 14 (1): 94–105. https://uvadoc.uva.es/handle/10324/64488.

Lefebvre, Jeffrey A. 1991. *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991*. Pitt Series in Policy and Institutional Studies. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Lewis, Ioan Myrddin. 1963. "Pan-Africanism and Pan-Somalism." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 1 (2): 147–61. https://www.jstor.org/stable/159026.

Lewis, Ioan Myrddin. 1988. *A modern history of Somalia: nation and state in the Horn of Africa*. Westview Press.

Lewis, Ioan Myrddin. 2008. *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History, Society*. Columbia University Press.

Markakis, John. 1986. "Radical Military Regimes in the Horn of Africa." In *Military Marxist Regimes in Africa*, edited by John Markakis and Michael Waller. Frank Cass.

Metz, Helen Chapin. 1992. *Somalia, a Country Study*. Library of Congress. https://arcadia.sba.uniroma3.it/handle/2307/5676.

Millman, Brock. 2014. *British Somaliland: An Administrative History, 1920–1960*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Mitchell, Nancy. 2016. *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War*. Cold War International History Project Series. Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press.

Mohamed, Saeed Sheikh. 1992. "The Rise and Fall of Somali Nationalism." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees: Special Issue on Somalia* 12 (5): 4–7. https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21675.

Møller, Bjørn. 2009. *The Somali Conflict: The Role of External Actor*. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt. http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=9999.

Nkrumah, Kwame. 1977. *A luta de classes em África*. Livraria Sá da Costa Editora.

Nkrumah, Kwame. 2025. *Kwame Nkrumah: Discursos pan-africanistas*. Organized by Efemia Chela and Vijay Prashad. Expressão Popular.

Ottaway, Marina. 1982. *Soviet and American influence in the horn of Africa*. Studies of influence in international relations. Praeger.

Pankhurst, Robert K., and Lee V. Cassanelli. 2011. "A Etiópia e a Somália." In *História Geral da África VI - A África do século XIX à década de 1880*, organized by J. F. Ade Ajayi. Cortez; UNESCO.

Pereira, Analúcia Danilevicz, and Rafaela Pinto Serpa. 2024. "Conflict Management in Africa: The African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)." *INTELLECTUS: The African Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1): 10–26. https://intellectus.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/INTELLECTUS___PEREIRA_and_SERPA_Vol_2-1.pdf.

Pereira, Analúcia Danilevicz, and Salvatore Gasparini Xerri. 2020. "O Sistema Mundial Contemporâneo: Uma Contribuição Para o Debate Sobre Desenvolvimento Na Teoria Do Sistema-Mundo." *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 9 (18): 41-65. https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.108854._and_SERPA_Vol_2-1.pdf.

Porter, Bruce. 1984. "The Ogaden war." In *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945–1980*, by Bruce Porter. Cambridge University Press.

Rivas, Edelberto Torres. 1981. "La Nación: problemas teoricos e historicos." In *Estado y Política na América Latina,* edited by Ernesto Laclau and Norbert Lechner. Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Rotberg, Robert I., org. 2003. *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror.* World Peace Foundation; Brookings Institution Press.

Samatar, Abdi I. 2016. *Africa's First Democrats: Somalia's Aden A. Osman and Abdirazak H. Hussen*. Indiana University Press.

Samatar, Abdi I. 2019. "'Fate Worse than' artificial borders is the insidious African elite politics : the Somali case." *South African Geographical Journal* 101 (3): 357–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2019.1612769.

Samatar, Ahmed I. 1987. "Self-Reliance Betrayed: Somali Foreign Policy, 1969–1980." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 21 (2): 201–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.1987.10803824.

Samatar, Ahmed I. 1988. *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality*. Zed Press.

Samatar, Said S. 1979. "Maxamad Cabdille Xasan of Somalia: The Search for the Real Mullah." *Northeast African Studies* 1 (1): 60–76. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43660350.

Samatar, Said S. 1982. *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan*. African Studies Series 32. Cambridge University Press.

Samoff, Joel. 1982. "Class, Class Conflict, and the State in Africa." *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (1): 105–27.

Sheik-Abdi, Abdi. 1977. "Somali Nationalism: Its Origins and Future." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 15 (4): 657–65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00002299.

Thompson, Vincent Bakpetu. 2015. *Conflict in the Horn of Africa: The Kenya-Somalia Border Problem, 1941-2014*. University press of America.

Tilly, Charles. 1996. *Coerção, Capital e Estados Europeus*. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo.

Touval, Saadia. 1963. *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*. Harvard University Press.

Valenta, Jiri. 1980. "Soviet-Cuban Intervention in the Horn of Africa: Impact and Lessons." *Journal of International Affairs* 34 (2): 353–67. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356896.

Visentini, Paulo Fagundes. 2020. "Regimes Militares Marxistas Africanos, ascensão e queda: condicionantes internos e dimensões internacionais." *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos* 5 (9): 33–53. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.97061.

Visentini, Paulo Fagundes. 2025. "As Relações URSS-África nos Anos 1970-1980: Uma Proposta Analítica das Motivações, Condicionantes e Im-

pactos." *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos* 10 (19): 34-49. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.149438.

Visentini, Paulo Fagundes, Luis Dario Ribeiro, and Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira. 2014. *História da África e dos africanos*. 3rd ed. Vozes.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1973. "Class and Class-Conflict in Contemporary Africa." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7 (3).

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2005. *Africa: The Politics of Independence and Unity*. University of Nebraska Press.

Woodward, Peter. 2002. *The Horn of Africa: State, Politics and International Relations*. I. B. Tauris & Company.

Yuusuf, Muuse. 2021. *The Genesis of the Civil War in Somalia: The Impact of Foreign Military Intervention on the Conflict*. I. B. Tauris; Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Zoppi, Marco. 2015. "Greater Somalia, the Never-Ending Dream? Contested Somali Borders: The Power of Tradition vs. the Tradition of Power." *Journal of African History, Politics and Society* 1 (1): 43–64.

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the role of pan-somalism as an ideal and movement in the construction and crisis of the Somali state. It argues that pan-somalism operated in two simultaneous dimensions: as an internal vector of national integration and as an external project of territorial reunification of the Somali peoples in the Horn of Africa. The central hypothesis maintains that this dual function, initially decisive for the legitimization of the post-colonial state, converted itself into a factor of structural fragilization insofar as the agenda of internal integration was subordinated to Irredentism. Based on a historical-materialist approach, qualitative and hypothetical--deductive, organized in national, regional and systemic levels, this article is divided into three sections. Firstly, it seeks to demonstrate how Somalia possessed, prior to independence, a relatively cohesive identitary base, but divided among five different colonial territories. These factors ended up influencing the nationalist movements to seek, besides independence, the unification of territories. In this context, the unification of the British and Italian Somalilands, in 1960, represented the initial execution of the pan-somali project, but also inaugurated tensions between internal consolidation and external projection. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the prioritization of the irredentist agenda diverted resources and legitimacy away from state development towards territorial expansion. The Ogaden War (1977–1978) condensed these contradictions by exposing the material limits of the Somali state in the face of the regional and systemic constraints of the Cold War.

KEYWORDS
Somalia. Pan-somalism. State building in Africa.

Received on April 15, 2026
Accepted on May 04 2026[19]

Translated by Luca Franklin Primon

19 How to cite: Serpa, Rafaela Pinto. 2025. "Pan-Somalism in the Construction and Crisis of the Somali State: Integration and Irredentism." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 10 (20): 105-132. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.154960.

A LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION PROCESS IN GUINEA-BISSAU

Angelita Alves de Carvalho[1]
Vavito Andre da Costa[2]

Introduction

Demography has produced one of the best-documented generalizations in the social sciences: the demographic transition (Kirk 1996). According to Lee (1987), demographic theories developed as scholars sought to analyze and systematize the theoretical foundations of population science, giving special emphasis to demographic thinking. The demographic transition is one of the best-known theoretical currents in demography, which has been developed over time and marked by different contributions in the quest to understand its processes and associated factors in different regions and countries around the world.

The classic formulation of demographic transition theory, as discussed by Kirk (1996), traces back to early contributions by authors such as Warren Thompson (1929), Adolphe Landry (1934), Kingsley Davis (1945), and Frank Notestein (1945), all cited in Kirk (1996). From the 1960s onward, Ansley Coale further systematized the study of demographic transitions in European countries through a major project at Princeton University, contributing to the consolidation of what is now regarded as the classic version of the theory (Coale 1973, cited in Kirk 1996; Grupo de Foz 2021).

1 Graduate Program in Population, Territory and Public Statistics, Escola Nacional de Ciências Estatísticas (ENCE/IBGE). Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. E-mail: Angelita.carvalho@ibge.gov.br. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9342-4181.

2 Graduate Program in Population, Territory and Public Statistics, Escola Nacional de Ciências Estatísticas (ENCE/IBGE). Passo Fundo, Brazil. E-mail: vavitociso@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2636-9938.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.153872

According to Kirk (1996), demographic transition has been an important topic for modern demography. The demographic transition model began as a classification of populations differentiated by different combinations of fertility and mortality. Societies undergoing modernization progressed from a pre-modern regime of high fertility and mortality to a post-modern regime in which both were low. There is a classification by phases or groups. In the first phase, both fertility and mortality were at a very high rate. In the following phases, mortality began to decline, followed by a decline in fertility.

Specifically, in the sub-Saharan context, studies show that the delay was caused by severe recessions in economic development and various problems in the historical past that directly affected the demographic transition process in the region. Using data from the United Nations Population Projection, we can identify how the transition is occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the sub-region of West Africa, the area in which Guinea-Bissau is located. Since the 1990s, which are considered by many authors to be the beginning of the transition in this region of Africa, data on both mortality and fertility have continued to decline at a very slow pace. In West Africa in 1990, the fertility rate was 6.65 children per woman, falling to 6.04 children in 2000. In 2010, there was a further decline to 5.71 children per woman, and to 5.05 for the year 2020 (United Nations 2022). Data on mortality for the same region can be observed for the same period. In 1990, the mortality rate was 17.5 per thousand inhabitants; in 2000, it declined to 15.7‰; the downward trend continued until 2010, 12.5‰, and in 2020, the observed crude death rate (CDR) is 10.7‰ (United Nations 2022). Guinea-Bissau, which has very similar characteristics to those of other countries in the region, is believed to be following similar trends in the demographic transition process.

This research in the Guinean context is highly relevant, since there are no studies on this country that seek to demonstrate the specificities of the demographic transition in the country. This is the first study with this aim, which seeks to encourage new research and, with it, the knowledge necessary for the development of public policies directed toward various demographic phenomena in Guinea-Bissau.

Beyond filling a geographic gap, this study distinguishes itself from existing regional analyses — such as those by Tabutin and Schoumaker (2021) or the World Bank (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015) — by moving beyond the aggregate trends of Sub-Saharan Africa to isolate the unique demographic trajectory of a fragile state. While regional models often treat Guinea-Bissau as a mere data point within a broader trend, our analysis addresses the "Demographic Transition in Conflict Contexts". By integrating historical and political

factors, such as the chronic instability and the 1998-1999 civil war (Koudawo 2001; Cardoso 1995), we explore how political shocks and governance failures have created a "stalled" or idiosyncratic transition pattern that defies the linear assumptions of classical demographic theory. This historical-political lens is the primary innovation of this work, offering a nuanced interpretation of how the state's fragility directly impacts demographic outcomes.

The Political, Social, and Demographic Context of Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau, located on the west coast of Sub-Saharan Africa, remains one of the least studied countries from a demographic point of view, despite its geopolitical relevance. In 2023, the country had 1.78 million inhabitants (INE 2023), a GDP per capita of 556,421 FCFA, and a Human Development Index of 0.480, in addition to persistent levels of poverty affecting almost half of the population (INE 2023). Its administrative organization includes three provinces, eight regions, and the Autonomous Sector of Bissau, and its ethnic diversity is marked by the coexistence of Creole — the national language — and Portuguese — the official language.

Since democratization in the 1990s, Guinean politics has been characterized by chronic instability, multiple *coups d'état*, and successive changes of government, elements that hinder institutional consolidation and the lasting implementation of public policies (Cardoso 1995; M'bundé 2017). These contemporary weaknesses are compounded by a complex past: the territory has been inhabited by different groups since prehistoric times, integrated into African trade routes, and later colonized by Portugal in the 15th century. After a long process of resistance, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC, from Portuguese *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*) led the anti-colonial struggle that culminated in independence in 1973–1974 (Benzinho and Joana 2015).

The post-independence period was also marked by turmoil. The government of Luís Cabral faced serious economic challenges and was overthrown by a coup led by João Bernardo Vieira in 1980, which established a single-party regime until the beginning of the multiparty opening in the 1990s (Gomes 2014; Koudawo 2001). The democratic transition, however, did not reverse the cycles of instability: the civil war of 1998 and the coup of 2012 compromised governance and affected essential sectors such as health and education (Sangreman, Proença, and Martins 2016).

Public health was deeply impacted by this instability. After 1974, the creation of the primary care network and the first National Health Plan (PNS, from *Portuguese Plano Nacional de Saúde*), approved in 1993, sought to strengthen maternal and child health, family planning, and disease prevention (Guerreiro et al. 2019). However, subsequent reforms — PNDS[3] I (1998), PNDS II (2003–2007), and the third PNDS (starting in 2017) — have progressed slowly due to the fragile political environment. Severe structural limitations persist: lack of energy, irregular water supply, and a shortage of qualified human resources across most units (Indi 2021). Investments in health are historically low, not exceeding 9% of the national budget and representing about 1.9% of GDP, which is lower than that of neighboring countries (Guerreiro et al. 2019). Even the Simão Mendes National Hospital faces significant difficulties in infrastructure, management, and information systems, hindering the production of reliable indicators.

The poor quality of demographic data is one of the structural challenges pointed out in the literature. Torrisi et al. (2025) demonstrate that civil registries significantly underreport deaths in Bissau, compromising mortality estimates and hindering robust analyses of demographic dynamics. Political instability, in turn, has a direct impact on mortality levels. Using indirect techniques, Fazzio, Mann, and Boone (2011) show that infant mortality remained high between 1977 and 2007, declining over time but rising again between 1997 and 2001 — a period that includes the 1998-1999 civil war. The risk of infant death varied by ethnicity: among Balanta until 2001 and Fula between 2002 and 2007, while factors such as distance to health centers and polygamy had less significant effects. The importance of ethnicity as an axis of vulnerability also appears in Balde (2019), who identifies the influence of cultural and socioeconomic factors — such as insufficient prenatal care and birth in the dry season — on the survival of children under one year of age.

The effects of instability extend to women. Kotsadam and Ostby (2019) show that conflicts and political crises have increased the mortality of women of reproductive age over the last few decades. Similarly, Damerow et al. (2024) analyze the quality of perinatal care in rural areas, identifying structural limitations that have exacerbated maternal and neonatal mortality. These findings reinforce that persistent inequalities and slow improvements in mortality levels make the demographic transition process particularly slow in the country.

3 National Health Development Plan (PNDS, from Portuguese *Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sanitário*).

In this context, recent projections by African Futures (Institute for Security Studies 2023) indicate that Guinea-Bissau will maintain an extremely young age structure in the coming decades, and that the possibility of enjoying a demographic dividend will depend on expanding access to contraceptive methods and consistent advances in reproductive health. Together, these historical, political, and institutional factors shape Guinea-Bissau's demographic dynamics, influencing patterns of mortality, fertility, and the speed of demographic transition, which are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The analysis of the demographic transition in Sub-Saharan Africa requires moving beyond classical linear models to incorporate contemporary debates on African Demographic Exceptionalism and Non-Linear Transitions. According to Bongaarts and Casterline (2013), the trajectory in the region is unique, characterized by a slower pace and occurring under distinct socioeconomic conditions compared to other global regions. This uniqueness is often marked by the phenomenon of fertility stalls — periods where the decline in birth rates stagnates or even undergoes slight reversals before resuming (Bongaarts 2008, 2017; Garenne and Joseph 2002).

Furthermore, recent literature emphasizes the "Demographic Transition in Conflict Contexts", where chronic political instability and state fragility act as primary disruptive forces. The impact of armed conflict on demographic outcomes is multifaceted; studies on exposure to armed conflict and fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that while conflict can lead to temporary fertility declines due to displacement and economic shocks, it often results in a "catch-up" fertility or a sustained high-fertility environment as a response to high mortality risks and uncertainty. As explored in "The Political Demography of Conflict in Modern Africa" (Green 2012), the interplay between ethnic diversity, land competition, and population pressure often creates a feedback loop that fuels further instability, particularly in states with weak institutional capacity.

This theoretical framework also highlights the critical relationship between population growth, age structure, conflict, and governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fragile states, a youthful age structure (a "youth bulge") combined with poor governance can exacerbate the risk of civil unrest, further stalling the demographic transition (Green 2012). Comparisons with countries such as Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) reinforce the thesis of non-linear transitions, where prolonged conflicts dismantle health systems and result in a stalled epidemiological

transition (Omran 2001; Kraehnert et al. 2019; Schoumaker 2019; Tabutin and Schoumaker 2021).

Methodology

This article is characterized as a descriptive quantitative study, based on the analysis of secondary empirical data to respond to the proposed objectives. Initially, a literature review was conducted, in which texts were selected that presented a historical and current overview of the social and demographic processes in Guinea-Bissau and the region. The National Research Institute of Guinea-Bissau (INEP, from Portuguese *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa*) is the main source of information, as it provides various collections and studies that address the social, political, and economic history of the country, as well as academic research that discusses demographic transition and local reproductive patterns.

Next, to analyze Guinea-Bissau's demographic transition, aggregate data made available on the digital platforms of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the National Institute of Statistics of Guinea-Bissau (INE, from Portuguese *Instituto Nacional de Estatística*) were explored. While this study utilizes secondary data from the United Nations Population Division (United Nations 2022), it is essential to acknowledge the inherent limitations of demographic indicators in Guinea-Bissau, where historical political instability and resource constraints have hindered systematic data collection. Estimates of infant and adult mortality are subject to substantial underreporting due to the lack of a robust civil registration system, particularly in rural areas or during periods of conflict; thus, the trends presented here should be interpreted as conservative estimates of the actual demographic burden (Omran 2001; Tabutin and Schoumaker 2021). Furthermore, population projections remain highly sensitive to assumptions about future stability and migration, which may not fully capture potential shocks given the country's history of sudden political shifts (Koudawo 2001). This study does not perform independent statistical corrections; instead, it provides a critical interpretation of existing UN data by contextualizing these figures within Guinea-Bissau's socio-political history, aiming to understand numerical trends as indicators of a complex post-conflict reality rather than absolute certainties.

These data allowed us to present and discuss the main indicators related to general demographic transition trends and their impacts on the age structure, covering the period from 1950 to 2050. Table 1 brings together the

selected indicators such as the Crude Birth Rate (CBR), the Crude Death Rate (CDR), population growth, and Infant Mortality Rate, which are essential for identifying the stage of the country's demographic transition. In addition, sex ratio and dependency ratio indicators were used to examine changes in the age composition of the Guinean population.

Finally, population pyramids — a classic resource for interpreting the age effects of demographic transition — were also analyzed and used to visually illustrate the changes in demographic trends over the period studied.

Table 1: Presentation, definition, and data source of the main indicators used to analyze the demographic dynamics of Guinea-Bissau

Indicator	Acronym	Concept	Formula
Crude Birth Rate	CBR	Number of births per 1000 inhabitants	Births / population x 1000
Crude Death Rate	CDR	Number of deaths per 1000 inhabitants	Deaths / population x 1000
Total Fertility Rate	TFR	Average number of births per woman	Σ age-specific fertility rates x 5
Infant Mortality Rate	IMR	Number of infant deaths under age one per 1000	Infant deaths under age one / live births x 1000
Sex Ratio	SR_t	Number of men per 100 women at time *t*	Men_t / $Women_t$ x 100
Total Dependency Ratio	TDR	Number of Young people (aged 0-14) and Elderly people (aged 65 and over) per 100 people of Working-age (aged 15-64)	(Young+Elderly) / Working--age x 100
Youth Dependency Ratio	YDR	Number of Young people (aged 0-14) per 100 people of Working- age (aged 15-64)	Young / Working-age x 100
Old-age dependency ratio	ODR	Number of Elderly people (aged 65 and over) per 100 people of Working-age (aged 15-64)	Elderly / Working-age x 100
Aging Index	AI	Number of Elderly people (aged 65 and over) per 100 Young people (aged 0 to 14)	Elderly / Young x 100

Source: Author´s elaboration (2024), based on UNFPA/UN.

Demographic Transition in Guinea-Bissau, from 1950 to 2050

Figure 1 summarizes the demographic transition process in Guinea--Bissau over a century, showing the evolution of the Crude Birth Rate, Crude Death Rate, and population growth. It's notable that mortality was already declining in 1950, albeit very slowly: the CDR remained high, at around 28 deaths per thousand inhabitants. This decline accelerated in the 1980s, when mortality reached lower levels and continued to decline until stabilizing around 2020 at about 9 deaths per thousand inhabitants.

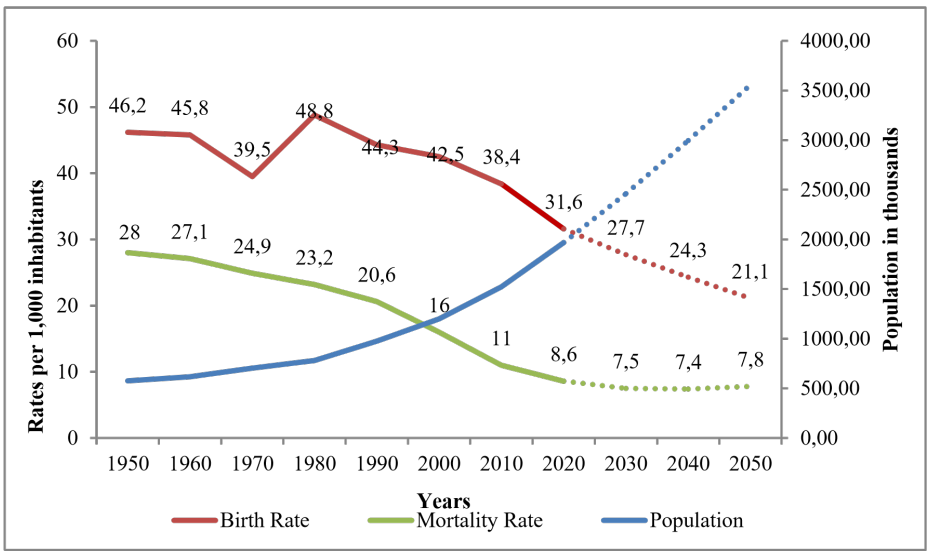
This pattern is consistent with what Omran (2001) calls the contemporary or delayed epidemiological transition model, characteristic of countries whose health modernization occurs externally and dependently. According to the author, "public health measures have been an important component, and the internationally imported and sponsored health system has played a decisive role in setting the stage for astronomical population growth in these economically deficient countries" (Omran 2001, n.p.). Thus, the health programs introduced in the country contributed decisively to reducing mortality, especially among women and children, even though infant mortality remains high and women of reproductive age continue to be exposed to higher risks than those observed among men of the same age group (Omran 2001).

While mortality declined, the CBR remained at high and relatively stable levels until the 2000s, only beginning to decline more clearly after that period. According to Figure 1, the CBR fell from values close to 40–45 per thousand inhabitants at the end of the 20th century to around 31.6 in 2020, indicating a downward trend, albeit still slow. The gap between the accelerated decline in mortality and the more gradual reduction in birth rates creates a wide gap between the curves, which in turn translates into strong population growth. This is evident in the significant increase in population, which reached around 1 million inhabitants in the 2000s and continues to expand rapidly.

The projection presented in the graph suggests that, by 2050, the CDR is expected to stabilize between 7 and 8 deaths per thousand inhabitants, while the CBR tends to continue its decline, approaching 20 per thousand. This persistent mismatch between birth and death rates results in robust population growth, with the country's population nearly doubling over the next three decades. This pattern is consistent with recent diagnoses of Guinea-Bissau's demographic future, which highlight the persistence of an extremely young age structure and the maintenance of high dependency

ratios, especially if access to contraceptive methods does not expand significantly (Institute for Security Studies 2023).

Figure 1: Data on the Demographic Transition in Guinea-Bissau from 1950 to 2050



Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

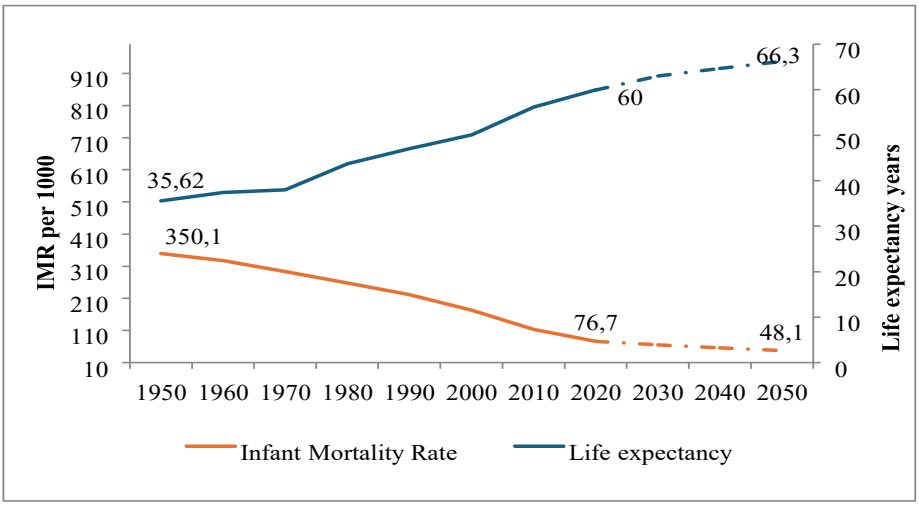
The changes observed in crude birth and death rates are directly reflected in other key indicators of demographic transition, such as life expectancy and infant mortality, as shown in Figure 2. In 1950, life expectancy in Guinea-Bissau was only 35.62 years, while infant mortality reached 350 deaths per thousand live births, levels typical of the initial epidemiological pattern, marked by infectious diseases, malnutrition, and structural limitations in health services — characteristics widely described by Omran (2001) in his epidemiological transition model.

Since the 1980s, there has been a progressive improvement in these indicators, partly associated with economic reforms, institutional reorganization, and the expansion of health services (Cardoso 1995; Guerreiro et al. 2019). In 2000, life expectancy reached 50.12 years, and this progress has continued: in 2020, it reached 60 years, with projections indicating 66.30 years in 2050.

This evolution follows trends observed in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the increase in life expectancy since the 1990s stems from the expansion of public health interventions, a progressive reduction in mortality from infectious diseases, and a gradual decline in infant mortality (United Nations 2022; Bongaarts 2008). Although slow, this improvement is consistent with the pattern of delayed demographic transition described for countries in the region.

Infant mortality follows a similar trajectory: its continuous reduction — reaching 77 deaths per thousand live births in 2020 — represents one of the most significant advances in Guinea-Bissau's demographic transition. Projections indicate a further decline, reaching 48 deaths per thousand in 2050. These results reflect both the process of declining fertility and gradual advances in maternal and child healthcare (Pontes et al. 2008; Guerreiro et al. 2019). In addition, regional studies show that persistently high levels of infant mortality, even when declining, are a common pattern among Sub-Saharan African countries with structural limitations such as those of Guinea-Bissau (Bloom, Canning, and Fink 2014; Sharrow et al. 2022).

Figure 2: Life Expectancy and Infant Mortality in Guinea-Bissau from 1950 to 2050



Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

Other key indicators for understanding the demographic transition are the total fertility rate, the number of women of reproductive age, and the annual total number of births, as shown in Table 2. With the progressive reduction in mortality over the last few decades, there has been a significant change in the age structure of the population, marked by an increase in the number of women between the ages of 15 and 49. This phenomenon increases the country's reproductive potential, even in a context of declining fertility — which fell from 5.9 to 4.1 children per woman between 1950 and 2020. As a direct result of this combination of a young age structure and a slow decline in fertility, the number of births increased from around 25,000 to almost 63,000 per year in the same period.

This scenario characterizes what demographers call demographic inertia, whereby population growth continues even with declining fertility and birth rates, driven by the existing age structure, in this case due to the high proportion of women of reproductive age. In Guinea-Bissau, this group accounted for 25% of the population in 2020 and is expected to reach about 30% in 2050. In addition, although fertility is expected to decline to 2.6 children per woman, it will remain above the replacement level (2.1), which explains why the country's population is expected to nearly triple over a 50-year period.

Table 2: Fertility Indicators in Guinea-Bissau, 1950-2050

Year	Population	Women Reproductive Age (in thousands)	Births per year	Total Fertility Rate
1950	543,414	137	25,147	5.9
1960	577,934	143	26,641	5.9
1970	591,663	134	23,336	6.0
1980	831,463	197	40,808	6.5
1990	973,551	215	43,465	6.5
2000	1,230,849	298	52,459	5.7
2010	1,567,221	380	60,273	5.1
2020	2,015,828	506	63,738	4.1
2030	2,484,863	655	68,811	3.4
2040	2,976,354	793	72,219	2.9
2050	3,044,529	925	72,601	2.6

Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

This behavior is in line with the pattern observed in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the fertility transition is occurring slowly compared to other regions of the world. Regional fertility fell from 6.5 children per woman in 1950–1955 to 5.4 in the mid-2000s (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015), a slower pace than that observed in regions of Asia and Latin America. Cleland and Machiyama (2017) emphasize that, due to the slowness of this process, the main demographic force in the region over the next 35 years will be the continued increase in births, driven by the growth of the adult contingent, which will outnumber the younger group.

Fertility stagnation in Sub-Saharan Africa reflects the interaction between structural constraints, reproductive preferences, and behavioral dynamics (such as education and women's autonomy); although there are no specific studies on the fertility transition in Guinea-Bissau, it is believed that this pattern follows the broader regional trends. For Garenne and Joseph (2002), this delay or stagnation in the decline in fertility is related to recurring economic crises and adverse historical conditions. Arnaldo (2013) shows that contraceptive use depends not only on women's preferences but also on access and availability, leading to higher fertility in regions with limited services. Ezeh, Mberu, and Emina (2009) highlight that changes in reproductive behavior — such as adolescent fertility, contraceptive use, and union patterns — affect fertility trends differently across contexts, explaining both stagnation (e.g., Kenya) and decline (e.g., Zimbabwe). Bongaarts (2020) further emphasizes that persistently high desired family size remains a key barrier to rapid fertility decline, even where contraceptive use has increased. Overall, fertility trends in the region are context-specific and shaped by the combined effects of access, preferences, and behavior.

Table 3 shows how this demographic transition process is taking place in Guinea-Bissau between 1950 and 2050, comparing it to Sub-Saharan Africa and the world. The evolution of national indicators closely follows the trends observed in countries in the region. In 1950, infant mortality reached 350 deaths per thousand live births. Low life expectancy (E_0)— only 35.6 years — reflected the combined impact of high infant mortality, maternal risks, and poor sanitary conditions. Fifty years later, improvements in social conditions contributed to an increase in life expectancy to around 50 years and to population growth, which reached 1,230,849 inhabitants in 2000.

Table 3: Data on the demographic transition in Guinea-Bissau compared, 1950–2050

Year	Region	CBR	CDR	TFR	E_0	IMR
1950	Guinea-Bissau	46.2	28.0	5.9	35.6	350.0
	Sub-Saharan Africa	47.1	26.5	6.5	37.5	315.8
	World	36.8	19.5	4.9	46.5	224.0
1990	Guinea-Bissau	44.5	20.6	6.5	47.1	222.0
	Sub-Saharan Africa	44.4	16.3	6.3	49.2	181.1
	World	26.8	9.3	3.3	64.0	92.8
2000	Guinea-Bissau	42.5	16.0	5.7	50.1	173.6
	Sub-Saharan Africa	41.7	14.7	5.7	50.6	152.5
	World	21.8	8.5	2.7	66.5	75.6
2020	Guinea-Bissau	31.6	8.6	4.1	60.0	76.7
	Sub-Saharan Africa	35.0	8.9	4.7	60.3	73.9
	World	17.2	8.1	2.4	72.0	37.7
2050	Guinea-Bissau	21.1	7.8	2.6	66.3	48.0
	Sub-Saharan Africa	24.0	7.2	3.0	66.7	45.7
	World	14.0	9.4	2.2	77.3	24.1

Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

The persistence of the slow decline in fertility in the region is also discussed by Bongaarts (2017), who shows that although developing countries reduced their fertility by more than 50% between 1960 and 2010, Sub-Saharan Africa is an exception, with much slower rates, largely due to its low level of socioeconomic development. Studies such as those by Arnaldo and Cau (2013) reinforce this diagnosis, pointing out that cultural practices, such as early marriage and low contraceptive use, sustain higher fertility levels.

With regard to survival, Defo (2014) shows that global demographic and epidemiological changes between 1950 and 2010 resulted in significant gains in life expectancy, but with strong regional inequalities. While developed regions reached values above 77 years and Latin America reached 73 years, Sub-Saharan Africa remained the region with the lowest global average — about 53 years in the period 2005–2010. According to the author, these differences are related to the wars, political instability, and economic crises that

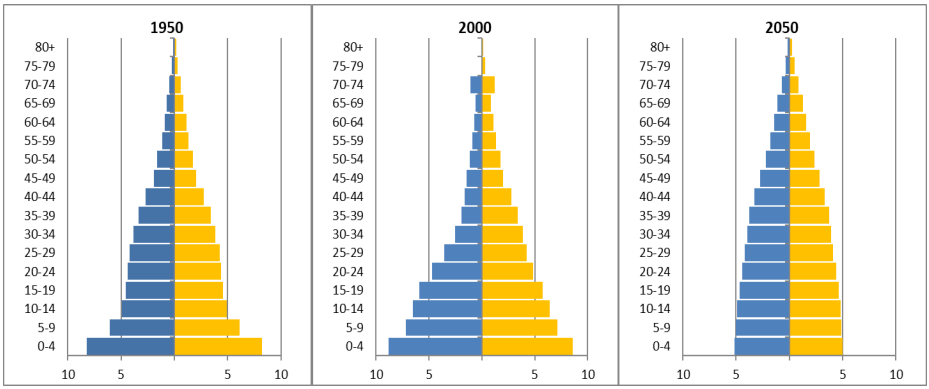
have marked the region's history over the last few decades, directly affecting the health and well-being of its populations.

These results place Guinea-Bissau in line with the regional pattern, in which advances in longevity occur slowly and discontinuously. Comparative studies show that countries such as Sierra Leone, Chad, and Mozambique have similar trajectories: life expectancy below 50 years until the early 2000s, strong influence of epidemics, civil conflicts, and fragile health systems, and only gradual advances after 2010 (Tabutin and Schoumaker 2004, 2021). These authors demonstrate that Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole has the world's latest transition in mortality, characterized by slow gains and persistent epidemiological vulnerabilities. Thus, the Guinean case is in line with the regional pattern, in which recent improvements coexist with long-standing structural challenges, resulting in a life expectancy that is increasing, but at a limited pace.

Recent changes in Guinea-Bissau's age structure clearly reflect the effects of demographic transition. Figure 3, with age pyramids for 1950, 2000, and 2050, illustrates this movement. In 1950, Guinea-Bissau's population structure was typically pre-transitional: an extremely broad base, with 16% of the population concentrated in the 0–4 age group, and a very narrow top, reflecting high mortality (28‰) and birth (46.2‰) rates. These levels are in line with the broader pattern in Sub-Saharan Africa during the same period, where colonial conflicts, poor sanitation, and epidemics kept life expectancy low (37.5 years) and infant mortality high (315‰) (United Nations 2022). In 2000, the pyramid retained its traditional shape, but with proportional increases in the youth and adult groups, indicating some progress in survival — especially among those over 60 — driven by a modest reduction in infant mortality (173‰). However, the maintenance of high fertility (5.7 children per woman) and the impacts of the 1998–1999 civil war limited more significant changes in the age structure, delaying the transition to a narrower base.

The projection for 2050 reveals a country in an advanced stage of transition: the base of the pyramid is narrowing, while the proportions of adults and older adults are increasing. The relative growth of the 5–9, 10–14, and 15–19 age groups constitutes a "youth bubble," typical of contexts in which fertility declines but remains above the replacement level. This process marks the beginning of population aging, even in countries whose structure is still predominantly young.

Figure 3: Population Pyramids for Guinea-Bissau in 1950, 2000, and 2050



Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

The transformations observed in the age structure of Guinea-Bissau can be interpreted in light of demographic transition theory, particularly in its application to late-transition contexts. The pattern described is consistent with the shift from the pre-transitional phase to intermediate stages of the transition. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the persistence of a wide base in the population pyramid up to 2000, even alongside gains in survival, suggests a mismatch between mortality and fertility — a central feature of late demographic transition — in which the decline in mortality has not yet been completed. Thus, the case illustrates a heterogeneous and prolonged process, shaped by institutional, cultural, and socioeconomic constraints, in which changes in the age structure reflect both improvements in survival and the persistence of high fertility levels.

These changes have a direct impact on the dependency ratio indicators (Table 4). Guinea-Bissau has historically experienced high child dependency: 66% in 1950, rising to 72.8% in 2000, despite the decline in mortality — a trend similar to that observed in several Sub-Saharan countries (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015). In 2020, the Total Dependency Ratio remained high (81.2%), reflecting a still very young population (median age of 18.8 years). Projections for 2050 indicate a reduction in total dependency (53.5%), driven by the continued decline in fertility and the expansion of the working-age population. In the case of the elderly, dependency remains low due to slow growth in life expectancy and historically high mortality rates. In 1950, the ODR was only 5.9%, increasing to 11.39% in 2000 — an increase that would have been greater had it not been for the effects of the civil war, which greatly

increased mortality, especially among men and children (Koudawo 2001; Guerreiro et al. 2019). By 2050, the ODR is projected to be 7.9%, still low but consistent with the onset of the aging process. The sex ratio (Table 4) also reflects the combined effects of mortality, fertility, and historical events. In 1950, it was 100%, possibly influenced by high maternal mortality resulting from poor sanitary conditions during the colonial period (Semedo 2021). In 2000, it fell to 94.4% due to the impact of the civil war, and is projected to rise again in 2050 (98.8%), in line with expected improvements in living and health conditions.

These changes in the age structure have direct implications for the country's potential demographic dividend. However, Sub-Saharan Africa, including Guinea-Bissau, faces major challenges in taking advantage of this opportunity: high fertility rates, slow decline in mortality, and persistent impacts of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS. In 2020, HIV prevalence was 3.8% among women and 2.2% among men, with 1,700 new cases reported and only 60% of people living with HIV were on ART (Sanca et al. 2023), factors that continue to limit mortality reduction.

Thus, although Guinea-Bissau is slowly moving toward the demographic dividend, its trajectory remains marked by a very young structure, high dependency, and a gradual — but consistent — process of fertility reduction and improved survival, similar to what is observed in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 4: Dependency Ratio in Guinea-Bissau (1950, 2000, 2050)

Year	TDR	YDR	ODR	SR_t	AI
1950	72.0	66.0	5.9	100.4	9.0
2000	84.2	72.8	11.4	94.4	15.7
2050	53.5	45.6	7.9	98.8	17.4

Source: United Nations (2022); author´s elaboration.

The experience of several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa confirms that the demographic dividend is a real opportunity, but it requires coordinated policies to materialize it. Empirical studies show that the key determinants of this dividend include investments in maternal and child health, family planning, education, and the labor market, as well as strong economic institutions (Woldegiorgis 2023). For the author, although the demographic transition in Africa began later, there is significant potential for a first and a

second dividend as these policies are effectively implemented. Therefore, the case of Guinea-Bissau reflects this regional dilemma: there is a window of opportunity, but capturing its benefits depends on intense structural reforms before the population ages.

Conclusion

This study pioneered an analysis of the demographic transition in Guinea-Bissau, demonstrating how the historical, political, and institutional context uniquely shaped the pace of this process. Late independence in 1974 marked the beginning of transformations that resulted in a progressive reduction in mortality and an increase in life expectancy, driven by improvements in public health services. This movement translated into a consistent decline in infant mortality over recent decades and a gradual increase in longevity, although still at levels lower than those observed in other regions of the Global South. In contrast, fertility remains high, with slow and recent declines — a pattern that reflects African Demographic Exceptionalism (Bongaarts and Casterline 2013). This trajectory was profoundly impacted by critical events, such as the 1998–1999 civil war, which interrupted health advances and intensified mortality. Currently, Guinea-Bissau is in a late and stalled transition stage, defined not merely by poverty but by the persistence of state fragility that prevents a sustained and linear demographic decline.

This trajectory, however, must be read from a decolonial perspective, which recognizes that the Guinean demographic pace is not a "lag" relative to the European model, but a historical response to the ruptures imposed by colonialism and post-independence instability (Koudawo 2001; Semedo 2021). Unlike classical views of demographic transition that impose a universal linearity, Guinea-Bissau's demography reflects a "demography of resistance", where the maintenance of high fertility rates and mortality volatility are byproducts of a state whose institutions have been historically weakened.

The pioneering analysis of this study demonstrates that the demographic transition in the country is inseparable from its political sovereignty and is, ultimately, a "demography held hostage by politics". In this scenario, demographic inertia and continuous population expansion occur within a framework of institutional instability. This observed "demographic inertia" is not merely a statistical phenomenon but a reflection of a people who, in the absence of solid state protection networks, resort to family survival strategies (Cardoso 1995). Therefore, capturing a future demographic dividend

(Bloom, Canning, and Fink 2014) will not come from external mechanisms, but from Guinea-Bissau's ability to decolonize its governance structures and strengthen its institutional resilience.

Furthermore, the case of Guinea-Bissau underscores the urgent need to develop theoretical frameworks within the emerging field of the "Demography of Conflict and Violence". As argued by Brunborg and Tabeau (2005), conflict should not be viewed as a mere temporary disruption of demographic trends, but as a central structural force that reshapes population dynamics through forced migration, altered fertility behaviors, and specific mortality patterns. By situating Guinea-Bissau within this field, we emphasize that demographic research in fragile states requires specialized methodologies that account for the profound impact of systemic violence on human reproduction and survival. Specifically, to overcome this stall stage, the country must strengthen its institutions and promote consistent policies that address the structural causes of high fertility and mortality volatility. This requires a decolonial lens that recognizes the agency of Guinean women and the need to transform deeply rooted gender norms that limit reproductive autonomy and female schooling. In this sense, the practical implications of this study suggest that capturing a future demographic dividend (Bloom, Canning, and Fink 2014) is intrinsically linked to the sovereignty of public health and education policies. Strengthening primary care must be accompanied by female empowerment, treating girls' education as a tool for emancipation that will naturally lead to a more organic and sustainable fertility transition. Furthermore, the integration of reproductive rights and family planning into the national health strategy is fundamental to overcoming the sociocultural barriers that keep fertility high. In summary, the consolidation of demographic transformations in Guinea-Bissau will require lasting political stability, capable of converting the potential of its youthful age structure into real development opportunities, overcoming historical cycles of fragility through resilient governance committed to the well-being of its people.

REFERENCES

Arnaldo, C. 2013. "Factors Associated with High Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Journal of African Studies* 1: 45–68.

Arnaldo, C., and V. Cau. 2013. "Early Childbearing and Low Contraceptive Use in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of African Demography* 12 (2): 77–94.

Balde, I. C. 2019. "Association between Maternal Education and Under-Five Mortality in Guinea-Bissau: Analysis of Single Live Births Reported by Mothers in MICS 2014." Master's thesis, Cedeplar, UFMG.

Benzinho, J., and M. Rosa. 2015. *Guia Turístico: A Descoberta da Guiné-Bissau*. Almedina.

Bloom, D. E., D. Canning, and G. Fink. 2014. "Disease and Development Revisited." *Journal of Political Economy* 122 (6): 1355–1366.

Bongaarts, J. 2008. "Fertility Transitions in Developing Countries: Progress or Stagnation?" *Studies in Family Planning* 39 (2): 105–110.

Bongaarts, J. 2017. "Africa's Unique Fertility Transition." *Population and Development Review* 43: 39–58.

Bongaarts, J. 2020. "Trends in fertility and fertility preferences in sub-Saharan Africa: The roles of education and family planning programs." *Genus* 76(1), 1–15.

Bongaarts, J., and J. Casterline. 2013. "Fertility Transition: Is Sub-Saharan Africa Different?" *Population and Development Review* 38: 153–168.

Brunborg, H., and E. Tabeau. 2005. "Demography of Conflict and Violence: An Emerging Field." *European Journal of Population/Revue Européenne de Démographie* 21 (2): 131–144.

Canning, D., S. Raja, and A. Yazbeck. 2015. *Africa's Demographic Transition: Dividend or Disaster?* Washington, DC: World Bank.

Cardoso, C. 1995. *Economic and Social History of Guinea-Bissau*. Lisbon: Colibri.

Cleland, J., and K. Machiyama. 2017. "The Challenges of Achieving Replacement Fertility in Africa." *Population Studies* 71 (Supplement): 1–17.

Damerow, S. M., H. G. M. Lopes, G. Russo, M. Skovdal, J. B. Sørensen, and A, B. Fisker. 2024. "Barriers and Facilitators to the Utilization of Facility Births during a National Health System Strengthening Initiative: A Mixed-Methods Assessment from Rural Guinea-Bissau." *SSM–Health Systems* 3.

Defo, B. 2014. "Demographic, Epidemiological, and Health Transitions in Africa: Reconciling the Evidence." *African Population Studies* 28 (1): 301–318.

Ezeh, A. C., Mberu, B. U., and Emina, J. O. 2009. "Stall in fertility decline in Eastern African countries: Regional analysis of patterns, determinants and implications." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 364(1532): 2991–3007.

Fazzio, I., V. Mann, and P. Boone. 2011. "Temporal Trends (1977–2007) and Ethnic Inequity in Child Mortality in Rural Villages of Southern Guinea-Bissau." *BMC Public Health* 11. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-683.

Garenne, M., and V. Joseph. 2002. "Stagnation in Fertility Decline in Sub-Saharan Africa." *African Population Studies* 17 (1): 19–33.

Gomes, D. F. F. 2014. "O 14 de novembro de 1980 na Guiné-Bissau visto pela imprensa portuguesa: Análise comparativa." *Revista Portuguesa de História* 45: 203–226. https://dl.uc.pt/handle/10316.2/35431.

Green, E. 2012. "The Political Demography of Conflict in Modern Africa." *Civil Wars* 14 (4): 477–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2012.740198.

Grupo de Foz. 2021. "Age Structure and Implications of Demographic Transition." *Cadernos de Demografia Histórica* 18: 1–32.

Guerreiro, C., et al. 2019. "Demographic Change and Health Vulnerabilities in Guinea-Bissau." *Revista Angolana de Saúde Pública* 5 (2): 55–73.

Indi, A. M. 2021. "Que organização e que recursos humanos para suportar o desenvolvimento do sistema de informação no Hospital Nacional Simão Mendes, Guiné-Bissau." Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. https://run.unl.pt/entities/publication/dd20dd10-8ae5-4da1-9495-f4c42060cd08.

Institute for Security Studies. 2023. "Guinea-Bissau: Demographics – Current Path (African Futures)." *ISS Africa*. https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/countries/guinea-bissau/.

Instituto Nacional de Estatística da Guiné-Bissau (INE). 2023. *Estatística de Gênero*. Bissau: INE. https://www.cplp.org/media/vsll1umn/guiné-bissau_estatísticas-de-género_2023_ine-gb.pdf.

Kirk, D. 1996. "Demographic Transition Theory." *Population Studies* 50 (3): 361–387. https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000149536.

Kotsadam, A., and G. Ostby. 2019. "Armed Conflict and Maternal Mortality: A Micro-Level Analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2013." *Social Science & Medicine* 239. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112526.

Koudawo, A. 2001. *The Civil War in Guinea-Bissau: Causes and Social Consequences*. Bissau: INEP.

Kraehnert, K., T. Brück, M. Di Maio, and R. Nisticò. 2019. "The Effects of Conflict on Fertility: Evidence from the Genocide in Rwanda." *Demography* 56 (3): 935–968. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00774-x.

Lee, R. 1987. "Population Dynamics of Humans and Other Animals." *Demography* 24 (4): 443–465. https://doi.org/10.2307/2061385.

M'Bundé, S. T. 2017. "Comportamento político e cíclica interrupção da democracia na Guiné-Bissau." *Almanaque de Ciência Política* 1 (2): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.25193//iissn2526-8066.v1.n2.a3.

Omran, A. 2001. "The Epidemiologic Transition: A Theory of the Epidemiology of Population Change." *The Milbank Quarterly* 79 (4): 607–637. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2690264/.

Pontes, A., et al. 2008. "Infant Mortality Trends in Lusophone West Africa." *International Journal of Public Health* 53 (2): 123–130.

Sanca, L., et al. 2023. "HIV Prevalence and Treatment Access in Guinea-Bissau, 2020." *BMC Infectious Diseases* 23: 112–123.

Sangreman, C, F. Proença, and L. V. Martins. 2016. "Guiné-Bissau: A evolução (2010–2016)." Lisboa: Centro de Estudos sobre África e Desenvolvimento, Working Paper 148: 6–34. https://repositorio.ulisboa.pt/entities/publication/d24665fe-c676-430b-b03d-8efb2e4e32f3.

Schoumaker, B. 2019. "Stalls in Fertility Transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Real or Spurious?" *Population and Development Review* 45 (1): 13–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12224.

Semedo, A. 2021. "Colonialism and Demographic Decline in Guinea-Bissau." *Journal of African Social History* 9 (1): 88–110.

Sharrow, D., L. Hug, D. You, L. Alkema, R. Black, S. Cousens, T. Croft et al.. 2022. "Global, Regional, and National Trends in Under-5 Mortality between 1990 and 2019 with Scenario-Based Projections until 2030: A Systematic Analysis by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation." *The Lancet Global Health* 10 (2): e195–e206. https://pure.johnshopkins.edu/en/publications/global-regional-and-national-trends-in-under-5-mortality-between-/.

Tabutin, D., and B. Schoumaker. 2004. "The Demography of Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1950s to the 2000s." *Population* 59 (3): 457–519.

Tabutin, D., and B. Schoumaker. 2021. "Mortality and Health in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Recent Empirical Evidence." *Population-E* 76 (2): 221–302.

Torrisi, O., A. B. Fisker, D. A. A. Fernandes, and S. Helleringer. 2025. "Improving Retrospective Data on Recent Household Deaths: A Multi-Arm Randomized Trial in Guinea-Bissau." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 54 (2).

United Nations. 2022. *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://population.un-.org/wpp.

Woldegiorgis, M. M. 2023. "Drivers of Demographic Dividend in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy* 4 (2): 387–413.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the demographic transition process between 1950 and 2020, as well as future population trends of Guinea-Bissau. Specifically, it seeks to: present and discuss the country's historical, social, and political processes and their relationship with demographic transition; and estimate and understand the demographic transition model experienced by Guinea-Bissau and countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Research of this nature in the Guinean context is highly relevant, as it is the first study of its kind, which aims to encourage new research and generate the knowledge necessary for the development of public policies directed toward various demographic phenomena in Guinea-Bissau. To this end, the main demographic indicators of the transition process were used, based on data obtained from the

UN Population Division. Among the main results, it is noteworthy that, in light of the theory of demographic transition, Guinea-Bissau is in a late transition process, with fertility rates of around 4.5 and mortality indicators that are still considered high. Despite this, the country appears to be following the downward trends of the indicators analyzed, similar to countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region whose reality is similar.

KEYWORDS

Demographic transition. Population dynamics. Guinea-Bissau.

Received on February 26, 2026
Accepted on April 22, 2026[4]

4 How to cite: Carvalho, Angelita Alves de, and Vavito Andre da Costa. 2025. "A look at the demographic transition process in Guinea-Bissau." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 10 (20): 133-154. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.153872.

ENDOGENOUS PEACEBUILDING IN THE NIGER DELTA: COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACHES AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

Tope Shola Akinyetun[1]
Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi[2]
Ambrose Osariyekemwen Iyase[3]

Introduction

The Niger Delta is part of the most volatile region in Nigeria, having experienced a prolonged history of political assassination, martyrdom, neglect, agitation, militancy, and violent conflict. The assassination of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders in 1995 and the retaliation for the environmental protests and the mass slaughter of civilians in the Odi Massacre in 1999 are examples of martyrdom and political violence in deep symbolic terms (African Studies Centre 1999; Francis et al. 2011). These incidents also include agitations related to environmental injustice, pollution, and environmental degradation, which hinder development in the region. Ironically, this paradox highlights the instability of peace in the country, as the area is

1 Department of Political Science, Lagos State University of Education. Oto/Ijanikin, Nigeria. E-mail: akinyetunts@lasued.edu.ng. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1906-3410.

2 Department of Political Science, University of Benin. Benin City, Nigeria. E-mail: ikponmwosa.ebomoyi@uniben.edu. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0776-5231.

3 Department of Political Science, University of Benin. Benin City, Nigeria. E-mail: ambrose.iyase@uniben.edu. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4925-4953.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.150670

central to Nigeria, being the primary source of government income through its crude oil deposits. For instance, attacks on oil facilities are estimated to have resulted in a significant loss of approximately 130 million barrels of oil in 2016 alone (Fatunji 2016) and 2.3 trillion Nigerian Naira in 2023 (Okonkwo 2023) due to militancy in the region.

Meanwhile, 179 cases of oil theft were recorded between January 11 and January 17, 2025, involving 55 illegal refineries and 29 illegal pipeline connections in the Niger Delta (Olawin 2025). In the same period, 48 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices were burned down between January 2019 and October 2022, as government buildings in at least nine states around the region were the target of militia action and politically motivated violence (George 2022). In addition to triggering a wave of kidnappings, attacks on government infrastructure, and the destruction of lives and property, militancy also resulted in devastating financial damages, with the government allegedly losing 10 billion Nigerian Naira per day during the times when the assaults on oil platforms were the most active in 2016 (Okere et al. 2016).

The conflict thus hindered both peace and peacebuilding efforts. As the government led by President Musa Yar'Adua in 2009 launched the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in an attempt to offer amnesty to militants, the pursuit of a sustainable peace in the region has been futile. The low effectiveness of the programme can be attributed to its politicization, corruption, ineffective control, the government's lack of sincerity, and poor management (Ebiede et al. 2020; Sarki 2009). Additionally, attacks and destruction of oil infrastructure continue to recur. For example, in 2025, militants organized attacks on trunk lines and terminals, which connected a significant portion of production (The Defense Post 2025).

To promote peace in the region, non-state armed forces were contracted, such as the Tompolo-led Tantita Security Services, which had been engaged since August 2022. As a result, thousands of cases of oil theft and pipeline vandalism have been detected, illegal facilities have been destroyed, and critical oil installations have been patrolled and guarded regularly, together with state security services (Kazeem 2025). Other peacebuilding strategies include negotiation and dialogue, such as the routine holding of state-community-oil company roundtables, which often result in empty promises or poorly executed memoranda of understanding (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2017; Francis et al. 2011). People-oriented development was supposed to be achieved by involving stakeholders through the agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The agency, however, has been plagued

by corruption, project abandonment, and the capture of the elite, leaving communities alienated (Ivongbe et al. 2025). On the same note, community policing and vigilante groups were encouraged to contain insecurity. Still, without proper checks and balances, the groups were soon after co-opted by local strongmen and frequently fueled the spiral of violence (Akinfenwa and Egbejule 2025).

Meanwhile, local capacity-building efforts, such as youth skills training and entrepreneurship programs as part of the Amnesty Programme, were initially seen as successful but undermined by patronage, low job absorption, and the lack of prospective industries to hire the trained youths (Ebiede 2018). Lastly, efforts to restore the environment, such as the US$1 billion Ogoni Cleanup, which started in 2016, have been delayed, experienced funding challenges, and had minimal effects on communities that live along the oil-contaminated watercourses and agricultural lands (Amnesty International 2020; Odinaka 2023). These interventions have yet to halt the conflict, and peace remains elusive. Such failures highlight a paradox, in that despite frequent interventions being packaged in the rhetoric of dialogue, participation, and development, peace has not been achieved due to inadequate and/or politicized top-down interventions and/or insufficiently sustained interventions. This trend of deficits amplifies the need to shift towards endogenous, community-based peacebuilding.

Extant literature has discussed various facets of conflict and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta. Ikelegbe (2017) examined the intersection between oil conflict, state fragility, and post-conflict transitions, situating the violence within the broader context of the political economy of resource control. Ebiede et al. (2020) concentrated on the Presidential Amnesty Programme and appreciated the fact that it has successfully moderated large-scale militancy. Yet, it has not been able to realise lasting reintegration and peace. Similarly, Inyang (2018) examined the relationships between militancy and restlessness among youth as a product of oil politics, whereas David (2025) referred to the grievances and insecurities that communities face, leading to insurgency.

Regarding peacebuilding, Mamudu et al. (2021) presented the idea of oil company-community relations and corporate social responsibility in the context of conflict management, whereas Courson (2016) framed the Niger Delta crisis in the framework of the global politics of petro-violence. Other interventions, such as the Ogoni environmental cleanup, have also been mulled by scholars as a potential source of promoting peace; yet, this is marred by ongoing delays and governance failures (Odinaka 2023). What is lacking,

then, is an analysis of endogenous peacebuilding: peace efforts based on local agency, community-driven development, and environmental restoration. As a result, the present study examines community-centred peacebuilding and alternative development models in the Niger Delta. Specifically, it appraises how local actors articulate strategies of inclusion, dialogue, community security, and livelihood diversification, and how these can be positioned as viable pathways towards sustainable peace in the region.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilizes the Human Needs theory (HNT) as the conceptual framework to examine the process of peacebuilding in the Niger Delta. HNT, developed by Burton (1990, 2024), posits that conflict persists when basic human needs, such as security, identity, participation, recognition, and development, are systematically denied. Contrary to the interests that can be negotiated, human needs cannot be negotiated, and their unfulfilled condition creates protracted and violent conflicts (Burton 1990). The main idea of HNT is that sustainable peace is impossible to establish if the material and relational cases are not met, including participation, recognition, and dignity (International Peace Institute 2018). Thus, any intervention that does not address these needs will inevitably be inefficient or temporary.

The case study of HNT in the Niger Delta highlights the inability to end militancy and the repeated failure of interventions in a context where the non-negotiability of basic human needs is prioritized. When the fundamental needs of security, identity, participation, and development are systematically withheld, conflict persists (Burton 1990). The state-based programs and agencies, such as the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), have attempted to bring about stability through stipends, contracts, and training. Nevertheless, such efforts have focused on temporary interests and have not addressed underlying structural injustices and profound needs, thereby maintaining the source of conflict. Ebiede et al. (2020) observe that without inclusive governance and listening institutions, this need will not be fulfilled, and disputes are bound to take new shapes and manifestations.

The Niger Delta gives a good example of the above scenario. Communities have repeatedly insisted on being included in decision-making processes, promoting good governance, and acknowledging their participation in the peace process. The youth population has expressed a need for education,

job opportunities, and empowerment opportunities in the region, which are essential to ensure they have viable livelihood alternatives to militancy (Ikelegbe 2017). One more vital dimension is ecological security: decades of oil spills, deforestation, and pollution have severely damaged the agricultural and fishing sectors, and cleanup initiatives, including the Ogoni cleanup, are often halted or politicized. These environmental complaints underscore the role of deprivation of fundamental survival requirements in fostering long-term unrest. Moreover, state interventions have been compromised due to corruption and mismanagement, eroding dignity and trust, which has contributed to alienation rather than reconciliation (Akinyetun 2023b, 2024; Odinaka 2023).

These effects of militancy underscore the relevance of HNT. Rampant unemployment, teenage pregnancy, and psychosocial trauma are witnesses to the disregard of the needs of protection and identity in the vulnerable population, especially women and children (Uche and Uche 2025). Communities have also developed their own locally based security systems, such as vigilante groups, in response to the state's inability to meet their fundamental safety requirements. The HNT is relevant because of its explanatory ability to facilitate understanding of the failures of past interventions. The reason why top-down, externally imposed programs have failed to bring lasting peace is their emphasis on unmet needs. However, critics warn that the theory might be too broad and abstract, and the needs are complex to define and operationalise (Bradshaw and Lötter 2019). Additionally, it is prone to downplaying deep-seated power inequalities that could hinder the fulfillment of community needs. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, HNT is especially applicable to the case of the Niger Delta, where issues of participation, livelihoods, dignity, and ecological justice still underlie the unrest.

The use of HNT points out that peace will not be achieved in the Niger Delta through elite compromises or palliatives. Interventions cannot be effective unless the fundamental needs of communities, namely participation, recognition, livelihood, ecological security, and dignity, are addressed. The theory thus provides a conceptual perspective to comprehend the persistence of conflict and a moral direction for rethinking peacebuilding, focusing not on limited stability but on endogenous, needs-fulfilling approaches as a source of sustainable peace.

Methodology

The research design employed is a qualitative, interpretive inquiry-based approach. Since conflict and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta are complex phenomena, qualitative methods are most appropriate for reflecting the lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies of local actors. The research conducted is based on data from in-depth interviews with participants from the community, leaders, and stakeholders in the Niger Delta. The sampling consists of 49 participants randomly selected from various communities across the Niger Delta. The sample was diverse in terms of gender, age, and social roles (where people who had been directly impacted by militancy or those involved in peacebuilding processes were prioritised). A set of semi-structured interviews was conducted, and questions were asked about how militancy has influenced the community's life, the socio-economic and environmental impacts of conflict, the perception of state-led interventions, and the locals' views on the vision of peace. The interviews were conducted in English and Pidgin (the majority of the respondents preferred Pidgin), were recorded with permission, and were later transcribed.

Familiarisation was ensured by reading the transcript several times. Coding was performed to ensure a close connection with the text in terms of its interpretation, and direct quotes were selected to preserve the respondents' voices. The analytical discourse was created to situate these accounts within the broader body of literature on peacebuilding and conflict in the Niger Delta. To enhance validity, triangulation was employed in the analysis, where interview data were contrasted with secondary information, including policy documents, reports, journal articles, newspaper articles, and internet sources. Meanwhile, reflexivity was also maintained during the analysis process, and the researcher's positionality and the interpretive decisions made during coding were considered. The ethical standards of research were strictly adhered to during the interviews. Informed consent was obtained, and the study's objectives were explained to the respondents before the study began. They were assured of anonymity by using pseudonyms and ID codes (e.g., A1, B2).

Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents the analysis of the opinions of participants on the subject matter which is synthesized and thematically represented.

Community Conceptualisations of Peacebuilding

Based on the interviews, it is evident that the respondents in the Niger Delta perceive peacebuilding as a multidimensional process that incorporates inclusion, dialogue, transparent governance, and environmental rehabilitation. Peace is no longer just conceived in terms of the ending of hostilities, but in terms of the institutionalization of structures that ensure meaningful involvement and material redress. The former resonates with Jarikre's (2025) claim that Niger Delta violence is based on a political economy of exclusion; however, it also takes the discussion forward by prefiguring community voices in defining peace in practical, all-day contexts. The need to include and to involve stakeholders is a dominant theme. An example is the submission of one respondent that peace needs "stakeholders' engagements, community participation, transparent governance, economic programs, infrastructure development"[4], and another one claimed that, "policy makers and stakeholders [should] collaborate in the areas of policy dialogues to give room for effective stakeholders' participation in addressing the issues arising from oil exploration"[5]. These views emphasise that, to local actors, it should be a real power of decision-making and access to resources. This position is consistent with previous studies of participatory peacebuilding (Ikelegbe 2017) and, at the same time, indicates the shortcomings of state-led consultations that can easily break down into elite bargains.

Another strategy that respondents highlighted as essential for establishing trust is dialogue and negotiation. According to one of the participants, peacebuilding is possible only "by facilitating an inclusive dialogue and partnerships among local communities, and international organizations to implement sustainable development plans"[6]. Another one emphasized that "policymakers should engage with various stakeholders, including community leaders, civil society organizations, businesses, and academic institutions through regular dialogue and consultation"[7]. Such descriptions imply that dialogue should be perceived not as a single-time settlement but as an iterative process that requires continuity and responsibility, which is in line with critiques of the consultation practices of the Niger Delta Development Commission, which have historically not followed up on implementing them (Ebiede 2018; Ebiede et al. 2020).

4 A1. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Okrika, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 27, 2025.

5 B2. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Nembe, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 4, 2025.

6 C3. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Brass, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 16, 2025.

7 **I9. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Bonny, Rivers State (Niger Delta), July 3, 2025.**

Also, the respondents associated peace with open governance. According to one of the participants, "let there be transparency in the amnesty program, and education training"[8]. Some others traced it to the deeper issue of institutional decay; "challenge of state authority and establishment of parallel systems of governance which have led to corruption, abuse of power, and a breakdown of institutions"[9]. These narratives demonstrate dissatisfaction with the vague procedures of interventions like the Amnesty Programme and the NDDC projects, which communities view as elite-led rather than development-based (Nwobueze and Inokoba 2017). This highlights the need for effective governance in translating dialogue into reality.

Among the key findings identified in the data is the emphasis on restoring the environment as a means of promoting peace and harmony. The respondents often associated the continuity of conflict with ecological degradation. For instance, "environmental degradation (no fertile land for farming, food production)" was said to be one of the significant points of dissatisfaction[10], and another one claimed that "communities mostly encounter issues such as environmental pollution resulting from pipeline vandalism. This issue could be addressed by cleaning the affected communities"[11]. Another was the one that advocated for "reforestation, cleaning up pollution, and restoring waterways, which can benefit both the environment and local communities"[12]. These views, as highlighted by Mosello et al. (2024), suggest that environmental restoration is not merely a marginal issue, but rather the core of achieving sustainable peace. Through implication, ecological recovery, reconciliation, and livelihood security are essential to the local imaginaries of peace, with an even stronger focus on the fact that the environment needs recovery to promote endogenous peacebuilding.

Collectively, these results demonstrate that community actors in the Niger Delta understand the concept of peacebuilding as a multifaceted process that involves the inclusion of everyone, sustained dialogue, open governance, and environmental restoration. Thus, dialogue tokenisation or the postponement of remediation can cause the collapse of trust to be attained, and the conflict can reappear (Coning et al. 2022). Due to this fact, peace is procedural and needs distributive justice and institutional legitimacy.

8 G7. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Biseni, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), April 23, 2025.

9 J10. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Egbema, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 22, 2025.

10 A1. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Okrika, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 27, 2025.

11 C3. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Brass, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 16, 2025.

12 J10. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Egbema, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 22, 2025.

Peaceful intervention must focus on eloquent endogenous pathways that are participatory and ecological.

Inadequate State-Led Interventions

Respondents were critical of the state-initiated interventions in the Niger Delta, in particular, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) and the Ogoni environmental cleanup. Although they recognise that these programmes were meant to appease militancy and stimulate development, the participants always framed them as partisan, ineffective, and unable to ameliorate the underlying discontents that underlie conflict. This supports the conclusion of Ajibola (2015) that, whereas the Amnesty Programme reduced insurgency in the immediate context, it did not achieve long-term reintegration and peace. The respondents had described the Amnesty Programme as a symbol of corruption and marginalisation. One of them stated that it was possible to maintain peace if "there is transparency in the amnesty program, and education training"[13]. Others decried the unequal distribution of benefits, citing that most of the youths were not accessing any training schemes or support in areas of insufficiency. Such testimonies suggest that Ansorg and Kurtenbach (2023) are correct in their assertion that amnesty-related interventions risk perpetuating marginalization sequences in cases of elite capture of the rewards. To the respondents, the issue was the narrow scope of the programme and the structure of its governance, which failed to evoke trust in those it aimed to reintegrate.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has been reported as ineffective and compromised. Respondents raised issues about unfinished projects that the agency still has and the loss of development they see in their communities. According to one respondent, "these challenges can be mitigated and addressed effectively by stakeholder engagement and provision of basic amenities, etc."[14], which indirectly highlights the failure of institutions like NDDC to deliver on basic needs. Some argued that the NDDC interventions were more symbolic than substantive, despite the massive allocations, which validated previous criticisms of elite capture and corruption within the agency (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre 2020). In the meantime, the Ogoni clean-up programme, initiated in 2016, was also met with criticism. Even as some respondents cited environmental restoration as a significant factor in achieving peace, they decried that formal cleanup

13 G7. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Biseni, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), April 23, 2025.

14 K11. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Eleme, Rivers State (Niger Delta), July 8, 2025.

has been slow, disjointed, and remote from community realities. One of the interviewees highlighted the importance of "reforestation, cleaning up pollution, and restoring waterways"[15] as key steps to restore livelihoods and confidence. These views align with the observation made by Odinaka (2023), who points out that the cleanup has suffered due to a lack of funding, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of community involvement, thus undermining the peace-building capacity of the page.

Besides the foregoing, there is also the feeling that armed non-state actors often fill the governance gaps as they seek to capture essential oil and state infrastructure. The respondents made references to how vigilante groups and former militant organisations took up duties to protect pipelines and government installations, usually on a contractual or informal basis. This is a paradox because state interventions aimed at demobilising militants have, in other cases, reintegrated them as quasi-state security actors. The interactions can be traced to the findings of Iheduru (2023) and Kazeem (2025) on the situation in the Niger Delta, where non-state actors hold a significant level of power in both the security and developmental spheres. Collectively, these views suggest that community actors widely perceive the state's interventions as having a weak transformative impact. Amnesty has been viewed as a way of providing relief, rather than a structural solution. As the NDDC is plagued by corruption and the Ogoni cleanup does not bring ecological justice, the instability of the state's legitimacy in the area is apparent. This highlights the need to embrace endogenous peace-building interventions that are based on locally conceived approaches, transparency, involvement, and ecological rehabilitation.

Locally Rooted Security Strategies

Community policing, vigilante groups, and the role of non-state actors were mentioned by the respondents several times as being at the heart of controlling the insecurity situation in the Niger Delta. These processes were characterised as supported and warned. They were perceived as sensitive to the local security issue on the one hand, and on the other hand, they brought up the accountability issue and the reproduction of violence. Community policing was even mentioned by some respondents, who specifically demanded it as a way to regain peace and security. One of the respondents cited "community policing, demobilization and reintegration" as

15 J10. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Egbema, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 22, 2025.

key strategies for reducing conflict[16]. Another said that peace would require "proper community engagements, awareness, and education on government policies"[17]. Community-based policing is also a source of security and a confidence-building activity in the eyes of these actors since it is a way of connecting governance with local realities. This is echoed by Akinyetun (2022), who noted that community-based security structures in the Niger Delta had explicitly arisen due to the ineffectiveness, lack of trust, or lack of formal policing.

The relevant paradox, the respondents also mentioned, is the role of armed non-state actors, especially ex-militants, who do become, in fact, the guarantors of oil installations and government facilities. According to participatory observations, the state authority has been outsourced, as the vigilance formations and former insurgents have been tasked with securing pipelines. This is consistent with the definition of hybrid governance developed by Iheduru (2023) in his study of the Niger Delta situation, where the distinction between the state and non-state is lost. Although they can also prevent sabotage in the short term, such deals acculturate non-state armed actors as power brokers, which creates a fragile peace that remains weak based on patronage contracts (Nextier SPD 2025).

The local security was mixed among the respondents. Although they appreciated the level of effectiveness of these local security efforts in dealing with short-term threats, they were concerned about sustainability and the dangers of normalizing warlords and local strongmen. According to one of these interviewees, the problem lies in the "establishment of parallel systems of governance which have led to corruption, abuse of power, and a breakdown of institutions"[18]. This implies that, despite the perceived need for community policing and vigilante structures, they also reveal the inefficiency of formal structures and the state's ineffective ability to offer credible security (Akinyetun 2023a).

These accounts highlight the fact that security is not assured even in the Niger Delta; inhabitants are accustomed to providing their own levels of security when the institutions of the state cannot perform their job. They are fragile, individualised, and are susceptible to co-option. Therefore, to make peace-building sustainable, local security policies need to be institutionalised, controlled, and embedded into the larger community-based systems of governance. Otherwise, they risk creating patterns of violence and dependency.

16 A1. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Okrika, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 27, 2025.

17 F6. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Warri, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 2, 2025.

18 J10. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Egbema, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 22, 2025.

Although state programmes are usually preoccupied with disarmament and reintegration, they do not interact with how communities in practice bring about security without effective policing. Identifying and legitimizing these local security practices, while encouraging accountability and inclusivity, forms one of the central components of endogenous peace-building in the region.

Socioeconomic and Gendered Consequences of Militancy

The respondents noted the significance of the socio-economic dislocations caused by militancy in the Niger Delta. They highlighted rampant unemployment, teen pregnancy, forced involvement in violence, disintegration of livelihoods, and psychological trauma as permanent effects of conflict. These effects directly influence the ways communities conceptualise peace and the kind of interventions which communities focus on. The results contribute to the existing literature, where other scholars have predicted the macro-political dynamics of oil and insurgency in the future (Courson 2016; Ikelegbe 2017), by highlighting the human cost incurred by households and communities daily. The respondents expressly cited youth unemployment and restlessness as one of the serious consequences of militancy. According to one of the respondents, the most urgent issues their community is facing are "youth unemployment, youth restiveness, teenage pregnancy, loss of livelihood"[19]. The other one said that joblessness has "forced many youths into participation in militancy, drug abuse, and other vices"[20]. These narratives are consistent with Ikelegbe's (2017) findings on the formation of restlessness cycles resulting from exclusion from the oil economy, as well as the further and more personalized effects of exclusion on households.

The feminine aspect of the conflict was raised in the mention of teenage pregnancy and female vulnerability. One of the respondents lamented about the "increase in teenage pregnancy"[21], which was a direct result of social disruption and economic availability. This viewpoint questions much of the literature on the Niger Delta itself, where male youth militancy has been historically emphasised and the impact on women and girls in the post-conflict period has been under-reported. It also points out that peace-building should not only focus on ex-militants, but also address the social damages caused by the conflict economy as a whole. In the meantime, the respondents talked

19 B2. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Nembe, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 4, 2025.

20 H8. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Ogoni, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 12, 2025.

21 B2. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Nembe, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 4, 2025.

of social disintegration and psychological trauma. The effects that violence produces continued to be experienced. According to one participant, due to the "psychosocial trauma and displacement" after years of insecurity, many families are yet to recover[22]. Others discussed the issue of "forced participation" and the erosion of trust in institutions, which can leave lasting scars in communities[23]. These testimonies echo the claim of Ebiede (2024) that reintegration efforts post-Amnesty have failed to reintegrate ex-combatants and the affected populations into deeper psychosocial needs. Besides, the economic impacts were highlighted. The destruction of agricultural lands and waterways due to oil spills and conflict-caused threats was attributed to the breakdown of conventional livelihoods. The situation is characterized by "environmental degradation (no fertile land for farming, food production)", which poses a significant obstacle to recovery[24]. The loss of livelihood also formed not only a part of poverty but also a trigger to long-term militancy as the frustrated youths returned to violence and sabotage when they had no other alternatives (Inyang 2018).

These narratives help to emphasise that the expenses of militancy are more complex and social. Peacebuilding, therefore, cannot be limited to disarmament or elite compromises, but must also include the gendered, household, and psychological harms as determined directly by communities. The findings underscore the need to move away from narrow security frameworks and focus on endogenous peacebuilding models that prioritize youth empowerment, gender-sensitive programming, livelihood diversification, and psychosocial support as their primary approaches.

Community-Rooted Policy Proposals

The respondents also articulated concrete and practicable proposals for peace in the region. The proposals focused on diversifying livelihoods, human capital formation, and environmental restoration, reflecting a community-based vision of peace that prioritized community agency over state paternalism (Barnett 2015). They also demonstrated how communities envision alternative models of development and security. Diversification of livelihoods and development of skills became the outstanding suggestions. Some respondents reiterated the significance of training and education, with one stating that peace requires "proper community engagements, aware-

22 I9. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Bonny, Rivers State (Niger Delta), July 3, 2025.

23 L13. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Koko, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 2, 2025.

24 A1. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Okrika, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 27, 2025.

ness, and education on government policies"[25]. Yet another one demanded specific investments in the empowerment of young people, emphasizing "there should be education, scholarships, and empowerment for the youths"[26]. These proposals are noteworthy, as they are not just complaints, but a demand for lasting peace, which establishes new economic avenues beyond militancy and oil-rent patronage.

There was also the recommendation by the respondents to have needs-based planning and community ownership of development projects. One of the participants noted that "the government should carry out needs assessment of the people, so that the projects and interventions will reflect what the people actually want"[27]. This call rejects top-down solutions like the NDDC, which communities believe do not align with their realities. It also confirms the contention of Peace Direct (2019) that exclusionary forms of governance perpetuate conflict, and introduces a local prescription: peacebuilding should be designed with, not for, communities. At the same time, environmental restoration was identified as one of the key principles of peace. The environment and local communities can benefit, as one respondent notes, "Reforestation, cleaning up pollution, and restoring waterways ... can benefit both the environment and local communities"[28]. The other one emphasized the need for "cleaning the affected communities" as a direct response to pollution related to oil activities[29]. Such views demonstrate that societies comprehend ecological justice as an economic, social, and reconciling process that is one of the stabilizing activities of the community, serving as a peacebuilding act. Notably, the respondents associated these proposals with transparency and accountability. One of them explained that sustainable peace relies on ensuring that "there is transparency in the amnesty program, and education training"[30]. This suggests that unless there are checks and balances, even the most well-crafted measures will be subverted by the elites and will not be effective in achieving their objectives (Amer et al. 2023).

These proposals, put forward by community actors, point to a model of peace that is participatory, accountable, and livelihood-oriented. They envi-

25 F6. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Warri, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 2, 2025.

26 D4. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Ekeremor, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 9, 2025.

27 E5. Interview by Tope Akinyetun, Bori, Rivers State (Niger Delta), June 19, 2025.

28 J10. Interview by Ambrose Iyase, Egbema, Delta State (Niger Delta), May 22, 2025.

29 C3. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Brass, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), May 16, 2025.

30 G7. Interview by Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi, Biseni, Bayelsa State (Niger Delta), April 23, 2025.

sion a development model based on community needs, operating transparently, and mitigating ecological harm and social exclusion among young people. The implications of these findings for the existing body of research on peacebuilding in the Niger Delta are that communities are not passive actors affected by the interventions of states or corporations; they are active actors expressing endogenous models of peacebuilding.

Towards Endogenous Peacebuilding

The evidence presented above suggests a consistent, though multifaceted, concept of peace as defined by the Niger Delta communities. Respondents emphasized that peace cannot be reduced to the absence of hostilities or elite-based settlements. They instead envision peace as a combination of interconnected processes that incorporate inclusive engagement, enduring dialogue, transparent governance, and ecological recovery through the provision of livelihood opportunities, which redirect the youths away from non-militancy. Analysis reveals that, on the one hand, communities understand the need for state-led programmes, including the Amnesty Programme, the NDDC, and the Ogoni cleanup. However, on the other hand, they overwhelmingly perceive such programmes as being top-down, politicized, and not transformative enough. Their critiques are consistent with the existing body of scholarship (Ajibola 2015; PLAC 2020; Odinaka 2023); however, they go further to expose how local actors identify failures, not only in the outcomes but also in the process, such as exclusion, lack of transparency, and no follow-through. In this regard, the respondents highlight the shortcomings of externally developed interventions and the importance of community legitimacy in the peacebuilding process. Simultaneously, the respondents exhibit agency by creating their own locally based security initiatives, such as community policing and community-based vigilante groups. Although these help to fill in key gaps in state capacity, they also highlight the dangers of hybrid forms of governance, where former militants and strongmen exercise quasi-official power. This duality highlights the strength of communities and the weakness of peace in situations where security is not institutionalized.

Another important lesson learned is the description of the socio-economic and gender impacts of militancy. Respondents associated youth unemployment, teenage pregnancy, trauma, and livelihood collapse with the continuation of the conflict, as they opine that peace should also address these evils to be sustainable. This makes debates more people-centred, as they have so far mistakenly concentrated on oil rents and leaders of insurgency, reminding us that the social fabric of the region is also at stake (Nigerian

Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission 2024). Lastly, the policy proposals that emerged among the respondents are convergent, leading to a model of endogenous peacebuilding that encompasses needs-based planning, education and skills development, livelihood diversification, environmental remediation, and open governance. These solutions are pragmatic, based on experience, and by emphasizing these points of view, the research shows that Niger Delta communities are not merely victims of conflict and on the receiving end of state generosity, but are actors with definite and practical visions of how to construct and maintain peace in the area.

The analysis shows that a long-term, sustainable path towards peace in the Niger Delta cannot be established solely through the strengthening of state-centric programs, but rather through the formal integration of community-based peacebuilding methods, which instill local involvement in the design, monitoring, and implementation of development and security policies. Through this strategy, the current study aims to bridge the gap between the existing literature, which primarily focuses on the interests of state and corporate actors, and the real-life experiences of local communities that continue to be affected by the consequences of militancy and ineffective interventions.

Conclusion

The paper analyzes community-based approaches to understanding peacebuilding in the Niger Delta, using qualitative data to assess how local actors frame strategies of inclusion, dialogue, community security, livelihood diversification, and environmental restoration as practical means of achieving sustainable peace. The results show that, although the state has undertaken interventions to resolve the crisis, including the Presidential Amnesty Programme, the NDDC, and the Ogoni clean-up, these efforts are commonly viewed as politicized, unclear, and not attentive to community realities. This perception not only weakens their legitimacy but also explains why they have had limited success in changing the structural forces of conflict. By highlighting the voices of community actors, the paper foregrounds the role of endogenous peacebuilding, which involves peace initiatives based on local agency and guided by community priorities. Respondents also contended that peace does not simply encompass the absence of militancy, but extends to encompass transparent governance, effective participation, ecological justice, and sustainable livelihoods. They also determined the socio-economic and gendered impact of militancy, like youth unemployment, teenage preg-

nancy, forced participation, and psychosocial trauma, as the impediments to peacefulness that are not fully addressed in current programmes. The insights build on the existing literature, most of which has been centered on the political economy of oil and state-centric interventions, highlighting the human impacts of conflict on ordinary life and the practical solutions communities devise to address these impacts. The policy implications are clear: lasting peace in the Niger Delta will require a transition from ad hoc palliatives and elite deals to institutionalized, community-based structures that entrench accountability, inclusiveness, and ecological remedies at their core. It involves livelihood diversification investment, empowerment, and targeting of youth and women through skill and empowerment programs, as well as transparency in designing and delivering development projects. More importantly, environmental remediation should not be a marginal activity as it has a direct connection to livelihood and reconciliation.

The study addresses a gap in the literature on peacebuilding in resource-abundant conflict zones. It shows that the study of the conflict over oil cannot be exhaustive without involving the local agents who define peace and suggest ways to resolve it. However, further investigation is needed in the future to understand how community-based peacebuilding frameworks can be scaled up and institutionalized, as well as how they can be integrated with broader governance reforms at both national and corporate levels. Comparative research in other resource-dependent zones in Africa may also shed light on whether the Niger Delta experience is a unique situation or a broader continental trend of endogenous peacebuilding. To sum up, the fragility of the Niger Delta has demonstrated the inadequacy of the interventions imposed by outside forces. When participation, accountability, environmental restoration, and livelihood security become the central focus of peacebuilding, sustainable peace can only emerge. These community-based strategies should not only be recognised and institutionalised, but are also a practical necessity to guarantee the stability of the most volatile yet economically key region of Nigeria.

Based on the findings, the following measures are recommended as strategies to achieve sustainable peace in the Niger Delta. The design and implementation phases of peacebuilding programmes must include mechanisms that guarantee meaningful community participation. This involves institutionalized spaces of discourse, wherein local leaders, women, and youth are facilitated, and results are linked to specific deadlines and surveillance systems. The Presidential Amnesty Programme Office and NDDC agencies should utilize clear and transparent procurement and reporting mechanisms, which include community and independent audits. There will be no accou-

ntability, and therefore, interventions will still be seen as means to capture the elite, rather than as a measure to promote peace.

Moreover, peacebuilding should focus on ecological recovery, i.e., reforestation, cleanups, and waterway restoration, rather than being peripheral. This necessitates accelerating the Ogoni clean-up, intensifying remediation initiatives, and linking these initiatives directly to community livelihoods through employment and training. Moreover, special investments in education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship should be increased with specific emphasis on involving trained youths in long-term industries outside the oil industry. Empowerment programmes and scholarships must be structured in a way that reduces the youth's susceptibility to militancy and criminality. Additionally, peacebuilding models must incorporate gender-sensitive initiatives, such as supporting young women who are pregnant during their teenage years, and livelihood policies that reflect the economic contributions of women. These social harms need to be addressed to rebuild community stability. Lastly, community policing and vigilante groups must be formally accepted yet controlled with the help of well-defined legal and accountability frameworks. This would maintain their local responsiveness while avoiding abuse, co-option, and entrenchment of parallel systems of governance.

REFERENCES

African Studies Centre. 1999. "Nigeria: Odi Massacre Statements." *University of Pennsylvania*, December 23. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/apic_122399.html.

Ajibola, Iyabobola O. 2015. "Nigeria's Amnesty Program." *SAGE Open* 5 (3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015589996.

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Angela. 2017. "Towards Ending Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region: A Collective Non-Violent Approach." *ACCORD,* September 12. https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/towards-ending-conflict-insecurity-niger-delta-region/.

Akinfenwa, Gbenga, and Michael Egbejule. 2025. "How Vigilante Groups Constitute Danger to Life despite Role in Security." *The Guardian,* May 24. https://guardian.ng/features/focus/how-vigilante-groups-constitute-danger-to-life-despite-role-in-security/.

Akinyetun, Tope Shola. 2022. "Policing in Nigeria: A Socioeconomic, Ecological and Sociocultural Analysis of the Performance of the Nigerian Police Force." *Africa Journal of Public Sector Development and Governance* 5 (1): 196–219. https://doi.org/10.55390/ajpsdg.2022.5.1.9.

Akinyetun, Tope Shola. 2023a. "Fighting from the Bottom Up: Community Mobilisation as a Viable Strategy in Combating Banditry in Nigeria." *ACCORD*, October 20. https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/fighting-from-the-bottom-up-community-mobilisation-as-a-viable-strategy-in-combating-banditry-in-nigeria/.

Akinyetun, Tope Shola. 2023b. "The Concentric Circle of Conflict in the Lake Chad Region: Between Youth, Exclusion and Grievance." *Panoply Journal* 4: 114–42. https://doi.org/10.71166/qpn5nz92.

Akinyetun, Tope Shola. 2024. "Identity Politics, Conflict, and National Integration in Nigeria: The Youths' Perspective." *African Identities* 23 (3): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2319582.

Amer, Masood, Emily Wegener, and Denitsa Zhelyazkova. 2023. *Securing progress: mapping opportunities for anti-corruption in security sector reform frameworks*. Transparency International. https://ti-defence.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Securing-Progress-SSR-Frameworks-v5-WEB.pdf.

Ansorg, Nadine, and Sabine Kurtenbach. 2023. "Promoting Peace and Impunity? Amnesty Laws after War in El Salvador and Beyond." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8 (2). https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogad010.

Barnett, Michael. 2015. "Paternalism and global governance." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 32 (1): 216–43. https://doi.org/10.1017/s026505251500014x.

Bradshaw, Gavin John, and Casper Lötter. 2019. "Re-Evaluating Burton's Human Needs Approach from Critical Theory Perspectives." *International Journal of Peace Studies* 24 (1): 63–80.

Burton, John. 1990. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21000-8.

Burton, John W. 2024. "Needs Theory (1997)." In *Pioneers in Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Practice*, 307–15. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51258-2_23

Coning, Cedric de, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva. 2022. *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92577-2.

Courson, Elias. 2016. "Spaces of Insurgency: Petro-Violence and the Geography of Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta." https://escholarship.org/content/qt8rp958w7/qt8rp958w7_noSplash_e7750d5a641f6e3f8b71d229b3529e7d.pdf.

David, James Ojochenemi. 2025. "Boko Haram and Niger Delta Avengers: Unraveling the Greed-Need-Creed Spectrum in Nigeria's Security-Development Nexus." *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (July). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1562472.

Ebiede, Tarila Marclint. 2018. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Employment Programmes for Ex-Combatants: A Case Study of Nigeria's Post Amnesty

Programme (PAP)." *IDS Bulletin* 49 (5). https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2018.177.

Ebiede, Tarila Marclint. 2024. "Reintegrating Ex-Combatants or Dividing Communities? Analysing Power Inequalities in Nigeria's Amnesty Programme." Violence, Inequality and Power Lab, Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1107&context=ipj-research.

Ebiede, Tarila Marclint, Arnim Langer, and Jale Tosun. 2020. "Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration: Analysing the Outcomes of Nigeria's Post-Amnesty Programme." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 9 (1). https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.752.

Fatunji, Anita. 2016. "Nigeria Loses over 130 million barrels in 2016 to Militancy in Niger Delta." *Ecofin Agency,* November 30. https://www.ecofinagency.com/production/3011-35989-nigeria-loses-over-130-millions-barrels-in-2016-to-militancy-in-niger-delta.

Francis, Paul, Deirdre Lapin, and Paula Rossiasco. 2011. *Securing Development and Peace in the Niger Delta: A Social and Conflict Analysis for Change*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/AFR_110929_Niger%20Delta_0113.pdf.

George, Godfrey. 2022. "48 N'Delta INEC Offices Destroyed in Three Years – Report." *Punch Newspapers,* December 31. https://punchng.com/48-ndelta-inec-offices-destroyed-in-three-years-report/.

Iheduru, Okechukwu. 2023. "Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigerian Case Study." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 22 (3). https://jmss.org/article/view/77363.

Ikelegbe, Augustine. 2017. "Oil, Resource Conflicts and the Post Conflict Transition in the Niger Delta Region: Beyond the Amnesty." CPED Monograph Series No 3. https://cped.org.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CPED-Monograph-series-No.-3-Oil-Resource-Conflicts-and-the-Post-Conflict-Transition-in-the-Niger-Delta-Region-Beyond-the-Amnesty.pdf.

International Peace Institute. 2018. "Humanitarian Action and Sustaining Peace." https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/0306-Humanitarian-Action-and-Sustaining-Peace.pdf.

Inyang, Bassey. 2018. "Militancy and Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria." *African Research Review* 12 (4): 65. https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrev.v12i4.6.

Ivongbe, Jude Rukevwe, Celestine Obinna Aniagolu, and Chikasi Mercy Obodoh. 2025. "Performance Evaluation of Infrastructural Project Delivery by the Niger Delta Development Commission (2012 - 2021)." *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports* 19 (9): 273–84. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2025/v19i91157.

Jarikre, Mathias. 2025. "The Political Economy of Peacebuilding in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region." *Sociological Research and Innovation* 3 (1): 155–179. https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/SRI/article/view/6663.

Kazeem, Perewei. 2025. "Supporting Tantita Security's Pipeline Surveillance Efforts — a Step towards a Secure Niger Delta." *Vanguard News,* July 13. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/07/supporting-tantita-securitys-pipeline-surveillance-efforts-a-step-towards-a-secure-niger-delta/.

Mamudu, Angela, Anthony Mamudu, Francis Elehinafe, and Damilola Akinneye. 2021. "Recent Trends in Corporate Social Responsibilities in Nigeria: A Case Study of Major Oil Firms in the Niger Delta Region." *Scientific African* 13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2021.e00928.

Mosello, Beatrice, Mary Elizabeth Potts, Héctor Morales Muñoz, Sandor Madar, and Oli Brown. 2024. "Ground for Peace: Land Restoration for International Peace and Security." *Climate-Diplomacy*. https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/environment/ground-peace-land-restoration-international-peace-and-security.

Nextier SPD. 2025. "Local Pacts, Fragile Peace." *The Nextier Group,* September 11. https://thenextier.com/local-pacts-fragile-peace/.

Nwobueze, Chibuzor Chile, and Preye Kuro Inokoba. 2017. "Mortgaging Tomorrow's Security through Today's Graveyard Peace: A Critical Discourse of the Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta, Nigeria." *Review of History and Political Science* 5 (2). https://rhps.thebrpi.org/journals/rhps/Vol_5_No_2_December_2017/3.pdf.

Odinaka. 2023. "$1bn Ogoni Clean-up Project: Truths, Half-Truths and Outright Lies." *Dataphyte Insight*, May 29. https://dataphyte.com/topic/1bn-ogoni-clean-up-project-truths-half-truths-and-outright-lies.

Okere, Roseline, Chido Okafor, and Julius Osahon. 2016. "Government Loses N10b Daily to Oil Facilities' Attack." *The Guardian*, June 13. https://guardian.ng/news/govt-loses-n10b-daily-to-oil-facilities-attack/.

Okonkwo, Omono. 2023. "Nigeria Lost N2.3 trillion to crude oil theft in 2023 – Senate." *Nairametrics*, October 11. https://nairametrics.com/2023/10/11/nigeria-lost-n2-3-trillion-to-crude-oil-theft-in-2023-senate/.

Olawin, Dare. 2025. "179 Oil Theft Incidents Uncovered in One Week – NNPCL." *Punch Newspapers,* January 23. https://punchng.com/179-oil-theft-incidents-uncovered-in-one-week-nnpcl/.

Peace Direct. 2019. "Local Peacebuilding - What Works and Why." *Alliance for Peacebuilding*. https://www.peaceinsight.org/reports/whatworks/.

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre. 2020. "NDDC Probe Exposes Nigeria's Corruption Underbelly." *PLAC,* July 21. https://placng.org/Legist/nddc-probe-exposes-nigerias-corruption-underbelly/.

Sarki, Halif. 2009. "Niger Delta: Yar`Adua`s Amnesty Deal: Palliative or Cure?" *ISS Africa,* September 09. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/niger-delta-yaraduas-amnesty-deal-palliative-or-cure.

The Defense Post. 2025. "Militant Groups Claim Attacks on Nigerian Oil Facilities." *The Defense Post,* April 13. https://thedefensepost.com/2025/04/13/militant-groups-attacks-nigeria/.

Uche, Okala Agwu, and Ijeoma Blessing Uche. 2025. "Militancy and Children's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Experiences from Imo." *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 24 (3). https://doi.org/10.1921/swssr20242255.

ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta is one of the most volatile territories in Nigeria, shaped by decades of militancy, ecological devastation, and a series of development interventions that have not achieved sustainable peace. Although a significant amount of literature has addressed the political economy of oil extraction, state fragility, and the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), relatively little attention has been given to how the communities of the Delta theorize the concept of peace and how these communities can put such a concept into practice. This paper attempts to fill this gap by focusing on endogenous peacebuilding practices that are more locally based and prioritize inclusion, accountability, livelihood diversification, and ecological restoration as pillars. The paper utilizes the Human Needs theory, which posits that conflict persists in situations where fundamental human rights, namely security, identity, participation, and development, are systematically deprived. The study employs a qualitative design, with primary data collected systematically through semi-structured interviews. The data were coded using NVivo, and the results are triangulated with secondary data. The empirical findings suggest that peace is not merely the absence of violence, but a dynamic interplay among interrelated processes, including stakeholder involvement, ongoing dialogue, open governance, and environmental justice. It stresses that state-based interventions are politicized and often lack transparency. Meanwhile, localised security practices and socio-economic and gendered consequences of militancy highlight the complex effects of conflict on the well-being of communities. Participants also proffered community-based policy recommendations that focus on livelihood diversification, empowering the youth, needs-based planning, and environmental restoration.

KEYWORDS
Niger Delta. Endogenous peacebuilding. Human needs. Militancy. Community participation. Environmental justice.

Received on October 03, 2025
Accepted on December 23, 2025[31]

31 How to cite: Akinyetun, Tope Shola, Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi and Ambrose Osariyekemwen Iyase. 2025. "Endogenous peacebuilding in the Niger Delta: community-centered approaches and alternative development pathways." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies,* 10 (20): 155-177. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.150670.

SHARIA IN YORÙBÁLAND: NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ETHNIC TENSIONS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

Olasupo Thompson[1]
Tokunbo Stephen Dada[2]
Olugbenga Seun Aina[3]
Bamidele Jinadu[4]
Surajudeen Oladotun Oladele[5]

Introduction

Religion has played a critical role in global and national development, offering hope and strength in times of crisis (Boro et al. 2022). While often seen as personal, some states impose religion to promote unity and peace. It remains a central factor in many global conflicts. Secularism has been adopted by some nations to foster harmony. Despite its role in social cohesion, religion has also sparked conflict, particularly in multi-ethnic or

1 Institute of Communication & General Studies (ICGNS), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Abeokuta, Nigeria. E-mail: thompsonoo@funaab.edu.ng. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2273-2152.

2 Institute of Communication & General Studies (ICGNS), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Abeokuta, Nigeria. E-mail: tokunbodada@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5798-3752.

3 Institute of Communication & General Studies (ICGNS), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Abeokuta, Nigeria. E-mail: ainaos@funaab.edu.ng. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0694-6273.

4 Institute of Communication & General Studies (ICGNS), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Abeokuta, Nigeria. E-mail:m Jinadubamidele2@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4740-4742.

5 Institute of Communication & General Studies (ICGNS), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Abeokuta, Nigeria. E-mail: princesurajudeenoladele@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6342-5902.

https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.151737

post-colonial nations. Africa exemplifies this, with countries like Congo, Rwanda, and Nigeria experiencing deadly religious conflicts, displacement, and refugee crises.

Nigeria is a diverse nation with over 450 languages, 374 ethnic groups, and a landmass of 923,768 square kilometers (Thompson and Adams 2021). With a population of about 230 million, it is divided into six geopolitical zones. The major ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Yorùbá, and Igbo are collectively called 'Wazobia.' Ten groups comprise 80 percent of the population, with four language groups, Hausa (21 percent), Yoruba (20), Igbo (17), and Fulani (7) dominating. Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) are widely practiced, with the north predominantly Muslim and the south largely Christian. Despite constitutional federalism and secularism, ethnic and religious tensions persist. Nigeria's legal system blends customary, religious, and statutory laws. The extension of Sharia courts beyond the traditionally Islamic north, particularly into Yorùbáland in southwest Nigeria — a region with a sizable Muslim population alongside strong Christian and traditionalist influences — has sparked debates on legal pluralism and religious freedoms.

Numerous studies have explored the intersections of ethnicity and religion (Ukiwo 2005; Nwauche 2008; Paden 2015; Lichtenheld and Ogbudu 2021), as well as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. However, there has been relatively little scholarly focus on the rising issue of Sharia implementation in Yorùbáland.

This paper examines reactions to the imposition of Sharia courts in Yorùbáland and its impact on intergroup relations, governance, and national development. Major Yorùbá towns include Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos. The study addresses key research questions: What are the Yorùbá people's laws and customs? What is the nature of North-South relations in Nigeria? Why is the North advocating for Sharia in Yorùbáland, and how is it perceived across regions? What are the implications for intergroup dynamics? This study is significant because it provides a theoretically grounded analysis of contemporary Sharia debates in Yorùbáland, an area often overlooked in existing scholarship on religion and law in Nigeria.

Literature Review: Religion and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Religion is as old as humanity and remains a central force in social organization. Durkheim (1964) defines religion as a unified system of beliefs

and practices related to sacred things that fosters social cohesion, while Giddens (2021) emphasizes its profound influence on culture, including art, music, values, and everyday life. Globally, major religions include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, alongside smaller faith traditions (CIA n.d.). In Africa, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) are dominant. Mbiti (1990) explains that traditional African belief systems are rooted in ancestor veneration, animism, and communal rituals. Christianity, introduced largely through colonial encounters, has grown significantly, with over 650 million adherents across Africa (Pew Research Center 2015). Islam, introduced earlier through Arab traders, is deeply entrenched in North Africa and parts of West and East Africa (Michalopoulos, Naghavi and Prarolo 2018). Scholars such as Chitando and Adogame (2012) and Ellis and ter Haar (2020) highlight religious syncretism — the blending of indigenous beliefs with Christianity or Islam — as a defining feature of African religiosity, shaping politics and social life while serving as both a unifying force and a potential source of conflict.

Religious tension in Africa often emerges from historical, political, and social dynamics, particularly in regions where Christianity and Islam coexist and compete. Ukah (2020) notes that such competition frequently produces insecurity, identity crises, and cultural violence. Several African countries illustrate these dynamics. In the Central African Republic, Furcoi and Essa (2017) document violent clashes between Christian and Muslim militias that resulted in mass killings and nearly one million displaced persons. In Egypt, tensions between the Muslim majority and the Coptic Christian minority have periodically escalated into violence. Meral (2018) recounts how protests by supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood following President Morsi's removal led to widespread attacks on Christian communities, including the destruction of churches and property.

Religion has also played a decisive role in Sudan's prolonged conflicts. Tounsel (2025) argues that the civil wars between North and South Sudan were deeply rooted in religious domination, particularly the imposition of Islamic identity and Sharia-based policies by the Khartoum government. Measures such as the nationalization of missionary schools, changes to public holidays, and the enforcement of Islamic laws on non-Muslims intensified grievances. The adoption of Sharia criminal law in 1983 contributed to renewed conflict, with punitive measures such as amputations applied to non-Muslims. Southern resistance framed the struggle as one for a secular state, eventually culminating in South Sudan's secession in 2011. Elsewhere, Ethiopia has experienced recurrent religious violence between Orthodox Christians and Muslims, often exacerbated by political manipulation of religious identities

(U.S. Department of State 2021). Ongoing crises involving Islamist militancy in Somalia and religiously framed conflicts in countries such as Libya and Tanzania further illustrate religion's role in instability across the continent.

Despite its association with conflict, religion can also serve as a powerful instrument for peacebuilding. Chigudu (2024) argues that recognizing the fluid and overlapping nature of religious identities is essential for conflict resolution in Africa. Majemu (2024) similarly contends that interfaith dialogue and religious moderation can counter radicalization and promote sustainable peace. These insights are particularly relevant in contexts such as Nigeria, where extremist groups like Boko Haram exploit religious narratives for political violence, intensifying inter-religious mistrust.

In Nigeria, religion intersects closely with ethnicity and politics. Suberu (2020) observes that the country's ethnic diversity and near parity between Christian and Muslim populations have been repeatedly exploited to fuel political tensions and undermine national development. Edewor and Aluko (2007) argue that federal arrangements, rather than mitigating divisions, often reinforce them by framing access to power and resources through ethnic and religious identities. These divisions are evident in electoral politics. Jabo (2025) notes that the 2023 general elections reflected strong religious and ethnic alignments, with candidates drawing support largely from co-religionists and ethnic bases. Mustapha (2019) warns that such patterns deepen marginalization, distrust, and national fragmentation.

The consequences of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria have been severe. Salawu (2010) estimates that such conflicts have claimed over three million lives since independence. More recent data indicate thousands of incidents of ethnic, religious, and ethno-religious violence between 1999 and 2021, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths (Adenuga et al. 2023). Scholars increasingly argue that religion should function as a tool for unity rather than division. Salisu et al. (2024) recommend prioritizing competence over religious or ethnic considerations in governance, while Salawu (2010) calls for proactive conflict prevention, institutionalized dialogue mechanisms, and poverty reduction to address the structural roots of ethno-religious crises. Despite extensive scholarship on religion and ethnicity in Nigeria, limited attention has been given to the recent resurgence of Sharia-related imposition and controversies in Yorùbáland, which this study seeks to address.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which explains how dominant social groups secure leadership by shaping moral, political, and cultural values that subordinate groups come to accept as legitimate (Gramsci 1991). Hegemony involves the exercise of power not solely through coercion but through a strategic combination of force and consent (Bailey and Clegg 2007). Within the state, it describes relationships among social groups in which dominance is sustained by presenting particular interests and worldviews as natural and universally beneficial (Martin 2023).

Gramsci emphasizes that hegemony relies heavily on consent where there is popular acceptance, ambivalence, or opposition. While coercion may be present, durable authority cannot be maintained through force alone; it requires the cooperation and acceptance of subordinate groups (Gramsci 2000). Consent is produced through ideological processes that align the values of the ruled with those of the ruling class, thereby legitimizing existing power relations. As Ateed and Ozel (2023) note, hegemony operates as a system of ideas through which dominant groups secure compliance and minimize resistance. Thus, power is exercised simultaneously through domination and persuasion, making hegemonic rule appear stable and legitimate while masking the underlying inequalities it sustains.

Gramsci's theory views hegemony as domination maintained primarily through consent rather than overt coercion, making power appear natural and legitimate (Ateed and Ozel 2023). It emphasizes the interplay of culture, politics, and ideas in sustaining authority. This framework is useful for analyzing ethnic relations in Nigeria, where historical and ongoing tensions, especially perceptions of northern Muslim dominance over the Christian South, shape political and socio-economic interactions (Badmus and Lafenwa 2022).

Table 1: Operationalising Gramscian Hegemony in Nigeria's Sharia and Legal Pluralism Context

Concept	Gramscian Application	Nigerian Sharia Context
Legal pluralism	Competing hegemonies	Sharia framed as moral common sense
Constitutional supremacy	Ideological weakness	Constitution overridden in practice
Gender & rights	Normalised domination	Patriarchy legitimised religiously
State arbitration	Hegemonic compromise	State avoids confrontation

Source: Authors compilation.

Table 1 shows how some concepts can be understood as interconnected sites of hegemonic struggle. Legal pluralism in Nigeria involves the coexistence of statutory, customary, and Islamic law, but from a Gramscian perspective, these systems do not operate on equal footing. Yusuf (1976) argues that, despite these laws in the six northern states, they conflicted with one another. In northern Nigeria, Sharia law functions as a hegemonic moral and legal order rather than merely one legal option among others (Adesoji 2010; Agbiboa 2015). Political and religious elites frame Sharia as an authentic Islamic identity, a moral alternative to corruption, and superior to Western-derived secular law. Through religious institutions and public discourse, this framing generates popular consent, turning Sharia into "common sense" within society. Legal pluralism therefore reflects a struggle between competing hegemonies rather than neutral coexistence.

This dynamic exposes tensions between Sharia and constitutional supremacy. While the Nigerian Constitution is formally supreme, its authority is often weakened by Sharia's deep cultural legitimacy in civil society. Mosques, scholars, and community leaders cultivate consent that frequently outweighs constitutional abstraction, leading governments to tolerate Sharia despite legal ambiguities. Gramsci (1991) illuminates how Sharia is presented as a moral, authentic or divinely mandated virtue within society, including its implications on gender and human rights. Patriarchal interpretations are normalised as divinely ordained, transforming inequality into moral obligation and limiting resistance. Consent, reinforced by socialisation, sustains these practices, while coercion enforces compliance where consent fails. It also interprets institutional mediation, examining the role of religious leaders, traditional authorities, courts, and the state in sustaining or contesting Sharia, as well as the adoption of consent and resistance, and coercion and accommodation, as forms of selective legal enforcement and state tolerance used to manage conflict.

This article has two interrelated objectives. The primary objective is theoretical: to apply Gramsci's concept of hegemony to explain contemporary debates over Sharia in Yorùbáland. The secondary objective is historical: to situate these debates within the longer trajectory of Yoruba religious pluralism and state–religion relations in Nigeria. The historical discussion therefore serves an explanatory function by illuminating the social conditions under which hegemonic struggles unfold. Overall, Nigeria's Sharia debates represent a crisis of legal hegemony in which law, morality, identity, and power are deeply contested.

Methods

The study adopts a qualitative research design in the collection of data. A qualitative research paradigm places emphasis on understanding through observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of people's words, actions, and records (Ejimabo 2015). This research approach aided the gathering of primary data from observations and interviews. Its importance cannot be overemphasised (Howard 2021).

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy, complemented by snowball sampling. Initial contacts were made through professional, religious, and civil society networks, after which interviewees recommended additional participants with relevant expertise. Selection criteria were based on religious affiliation, professional role, and community influence, in line with the study's theoretical focus on hegemonic authority. A total of 19 interviews were held with at least two respondents from each state. Fifteen were males while four were females. The gap between sexes was a result of the differing level of willingness, as some of the females contacted were reluctant to speak on the subject. Their reasons were either because they did not have sufficient information or that it was a delicate matter on which their husbands or male counterparts could speak. The six states in Yorùbáland were used for the field work excluding some Yoruba speaking people of Kogi and Kwara states. They are Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos[6]. These states were selected for fieldwork because they represent the Yoruba states in southwest Nigeria. Recruitment was based on knowledge on the subject

6 Olasupo Thompson covered interviews in Ogun State and Lagos State; Tokunbo Dada covered the interviews in Oyo, Ondo and Ekiti; Olugbenga Aina supported with the interview in Ogun and Oyo States; Bamidele Jinadu Covered the interviews in Lagos State; and Surajudeen Oladele covered the interviews in Osun State.

matter, willingness, and interest to take part. These include adherents from the three major religions in the states including legal professionals.

Table 2: Biography of participants

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Religion	Occupation	Location	Date
1	Alhaji Sheik	71	Male	Islam	Islamic Missioner	Ibadan, Oyo State	11/01/2025
2	Linus	58	Male	Christianity	Business man & Political Party Chieftain	Iyana Ipaja, Lagos	11/02/2025
3	Kunlele	36	Male	Christianity	Farmer	Ondo	18/02/2025
4	Ofana	29	Male	Islam	Civil Servant	Ondo	18/02/2025
5	Brukeme	43	Male	Christianity	Civil Servant	Ekiti	21/01/2025
6	Chi Baba	44	Male	Christianity	Lecturer	Abeokuta, Ogun State	03/02/2025
7	Yinks	43	Fem.	Christianity	Architect/Lecturer	Mowe, Ogun	17/01/2025
8	Alhaji Sura	52	Male	Islam	Business Man	Osogbo, Osun State	19/02/2025
9	Josh	44	Male	Christianity	Teacher	Apapa, Lagos	05/01/2025
10	Baba Kay	51	Male	Christianity	Teacher	Abeokuta, Ogun	12/02/2025
11	Papi	45	Male	Christianity	Law Enforcement Officer	Abeokuta, Ogun	12/02/2025
12	Buki	37	Fem.	Christianity	Lawyer	Ibadan Oyo	11/01/2025
13	Abike	52	Fem.	Christianity	Lawyer	Ekiti	21/01/2025
14	Baba Ropo	71	Male	Christianity	Farmer	Ekiti	21/01/2025
15	Teju	45	Male	Christianity	Business owner	Abeokuta, Ogun	12/02/2025
16	Haji Kay	55	Male	Islam	Real Estate	Epe, Lagos	09/01/2025
17	Yem	70	Fem.	Christianity	Retiree	Ondo	18/02/2025
18	Baba Onifa	78	Male	Traditional	*Ifa* Priest	Oyo, Oyo State	11/01/2025
19	Baba Akeweje	61	Male	Traditional	Native doctor	Abeokuta	12/02/2025

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The interview questions were sent to the researchers in advance via telephone calls, WhatsApp messages, and during one-on-one interactions. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to reflect freely while ensuring comparability across cases. An interview guide was used by the authors and by a trained research assistant. All interviews conducted by the assistant followed the same guide and protocol to ensure consistency. This assistant helped conduct one-on-one interviews with some participants, while the authors did the same with others. For a few who could not attend an in-person interview, they agreed to speak by phone or via WhatsApp. Each interview lasted between eight and fifteen minutes. The study also gained from the use of participant and nonparticipant observation of religious activities in Nigeria. Apart from the fact that the authors belong to different religions, they were also directly involved in and observed the incidents across the country, and they engaged in discussions with colleagues and friends in both workplace and religious communities.

The primary data collected were complemented by secondary sources, particularly newspaper reports of activities, as well as responses and reactions from different religious bodies and representatives. Additional secondary materials included books, journals, and archival documents obtained from the National Archives in Ibadan.

The primary analysis was conducted by the lead author. The research assistant who participated in data collection provided contextual clarification and assisted in reviewing selected transcripts, but final coding decisions and interpretation were undertaken by the lead author. The authors' positionality as Nigerian scholars familiar with Yoruba religious pluralism informed the interpretive process, enabling contextual sensitivity, while remaining analytically critical. Reflexive attention was given to how this positionality shaped interpretation, particularly in relation to religion, law, and intergroup relations.

Data analysis followed a qualitative thematic approach informed by Gramscian theory. Interview transcripts were manually coded into themes aligned with the research questions, including laws and customs, the nature of North–South relations, motivations behind advocacy for Sharia in Yorùbáland, and the implications for intergroup relations. The study adopted a qualitative interpretive approach rather than a positivist coding model. Interpretation was intersubjective, grounded in iterative reading of the data, theoretical sensitivity to Gramscian concepts, and reflexive engagement with the researcher's positionality. While the analysis does not claim statistical reproducibility, transparency was ensured through clearly defined thematic

categories, systematic coding procedures, and the triangulation of interview data with secondary sources.

The study took place in the months of January and February 2025. Consent was obtained from all participants, and they approved the use of aliases or pseudonyms instead of their real names. The approval for the study was granted by the Department's Ethics Committee with approval number PDS/ICGNS/Ethics Approval/Sharia/2025.Vol.3

Yorùbáland: History, Culture and its People

The Yorùbá people trace their origins to either the Near East or the Niger River region (Lange and Dietrich 2005). Their founding figure, Oduduwa, is believed to have settled in Ile-Ife, where he encountered an existing Yorùbá-speaking population. Oduduwa's son, Okanbi (or Idekoseroake), had seven descendants, who played significant roles in Yorùbá history (Atanda 1980; Thompson and Nwaorgu 2024). Today, the Yorùbá predominantly reside along the West African coast, especially in Nigeria, with communities also in Benin and Togo. The transatlantic slave trade established Yorùbá--descendant populations in Brazil, Cuba, the Caribbean, and the U.S. With an estimated 30 million speakers, Yorùbá is one of Nigeria's three major languages and has spread to Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the U.K., playing a vital role in cultural preservation.

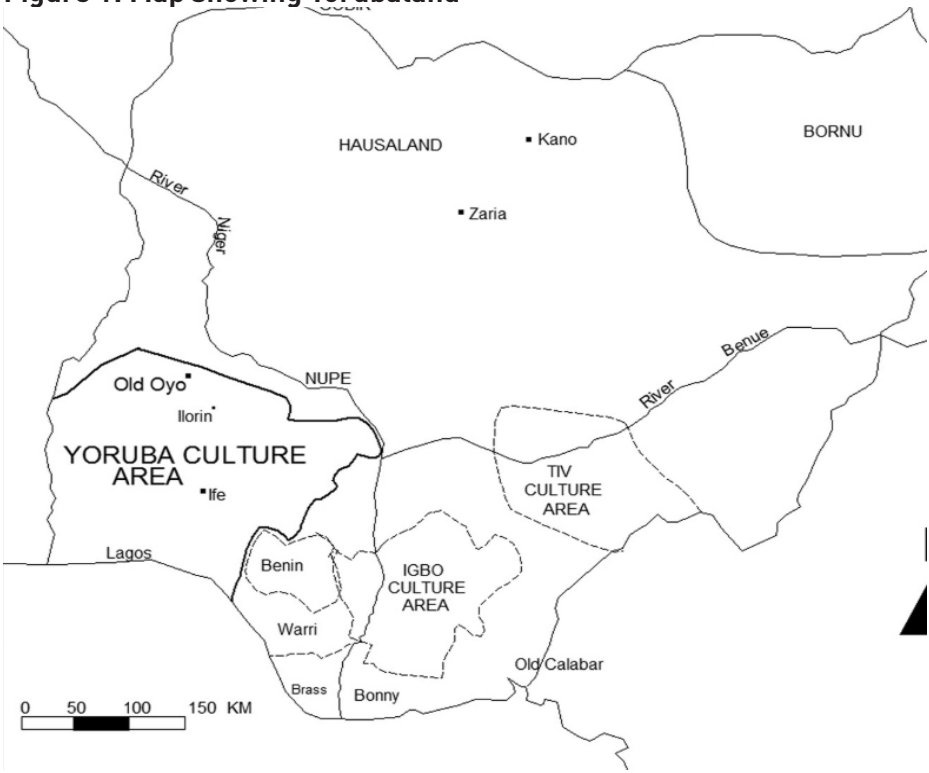
In pre-colonial Yorùbá society, political systems were led by the *Oba* (traditional rulers), who appointed *Baale* (local leaders) to govern smaller communities. The *Oba* were seen as intermediaries between the people and deities. The Yorùbá spiritual system includes over 400 deities (*Orisa*), with worship often assigned to towns or families. Incest was a grave offense, requiring sacrifices to family gods, while attitudes toward suicide depended on its cause — those who died from suffering were honored, while others who took their lives due to shame were cast out without burial[7]. Land was typically owned by families until the colonial era (Ajisafe 1924).

Titles like kingship were not strictly hereditary, despite being reserved for royal lineages. Yorùbá legal systems were sophisticated, with criminal cases referred to deities and civil disputes adjudicated by the *Osugbo* council, palace authorities, or *Baale*. Legal proceedings could take place at any time, reflecting Yorùbá society's adaptable justice system. Divination, especially through *Ifá*, was central to resolving issues and foretelling events. Sorcery

7 Oral interview, Baba Akeweje. Native doctor from Abeokuta. Interviewed on February 12, 2025.

and medicine were encouraged professions, often learned through apprenticeships under experienced practitioners (Ajisafe 1924).

Figure 1: Map showing Yorùbáland



Source: Usman and Falola (2019, 2).

The Yorùbá experienced significant cultural shifts with external influences, including Fulani invaders promoting Islam and European missionaries introducing Christianity. Christianity likely arrived in Nigeria in the 15th century, with missionary activities recorded in cities like Benin and Warri. Today, religion and ethnicity are central to Yorùbá identity, shaping their sense of belonging. Despite the dominance of Christianity and Islam, Yorùbá communities have maintained interfaith harmony, with interfaith marriages and families often living peacefully despite religious differences (Adogame 2013; Usman and Falola 2019). The blend of indigenous customary laws and statutory regulations continues to guide Yorùbá communities, sparking debates about integrating Islamic legal frameworks alongside existing traditions.

A History of North-South (Muslim-Christian) Relation

Before colonial rule, Northern and Southern Nigeria existed as separate entities. Islam entered the Northern region in the 9th century through Arab travelers, gaining dominance in the north. Initially led by the Hausa, political power shifted to the Fulani after the 1804 *Jihad*, which expanded their control from Sokoto to Yola, stretching from the Sahara to the Equatorial Belt. Although Islam faced resistance in North-Central and Southeastern Nigeria, it took hold in Yorùbáland in the Southwest.

Islamic social and religious structures, influenced by the Songhay Empire, were integrated into local administrations. Many northern and western rulers adopted Islam to legitimize their rule, unify communities, and enhance administration, military strength, and trade within the broader Islamic world (McLoughlin and Bouchat 2013). Islamic courts led by Sharia scholars provided impartial justice, and Sharia law historically governed the predominantly Muslim northern regions (Lugard 1920).

When the British colonized Nigeria, the Northern Province was marked by fragmented despotisms, characterized by slave raids, peasant exploitation, cruelty, and corruption (Lugard 1920). Fulani horsemen could not penetrate the dense southern forests, where around 7.75 million southerners, described as being of purer Negro stock, excelled in agriculture. Many delta tribes adopted semi-aquatic lifestyles, relying on fishing and oil palm harvesting for trade and sustenance, transported by middlemen to coastal merchants.

Lugard (1920) also depicted the southern region as largely influenced by fetish worship, witchcraft ordeals, human sacrifices, and the killing of twins. He described the Igbo people as primitive and savage, in contrast to the Yorùbá in the west, who had a more organized system of governance under recognized rulers. Coastal areas were inhabited by educated traders and middlemen, some of whom had attended mission schools and controlled access to the interior. Towns like Lagos and Calabar had a few educated professionals, including doctors and barristers. These regional disparities fostered tensions that surfaced during Nigeria's early nationalist movement. Despite their unity in fighting colonial rule, key figures like Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Sir Tafawa Balewa, and Nnamdi Azikiwe remained wary of each other's political ambitions (Adebanwi 2009, 2014; Undiyaundeye 2021). In a 1953 parliamentary session, Ahmadu Bello declared, "the mistake of 1914 has come to light," expressing opposition to further integration of northern and southern Nigeria. Despite later efforts to reassure southern Nigerians,

Bello's sentiments about regional divisions persisted into the country's independence era. As he observed:

> The new nation called Nigeria should be the estate of our great-grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent the change of power. We use the minorities in the north as willing tools, and the south as conquered territory, and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to rule over their future (Iyekekpolo 2020, 757).

Of the Igbos, Sardauna of Sokoto opines in 1962 that:

> The Igbos are the type of people whose desire is mainly to dominate everybody. If they go to a village, they want to monopolize everything in that area. If you'll put them in a labor camp as a laborer, they would try to emerge as head man of that camp (Unaegbu 2023, 55; Bello 1962, 161).

In the 1980s, Muhammadu Buhari supported Nigerien candidate Idi Omaro, a Fulani Muslim, over his country's representative Peter Onu for Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), reportedly prioritizing religion and ethnic identity over national representation. This exemplifies how religion and ethnicity, including the issue of Sharia, have played pivotal roles in Nigeria's history.

In the 1990s, protests erupted in the south over Head of State Ibrahim Babangida's plan to involve Nigeria in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), reflecting deep-seated mistrust among Nigeria's major ethnic groups. The introduction of Sharia law in 1999 in northern states led to violent conflicts, significant loss of life, and displacement. Similarly, a 2016 proposal to establish Ecclesiastical (Christian) Courts faced strong rejection in the north, highlighting persistent religious tensions.

The election of Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 intensified fears due to his past rhetoric and perceived favoritism in policies and appointments. Allegations of attempts to "northernize" and "Islamize" Nigeria emerged, especially with the controversial Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) initiative (Afolabi et al. 2020) and his perceived silence on violence in north-central Nigeria. Tensions were further heightened when his party, the APC, nominated a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket for the 2023 elections, fueling suspicions of a northern and Islamic agenda.

Reigniting Sharia in Yorùbáland, Southwest Nigeria

Though it has been established that there have been Sharia panels in most mosques operating in Southwest Nigeria, these panels were discreet. The bold move to re-introduce not just the panels but to also spread it across the Yorùbáland of Southwest Nigeria in recent times began when a proposal was made on December 20, 2024, through one AbdulQowiyy Olalekan Imam-Oníde on his X account (formerly twitter) handle (@A_QowiyyBadmus). He wrote:

> Since the Southwest states have left Muslims without any trial court of competent jurisdiction on their matters, despite S. 275 (1) of the 1999 CFRN allowing every state to have one, Muslims have resorted to ISPs. Oyo Alaafin is launching its own in January (Imam-Oníde 2024).

The post included an invitation from the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria, Oyo chapter, for the inauguration of a Sharia Court in Oyo town on January 11, 2025. The event, to be held at the Muslim Community Islamic Centre, Mobolaje Area, Oyo was reported to feature prominent figures, including the Basorun of Oyo land, High Chief Yusuf Olayinka and Alhaji Tajudeen Kamorise, the Aare Musulumi of Oyo land. Also on the invitation is the spiritual father of the day, Alhaji Abdul Lateef Eleyele, who is the Mufasiru of Oyo land and the Amir li-Mumeen of Oyo land, Alhaji Yaqub Mainazara, among others. After public outcry over the incident, a message was released postponing the inauguration. The statement read:

> On behalf of the Oyo Muslim indigenes, this is to inform the general public that the inauguration ceremony of the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria (Oyo branch) previously scheduled for January 11th, 2025 at the Muslim Community Islamic Center, Oba Adeyemi High School Road, Mobolaje Area, Agbongangan, Oyo, has been suspended until further notice. Islam portrays peace (Sulaimon 2024, n.p.).

The panel will hold another meeting in Ekiti State. The Chief Imam, Kewulere, confirmed the establishment of the committee, which had already resolved a marriage dispute and was handling another case, emphasizing that it was solely formed to address inheritance matters for Muslim members, dismissing any claims of sinister motives, crisis creation, or external influence.

As if the incident was over, it was not too long that a similar incident played out in Ogun State. A flier inscribed:

> Alhamdulillah, it's eventually established in Ogun State. A Sharia Court, which Ogun State Muslims have been yearning for, for ages, is finally here. You can now seek redress or have your case adjudicated based on Qur'an and Sunnah by reputable Islamic jurists. The Shari'ah Court, under the able leadership of eminent, reputable and erudite Islamic scholars like Shaykh Dr. Khidri Mustafa – Grand Qadi, Shaykh Abdu-r-Rasheed Mayeleke, Dr. Musa Afis and a host of competent Islamic jurists, is opened is to all Muslims, male and female. The Shariah Court handles cases on the marital dispute; Imamship tussle; organisational conflict; child custodian and guardianship; and inheritance imbroglio (Taiwo, Akinselure and Olumense 2025, n.p.).

A Muslim missionary stated that there should be no opposition to Sharia. He argued that if the Yoruba people were sincere to God and humanity, they would not oppose it, emphasizing that the issue of hand-cutting witnessed in the north does not end in the Sharia court. He explained that cases could be taken to the Sharia Court of Appeal and even to the Supreme Court, which includes Sharia experts, assuring that there was nothing to fear in Sharia law[8].

The Politics of the Sharia Courts in Yorùbáland

The debate over the establishment and operation of Sharia courts or related Sharia arbitration panels in Yorùbáland highlights the intricate interplay of religion, law, cultural identity, and politics within Nigeria's religiously pluralistic society. This section examines the reactions to efforts aimed at introducing or promoting Sharia courts (and alternative Sharia panels) in Yorùbáland, underscoring how these developments influence interreligious relations and governance in the region.

Historical Antecedents, Fear of Domination/Extremism and Cultural Incompatibility

One of the issues raised in the rejection is the historical antecedents, fear of domination, and cultural incompatibility. These respondents

8 Oral interview, Alhaji Sheik. Islamic Missioner from Ibadan Oyo State. Interviewed on January 11, 2025.

argue that the presence of religious courts in a legally pluralistic society may undermine national unity, lead to religious discrimination, and infringe on the rights of non-Muslims. Linus contend that:

> It is also clear that some Yorubas have forgotten how Alimi (Fulani man) in cohort or collaboration with Afonja (Yoruba generalissimo), to disintegrate the OYO empire. The notion of using religion in the name of sharia, is a ploy and tactics to penetrate and silently conquer the Omoduduwa land by the same people who conquered Hausa land in 1804. It is time to interrogate the motives behind the rush and quest for something that has been there for a long time immemorial. The Yoruba intelligencers should question the motive for it's said that thunder doesn't strike twice in one spot[9].

Kunlele stated that the people in North-Central and even Southern Nigeria suffered during Buhari's presidency because of his policies and ethnocentrism, which allowed the Fulani herdsmen to go get with murder so how can the Yorubas now trust anything that has to do with Islam[10]. Ofana queries if the Yoruba Muslim could dealer sighting of the Crescent and the Muslim North would oblige. He opined that the northerners see themselves as the better Muslims while the southerner Muslims are inferior so there is no need to trust them[11]. Brukeme ask:

> In the north where they claim they practice Sharia and they have Christian, have they not killed some Christians or punished them for not fasting? So how do we trust them that this Sharia law or court that they want to bring to Yorùbáland will not later be extended to everybody. Give them a step and they will fly[12].

Chi Baba fears that it may be a step by the Fulani to capture Yorùbáland, which he believes is more tolerant than the North, adding that the Yoruba must be vigilant[13]. Yinks stated that what is panning out today is a script prepared from the days of the Muslim-Muslim ticket which is a hidden

9 Except from oral interview, Linus. Business man and Political Party Chieftain from Iyana Ipaja, Lagos. Interviewed on February 11, 2025.

10 Except from oral interview, Kunlele. Farmer from Ondo. Interviewed on February 18, 2025.

11 Excerpt from oral interview, Ofana. Civil Servant from Ondo. Interviewed on February 18, 2025.

12 Except from oral interview, Brukeme. Civil Servant, Ekiti. January 21, 2025.

13 Except from oral interview, Chi baba. Lecturer from Abeokuta, Ogun State. Interviewed on February 3, 2025.

agenda that God is exposing. She continued "they want to Islamise Nigeria but God will not allow them"[14].

On January 31, the Yorùbá Nation Youths, both in Nigeria and the diaspora, warned the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar against promoting Sharia courts in the South-West. Their leaders, Prophet Ayodele Ologunloluwa and Comrade Oyegunle Oluwamayowa Omotoyole, condemned the move as destabilizing, citing Northern states' poverty, corruption, and terrorism under Sharia law. They argued that Sharia contradicts Yorùbá culture and traditions. The Yorùbá Regional Alliance (YRA) and Yorùbá Nation Religious Council (YONAREC) challenged the proposal in court. Speaking on behalf of YRA and YONAREC, which include Muslim Association of Yorùbá Nation (MAYON); Yorùbá Nation Christian Association (YORNCA); Imo Oodaiye (*Isese* Yorùbáland), among others. Mr. Opeoluwa George Akinola, addressing journalists, described the Yorùbá as historically peace-loving, tolerant, and harmonious people, with families often encompassing Christianity, Islam, and *Isese* traditions, an arrangement that has endured for centuries and should be preserved (Anyanwu 2025). He argued that Sharia practices are incompatible with Yorùbá cultural values and warned that their introduction is politically motivated and risks undermining peaceful coexistence, questioning whether Sharia law could achieve beyond existing penal codes and legal frameworks. Alhaji Suraj noted that the extension of Sharia, in whatever form, into Yorùbáland will not be accepted because its punishments do not align with Yoruba ethos and culture. He added that will be a tall dream for anyone to attempt to Islamise Nigeria, given the heterogeneous nature of the State[15]. According to a respondent who had lived in the north before coming down to Yorùbáland, he says:

14 Except from oral interview, Yinks. Architect/Lecturer from Mowe, Ogun. Interviewed on January 17, 2025.

15 Excerpt from oral interview, Alhaji Sura. Business Man from Osogbo, Osun State. Interviewed on February 19, 2025.

> We are already having negative impact of sharia in the north too, before the sharia law in the north, we were living peacefully with one another i.e we were having religious tolerance but after the introduction of sharia everything went bad. I don't support it ooo, because Yoruba Moslems doesn't understand what our northern Moslems are bringing to them, all those terrorists will begin to have space down here and there will be no peace again ooo. Let me tell you, if not because Southern Governors kicked against Buhari's RUGA's plan, it would have been bad in the south because those terrorists would have caused trouble down south. A 12-year Old boy was amputated in Gombe for phone theft. His hands were chopped off by Sharia Court. Is this suitable for Yorùbáland? No Way![16]

The Chief Imam of Yorùbáland, Sheik Abdulraheem Aduanigba, asserted that Sharia law could never work in the South-West due to religious diversity, the absence of Muslim dominance, cultural practices like Masquerade festivals, alcohol consumption, and thriving entertainment industries. He warned it could disrupt governance, contradict traditions, cause legal inconsistencies, and invite social unrest (Elijah 2025). Similarly, Sheikh Muhammad Habbibullah Adam Abdullah El-Ilory, Director of Markaz, criticized calls for Sharia courts in Yorùbáland, labeling them politically motivated rather than religiously necessary. He argued that Muslims already practice their faith freely and warned against creating unnecessary crises (Elijah 2025). He asked, "Are we already practising Shari'a or not? We are. So why demand it now? It could create a crisis when no one is stopping us from living according to Islamic principles," (Abdulkareem 2025, n.p.). Baba Kay says:

> I think external influence is responsible for the noise around sharia in the southwest. It is apparent the people themselves are vehemently against it including practicing Muslims. The Yoruba people by nature are not given to religious extremism, they're very Liberal when it comes to religion[17].

Some groups outside southwest Nigeria also rejected the sharia in Yorùbáland, even when they are not in south-west Nigeria. For example, some Okun people of Kogi State have distanced themselves from threats of *Jihad* against Yorubas following the rejection of Sharia Law in South-West Nigeria. Ambassador Akenson Rotimi, President General of the Okun Development

16 Excerpt from oral interview, Josh. Teacher from Apapa, Lagos. Interviewed on January 5, 2025.

17 Excerpt from oral interview, Baba Kay. Teacher from Abeokuta, Ogun. Interviewed on February 12, 2025.

Association (ODA), affirmed that the Okun people, predominantly Yoruba, identify as "Yoruba Ponbele" and are deeply rooted in Yoruba history, language, customs, and cultural expressions. He called for a reversal of historical injustices dating back to 1903 and proposed a referendum to redefine their political and cultural identity and also emphasized building alliances with groups that share similar heritage and developmental aspirations (National Concord 2025).

Constitutional Inconsistencies and Fundamental Human Rights

The Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion (Section 38) and a secular state (Section 10), while allowing Sharia courts in states with significant Muslim populations. In December 2024, a group in Ibadan proposed a Sharia panel, sparking public concern. Ahmed Raji (SAN, the Senior Advocate of Nigeria) clarified that it was not a court but a voluntary mediation panel for consenting Muslims, with no punitive measures or binding authority without mutual agreement. Proponents argue that Sharia panels provide accessible justice aligned with Islamic faith. However, debates continue over their alignment with constitutional provisions and human rights. Mallam AbulGaniy Ezra, Osun State Coordinator of the Supreme Council of Sharia in Nigeria (SCN), stated plans to persuade Governor Ademola Adeleke to elevate the state's Sharia panel to a full-fledged court. He emphasized that both Sharia and customary courts are constitutional under Section 278. Imam Haroun Muhammad Eze, Deputy National Legal Adviser of the NSCIA, also advocated for Sharia Arbitration Panels in Ekiti, Oyo, and other South-West states, citing Section 275 of the 1999 Constitution, which allows for Sharia Courts of Appeal similar to Customary Courts of Appeal. As the NSCIA stated:

> The NSCIA strongly supports the establishment of Independent Shariah Arbitration Panel in Ekiti and Oyo States for the purpose so intended, especially where the Muslims in the states have been denied their constitutional right to a Shariah Court of Appeal in all the states of South-Western Nigeria. The Council cannot find any legal justification for the unnecessary alarm and unwarranted resistance. All the states in the North have Shariah Courts, and some, in addition, have Customary Courts (NSCIA 2025, 1).

Opponents argue against Sharia courts using constitutional provisions. Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun State rejected their establishment, stating only legally recognized courts can handle disputes, and any unautho-

rized Sharia entity must dissolve (Taiwo, Akinselure, and Olumense 2025). Papi says Sharia is against women, children and human rights as they cut hands, legs, etc for ordinary common crimes and yet they have bigger crimes in the north[18]. Another legal personality opined that Sharia is a sort of customary law which is in southern Nigeria because of the mixed religions as compared to the north where there is a monolithic religion[19]. He furthered that they are going about it the wrong way. As a respondent contends that though the constitution is clear on fundamental human rights and the place of secularism, in Nigeria, bringing in Sharia is an anathema because the constitution is clear that it can only be applicable to the northern part of Nigeria just like penal code[20]. Ekiti's Attorney General, Dayo Apata, also noted the state's legal structure doesn't recognize Sharia courts. Traditional leaders like the Ewi of Ado Ekiti,Oba Adeyemo Adejugbe, supported the ban. However, the Oluwo of Iwo and supporters from Kogi advocated for Sharia law, citing religious freedom and Muslim rights. Some took a harsher stance, threatening opposition and calling for political action in the 2027 elections ("Kogi jihadist threatens..." 2025). Aside, a former University Professor, Ishaq Oloyede advised that although some panels in southwest states have handled Muslim cases, the establishment of a dedicated court and legal framework should be supported by all. He emphasized that Muslims in the south have long suffered from being governed by customary or civil courts, while their counterparts in the north benefit from the application of the Sharia law (Sulaimon 2025).

Socio-Economic Implications

The Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yorùbáland, Gani Adams, expressed concerns that the introduction of Sharia law in Oyo State would create significant challenges. Although he stated he had no objection to Sharia law itself, Adams noted that its implementation is more feasible in the North and even faces limited enforcement in the Christian-majority Middle Belt. He emphasized that the South-West adheres to a modern constitution that upholds religious coexistence and unity (Lawal 2024). On January 27, 2025, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Yoruba socio-political group Afenifere firmly rejected the introduction of Sharia law in Yorùbáland based on the secularity

18 Excerpt from oral interview, Papi. Law Enforcement Officer from Abeokuta State, Ogun. Interviewed on February 12, 2025.

19 Excerpt from oral interview, Buki. Lawyer from Ibadan Oyo. Interviewed on January 11, 2025.

20 Excerpt from oral interview, Abike. Lawyer from Ekiti. Interviewed on January 21, 2025.

and modernisation as well a religious tolerance celebrated in Yorùbáland (Taiwo, Akinselure, and Olumense 2025). Rem denounced it, arguing that it would be akin to returning to the dark ages and would negatively impact Christians and the development of the church. Similarly, Baba Ropo opposed the move, stating that it contradicts Yoruba culture, laws, and traditions. He highlighted that punitive measures such as stoning and amputations are entirely incompatible with the values of the Yoruba people[21]. Others who took turns to oppose the creation was the Afenifere, the pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation. Its Organizing Secretary, Abagun Kole Omololu, said importing religious law into the Yoruba culture would not be tolerated, stating that the focus of the South-west region was development. In his words:

> What Yoruba wants is not religious bigotry, we are too closely knit as a race. Religion is the last on the pedestal of our priorities. Ecclesiastical or shari'a law will not make us Dubai or Singapore. My grandfather, who died in 1957, was a Babalawo (herbalist), and yet Baba Egbe (elder) in the church. The concoction he prepared against smallpox is still at the back of my father's house. Yet, my dad was a chairman of a church too. Because we are uniquely homogeneous as a race, what binds us together is our tradition and not religion. Hardly can you find any family in Yorùbáland that does not co-habit as traditional believers, Muslims and Christians. Introducing religious law into our family will encroach into our traditional family setting (Akinselure et al. 2025, n.p.).

Professor Banji Akintoye, a prominent leader of the Oduduwa nation, criticized Fulani herdsmen's attacks on Yoruba Muslims and non-Muslims, blaming the Sultan of Sokoto's silence for their rejection of his authority. He asserted that Sharia court attempts in Yorùbáland have failed due to Yoruba religious tolerance and urged the Fulani to abandon dominance efforts (Eric 2025). Akintoye further advised that rather than seeking dominance over Nigeria, the Fulani should focus on solving their internal issues, such as the significant number of their population that still practices traditional spirituality instead of Islam. He also urged the Fulani to abandon their "born-to-rule" mindset and adopt a more respectful and cooperative stance toward fostering national unity (Eric 2025). Teju avers that "it is not responsible for the North to use style to introduce Sharia in Yorùbáland while they reject beer in their own land"[22]. Haji Kay stated that what is being proposed amounts

21 Except from oral interview, Baba Ropo. Farmer from Ekiti. Interviewed on January 21, 2025.

22 Except from oral interview, Teju. Business owner from Abeokuta, Ogun. Interviewed on February 12, 2025.

to political sharia, which he believes would only be applicable to the poor in Yorùbáland; therefore, he argued that the idea should be rejected[23]. Yem argued that Sharia law would be incompatible with Yoruba society, which thrives on businesses not accepted by Islam, such as prostitution and alcohol production, particularly in Ogun and Lagos. He warned that implementing Sharia could deter tourists, negatively impacting revenue in commercial hubs like Ikeja, Lekki, and Agbara[24].

Implications for North-South, Inter-Group Relations and National Development

The Sharia court imbroglio has significant implications for North--South relations, inter-group dynamics between the two regions, and national development overall. For North-South relations, it undoubtedly leads to increased religious tensions. The move exacerbates historical religious tensions between the predominantly Muslim North and the religiously pluralistic South, deepening suspicions of an Islamisation agenda. The issue of the Islamisation agenda has been well enunciated by many scholars and the fear in recent times seems not only to be brewing but also precipitating and reaching a toxic and pulsating level. Also, it accelerates political frictions, as it could fuel regional distrust and further widen the existing North-South divide, ultimately affecting political alliances and governance stability.

The second aspect concerns its implications for inter-group relations. There is no doubt that the issue will create ethnic, identity, and religious polarization within the Yoruba communities, particularly between Muslim and non-Muslims Yorubas. Already, these groups, despite sharing the same ethnic identity, sharply divided during the 2023 general elections. As a result, the Yoruba identity may be threatened. The Sharia issue could reshape Yoruba identity by challenging the region's long-standing reputation for religious tolerance and syncretism, values the Yoruba have historically claimed as defining features of their culture. Over the years, fears of an Islamisation agenda have persisted, and the recent push to introduce Sharia in the southwest is now amplifying those concerns. Additionally, it is a potential recipe for conflict and violence. Already, there have been violent conflicts among the Christian,

23 Except from oral interview with Haji Kay. Real estate actor from Epe, Lagos. Interviewed on January 9, 2025.

24 Excerpt from oral interview with Yem. Retiree from Ondo. Interviewed on February 18, 2025.

Muslims, and African Traditional Religion adherents in the south-west and even in some north-central areas particularly Ilorin; the recent issue will be one of those issues. Thus, there is a strong possibility of opposition from traditionalists and Christians, which could lead to communal conflicts or legal battles over jurisdiction.

Thirdly, it threatens national development and cohesion. The Nigerian State has oscillated between weakness and fragility. There is no doubt that such incursions and renewed push for Sharia, in whatever guise, may fuel tensions, war, and disintegration of a country already regarded as standing on the brink (Campbell 2011; Thompson, Afolabi, and AbdulBaki 2019). An *Ifa* Priest said it will cause conflict in Yorùbáland[25]. When the Islamic missioner was asked if the introduction can cause conflict, he replied:

> Yes, it can lead to crisis. And the root of the matter is the sore relationship between the Muslims and the Christians which shouldn't be there. We are brothers and we should recognise that and live in peace. The Christian can put up their own idea of court/laws and watch if Muslims will go against it[26].

Religious tensions will deter investments and disrupt economic collaborations, not only between the North and the South but also among foreign investors. Notably, the North-South crises in 2021 led to the North boycotting the shipment of foodstuffs to the South. There is no doubt that such a move may not only lead to hunger and starvation but could also result in a high mortality rate, especially among vulnerable populations such as women, children, and the elderly. In fact, the Yoruba Regional Alliance (YRA) protest in Ekiti State was kept under control by police intervention, preventing any potential chaos or violence. Finally, it may affect governance and stability. This is because increased regional tensions may distract the state from pressing national issues, diverting government focus from security, infrastructure, and economic reforms.

25 Except from oral interview, Baba Onifa. *Ifa* priest from Oyo, Oyo State. Interviewed on January 11, 2025.

26 Except from oral interview, Alhaji Sheik. Islamic Missioner from Ibadan Oyo State. Interviewed on January 11, 2025.

Of Hegemons and Hegemony: Discourse on Debating Religion in a Multiethnic State

The findings reveal that, historically, the practice of African Traditional religions before the introduction of Islam and Christianity — through the Fulani and missionaries, respectively — produced a pluralist society based on tolerance, which now functions as a counter-hegemonic resource against the expansion of Sharia. Despite the dominance of these two religions, Yoruba communities have generally coexisted peacefully, with intermarriage and mutual tolerance being common, although occasional conflicts do occur and are typically manageable. Bouchat (2013) noted that many Muslim, Christian, and animist Yoruba live peacefully, not only in the same cities but also in the same households. Peel (2016) emphasized that the Yoruba take pride in their deeply rooted culture of religious tolerance, shaped by historical and cultural experiences. Unlike Northern Nigeria, where extremist ideologies like Islamic fundamentalism and Boko Haram have taken hold, such movements lack fertile ground in Yoruba society. In 2025, Bola Tinubu, a Muslim President, attended the Eyo festival in Lagos state. This a sign of tolerance as a way of managing the pluralistic society in Yorùbáland (State House 2025)

The findings also reveal that the North-South relationship was interdependent prior to colonial rule. The amalgamation of these culturally distinct regions created underlying animosities. Although they collaborated to end colonial rule, post-independence leaders harbored mutual fears and distrust, which persist in public policies, laws, and on social issues today. Kukah (2013) asserted that the history of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria is intricately linked to the state's history, and the colonial state laid the groundwork for many of the ongoing tensions.

Findings also show the controversy surrounding the introduction of Sharia panels and courts in parts of Yorùbáland, beginning with Oyo State and later extending to Ekiti and other areas. While proponents, primarily Muslims, advocated for these courts as a means to address perceived injustices in civil courts and uphold cherished religious practices, the broader Yoruba community strongly condemned the move. Olaniyi (2011) suggests that the reintroduction of Sharia aimed to address policing challenges. However, the rejection of Sharia courts stemmed from several factors, including historical antecedents, cultural incompatibility, constitutional and legal debates, socio-economic issues, and political and sectarian concerns. Historically, references were made to the Fulani conquest of the Oyo Empire, particularly the role of Afonja, whose actions symbolized the modern perception of Muslims

inviting external influences to reintroduce Sharia. This historical event also marked the Fulani's entry into Ilorin and the spread of Islam into the Oyo Empire. Any wonder Bailey and Clegg (2007) contends that it could either be a forceful way or consent. While the Afonja debacle was a forceful way, there is no doubt that the people view the introduction of Sharia courts as a more subtle strategy, which explains their fears.

Additionally, the cultural differences between northern Nigeria, where Islam dominates, and Yorùbáland, where three religions coexist, raised questions about the compatibility of Sharia with Yoruba traditions and values. The coexistence of multiple religious groups in Yorùbáland makes Sharia courts a sensitive issue. Some view their introduction as potentially fostering inclusivity, while others see it as deepening religious divisions. The debate also centers on Nigeria's constitutional provisions on religious freedom and secularity, highlighting legal tensions over the establishment of Sharia courts. While Sharia panels operate within hegemonic negotiation, not outside the state; the silence and tolerance of the State over the years especially under both the late President Muhammadu Buhari and Bola Ahmed Tinubu who are both Muslims further exemplifies this. The fears of state silence or favouritism toward Islam — and by extension, Sharia — over Christianity have shown in utterances and countenances of both leaders. Although Buhari is often perceived as being extreme, Tinubu is viewed as relatively more liberal (Owonikoko 2025).

Socio-economic concerns also shape opposition to Sharia law in Yorùbáland, with critics warning that its expansion could undermine urban life, tourism, entertainment, and alcohol-related businesses that are central to the region's economy. Although Nigeria operates a plural legal system in which customary and Islamic courts are legally recognised, their authority remains constitutionally subordinate to the 1999 Constitution. In principle, any customary or Sharia ruling that violates fundamental rights, particularly gender equality, should be nullified by superior courts. In practice, however, state institutions often respond cautiously or remain silent. Federal authorities and appellate courts have been reluctant to decisively challenge controversial Sharia or customary rulings due to fears of political backlash, regional instability, and accusations of religious or cultural intolerance. This pattern reflects a hegemonic compromise rather than legal neutrality. This dynamic is illustrated in *Yahaya Sharif-Aminu v. Attorney General,* where the Nigerian Court of Appeal upheld the constitutional validity of a state Sharia blasphemy offence involving a singer sentenced to death for allegedly insulting Prophet Muhammad via a WhatsApp song. While the High Court quashed the conviction on procedural grounds, the Court of Appeal held that Section

10 of the Constitution prohibits the adoption of a state religion but does not invalidate Sharia laws applicable to Muslims, ordering a retrial. A dissenting judge, however, found the offence unconstitutional and favoured acquittal (Global Freedom of Expression n.d.). Such legal outcomes have reinforced Nigeria's patriarchal order, where women's rights are frequently compromised (Makama 2013). Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, customary and Sharia justice often sustains male dominance in marriage, inheritance, divorce, and punishment (Ogbe 2020; Bajaj 2024). From a Gramscian perspective, these inequalities persist through hegemonic consent, with state inaction subordinating constitutional principles to political stability.

There are also security concerns, with fears that Sharia courts could create a platform for extremist elements, heightening religious tensions and risks in the region, as well as fear of ethnic domination through religion. Political and sectarian motivations also play a role, with some stakeholders perceiving the push for Sharia courts as politically driven rather than religiously necessary, potentially influenced by Northern Nigeria. Notably, concerns persist about the political and socio-economic influence of the Muslim North and its perceived efforts to assert control over the Christian South (Badmus and Lafenwa 2022). This has led to strong opposition from traditional rulers, religious leaders, legal experts, and civil society groups, who fear the erosion of Yoruba cultural identity, religious extremism, and the potential for conflict. Additionally, regional and ethnic identity concerns fuel the debate, with some framing it as part of a broader struggle for Yoruba political autonomy and cultural preservation.

The Sharia court controversy has significant implications for Nigeria's North-South relations, inter-group dynamics, and national development. It heightens religious tensions between the predominantly Muslim North and the religiously diverse South, fueling suspicions of an Islamization agenda. Ejiofor (2021) had argued that the consequence of these suspicions is the rejection of governmental policy initiatives geared toward resolving the conflicts. This could deepen distrust, escalate political friction, and widen regional divides, destabilizing governance and political alliances. In Yoruba communities, the controversy risks polarizing Muslim and non-Muslim groups, threatening historical religious tolerance and syncretism. Communal conflicts and legal disputes may arise, as seen in past clashes in the South-West and Ilorin, with opposition from traditionalists and Christians. As Lamidi and Raji (2025) argue, unlike Nigeria's conflict-prone North, Southwestern Nigeria maintains religious harmony through inclusive Yoruba cultural practices that promote interfaith coexistence. The controversy could also undermine Nigeria's secular, federal structure, already strained by state

fragility and economic instability. Heightened regional tensions could deter foreign investments, disrupt food supply chains, and increase mortality rates among vulnerable populations, similar to the 2021 North-South crisis. Moreover, these tensions may distract the government from addressing critical national issues, such as security, infrastructure development, and economic reforms, further jeopardizing national stability and development.

Conclusion

The push for Sharia courts in Yorùbáland transcends legal discourse; it is a litmus test for Nigeria's secular democracy, federal balance, and fragile inter-group relations. While Muslim communities in the Southwest are entitled to religious adjudication within constitutional limits, the manner and timing of Sharia's reintroduction have amplified historical grievances, stoked suspicions of northern dominance, and risked undermining the region's longstanding culture of religious tolerance. The controversy threatens to deepen North-South divides, disrupt socio-economic stability, and erode public trust in governance. Mitigating these risks requires a deliberate, transparent, and participatory approach rooted in genuine federalism, constitutional safeguards, and sustained interfaith engagement to ensure that religious diversity strengthens rather than fractures Nigeria's unity.

REFERENCES

Abdulkareem, A. .2025. "Demands for Shari'a in Yorubaland borne out of self-interest, political undertone — Mudir Markaz." *Nigerian Tribune*, February 6. https://tribuneonlineng.com/demands-for-sharia-in-yoruba-land-borne-out-of-self-interest-political-undertone-mudir-markaz/.

Adebanwi, W. 2009. "The cultural agency of elites: Awolowo and the re-making of the Yorùbá." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22(2): 207–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2009.01349.x.

Adebanwi, W. 2014. *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria: Obáfemi Awólowo and corporate agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Adenuga, G., A. Olajubu, S. Oyewole, and J. S. Omotola. 2023. "Ethno-religious conflicts and the challenges of national security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic." *South African Review of Sociology* 53(2): 130–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2023.2233462.

Adesoji, A. 2010. "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria." *Africa Spectrum* 45(2): 103-119.

Adogame, A. 2013. *The African Christian diaspora: New currents and emerging trends in world Christianity*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Afolabi, A. S., O. O. Thompson, E. O. Ademola, O. G. F. Nwaorgu, and C. A. Onifade. 2020. "Public reaction to federal government's farmer-herder conflicts through the Ruga policy: Can one continuously do the same and expect different result?" *African Insight* 49(4): 88–103. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ai/article/view/202422.

Agbiboa, D.E. 2015. "Boko Haram, Sharia Law and the Nigerian Constitution: An Unholy Alliance?" Paper written for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/unholy_alliance_agbiboa.pdf.

Ajisafe, A. K. 1924. *History of Abeokuta*. Richard Clay & Sons.

Akinselure, W ., B. Taiwo, G. Olonininran, B. Bamigbola, A. Nejo, and P. Dada. 2025. "Afenifere, CAN, others oppose push for Sharia in S'West." *Punch*, January 8. https://punchng.com/afenifere-can-others-oppose-push-for-sharia-in-swest/.

Anyanwu, S. 2025. "Yorùbá groups warn against proposed Sharia court in Oyo, Yorùbáland, write Makinde." *Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation*, 15 January. https://fmino.gov.ng/yoruba-groups-warn-against-proposed-sharia-court-in-oyo-yorubaland-write-makinde/.

Atanda, J. A. 1980. *An introduction to Yoruba history*. IUP.

Ateed, E. H., and O. Ozel. 2023. "Theorising the fall of hegemony: A neo-Gramscian perspective." *MANAS Journal of Social Studies* 12(2): 745–758.

Badmus, B. G., and A. S. Lafenwa. 2022. "Hegemony versus southern aversion: The politics of restructuring in Nigeria and its implications for national unity." *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3(4): 7–14.

Bailey, J. R., and S. Clegg. eds. 2007. *International encyclopedia of organization studies*. Sage.

Bajaj, A. 2024. "Examining Violence Against Women in Northern Nigeria: The Boko Haram Case." *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, May 31. https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/examining-violence-against-women-in-northern-nigeria-the-boko-haram-case/.

Bello, A. 1962. *My life*. Cambridge University Press.

Boro, E., T. Sapra, J. de Lavison, C. Dalabona, V. Ariyaratne, and A. Samsudin. 2022. "The role and impact of faith-based organisations in the management of and response to COVID-19 in low-resource settings." *Religion and Development* 1: 132–146.

Bouchat, C. J. 2013. *The causes of instability in Nigeria and implications for the United States*. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College.

Campbell, J. 2011. *Nigeria: Dancing on the brink*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Chigudu, D. 2024. "The Nexus between Religion, Conflict and Peace Building in Africa and Policy Implications." *Revista De Gestão - RGSA* 18(5). https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n5-034.

Chitando, E., and A. Adogame. 2012. *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*. Routledge.

CIA. n.d.. *Religions*. The world factbook. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/religions/.

Durkheim, É. 1964. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41360/41360-h/41360-h.htm.

Edewor, P. A. and Y. A. Aluko. 2007. "Diversity Management, Challenges and Opportunities in Multicultural Organizations." *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations* 6(6): 189–195.

Ejimabo, N. O. 2015. "The effective research process: Unlocking the advantages of ethnographic strategies in the qualitative research methods." *European Scientific Journal* 11(23): 356–383. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236404786.pdf.

Ejiofor, P. F. 2021. "The fear of ethnic domination: Explaining the persistence of natural resource conflicts in Nigeria." *Ethnopolitics* 22(1): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2021.2006521.

Elijah, L. 2025. "Introduction of Shari'a'll ignite war in Yorubaland – Chief Imam warns." *Vanguard*, February 6. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/02/introduction-of-shariall-ignite-war-in-yorubaland-chief-imam-warns/.

Ellis, S., and G. Ter Haar. 2020. "Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36(2): 175-201.

Eric. 2025. "Yoruba Nation replies Sultan of Sokoto on plans to install Sharia in South West." *The Boss Newspaper,* 1 February. https://thebossnewspapers.com/2025/02/01/yoruba-nation-replies-sultan-of-sokoto-on-plans-to-install-sharia-in-south-west/.

Furcoi, S. and A. Essa. 2017. "Tensions between Muslims and Christians rise in CAR." *Aljazeera*, 14 June. https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2017/6/14/tensions-between-muslims-and-christians-rise-in-car#.

Giddens, A. 2021. *Sociology: A brief but critical introduction (8th ed.)*. Polity Press.

Global Freedom of Expression. n.d. Yahaya Sharif-Aminu v. Attorney General. https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/commissioner-of-police-v-yahaya-sharif-aminu/.

Gramsci, A. 1991. *Gramsci's political thought: An introduction*. R. Simon ed. Lawrence & Wishart.

Gramsci, A. 2000. *The Gramsci reader: Selected writings, 1916–1935*. D. Forgacs ed. New York University Press.

Howard, N. 2021. "Literature review: Examining the strengths and limitations of ethnographic research: An evaluation of two studies in distinctive educational contexts." *International Journal of Asian Education* 2(4): 549–558. https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v2i4.212.

Imam-Oníde, AbdulQowiyy Olalekan (@A_QowiyyBadmus). 2024. "*Since the Southwest states have left Muslims without any trial court of competent jurisdiction on their matters, despite S. 275 (1) of the 1999 CFRN allowing every state to have one, Muslims have resorted to ISPs. Oyo Alaafin is launching its own in January.*" Twitter (now X), December 20. https://x.com/A_QowiyyBadmus/status/1869977459547938894.

Iyekekpolo, W. O. 2020. "Political elites and the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32(4): 749–767. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1400431.

Jabo, S. M. 2025. "Manipulation of Ethno-Religious Sentiment in the 2023 General Elections: Implications on Nigeria's Unity." *Wukari International Studies Journal* 9 (1): 134-144. https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/590.

"Kogi jihadist threatens Yoruba people for rejecting Sharia law: 'It's time to start preaching Jihad in Yorubaland." 2025. *Sahara Reporters*, February 1. https://saharareporters.com/2025/02/01/kogi-jihadist-threatens-yoruba-people-rejecting-sharia-law-its-time-start-preaching.

Kukah, H. 2013. "Origins of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria." *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 25: 7–19.

Lamidi, K. O and T. A. Raji. 2025. "Religious Diversity and Tolerance in the Performance of Traditional Festivals in Òsun State, Southwestern Nigeria: A Multidisciplinary Perspective." *Dutse Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution* 1(1): 98-111.

Lange, M and R. Dietrich. 2005. *States and Development: Historical Antecedents of Stagnation and Advance*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lawal, M. 2024. "Sharia law'll cause anarchy in S'West, traditional leaders warn." *Punch*, December 28. https://punchng.com/sharia-lawll-cause-anarchy-in-swest-traditional-leaders-warn/.

Lichtenheld, A., and E. Ogbudu. 2021. "Fear of the unknown': Religion, identity, and conflict in Northern Nigeria." *Mercy Corps,* July. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/FearoftheUnknown_Full_6-30-21.pdf.

Lugard, F. D. 1920. *Nigeria report: Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, and administration, 1912–1919*. His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Majemu, S. A. 2024. "Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue through Religious Moderation Discourse: An African Perspective." *International Journal of Civiliza-*

tion Studies and Tolerance Science 2(1): 76–85. https://doi.org/10.54878/2apnq261.

Makama, G. A. 2013. "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward." *European Scientific Journal* 9(17): 115-144.

Martin, J. 2023. *Antonio Gramsci*. Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gramsci/.

Mbiti, J. S. 1990. *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann.

McLoughlin, G., and C. J. Bouchat. 2013. *Nigerian unity: In the balance*. US Army War College Press. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/525.

Meral, Z. 2018. *How Violence Shape Religion*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108553964.

Michalopoulos, S.,A. Naghavi, and G. Prarolo. 2018. "Trade and Geography in the Spread of Islam." *Economic Journal* 128(616): 3210–3241. https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12557.

Mustapha, A. R. 2019. E*thnicity and democracy in Nigeria*. Oxford University Press.

National Concord. 2025. "Okun people dissociate from the threat of Jihad against Yoruba kinsmen in South West over Sharia law." *National Concord,* February 3. https://nigerianconcord.com.ng/okun-people-dissociate-from-the-threat-of-jihad-against-yoruba-kinsmen-in-south-west-over-sharia-law/.

NSCIA. 2025. *Live and let live* [Press release], January 29, 2025. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1044137321094050&set=pcb.1044140347760414.

Nwauche, E. S. 2008. "Law, religion and human rights in Nigeria." *African Human Rights Law Journal* 8(2): 568–595. https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/images/ahrlj/2008/ahrlj_vol8_no2_2008_enyinna_s_nwauche.pdf.

Ogbe, Adah. 2020. "The Travails of Women and Girls in Northern Nigeria: A Human Rights Issue." *SSRN*, April 27. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3599122 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3599122.

Olaniyi, R. O. 2011. "Hisbah and Sharia law enforcement in metropolitan Kano." *Africa Today* 57(4): 71–96. https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.57.4.71.

Owonikoko, S. B. 2025. "Muslim–Muslim Ticket', Christian–Muslim Relations and Peacebuilding and Development in Nigeria: A Reflection on Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Elections." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 20(2): 171-187. https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166241304805.

Paden, J. 2015. *Religion and Conflict in Nigeria: Countdown to the 2015 Elections*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR359-Religion-and-Conflict-in-Nigeria.pdf.

Peel, J. D. Y. 2016. *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa religion: Three traditions in comparison and interaction*. University of California Press.

Pew Research Center. 2015. The future of world religions: Population growth projections, 2010–2050. April 2. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

Salawu, B. 2010. "Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: Causal analysis and proposals for new management strategies." *European Journal of Social Sciences* 13(3): 345–353.

Salisu, A., I. I. Ibrahim, S. Yusuf, I. A. Ibrahim, and U. H. Sanni. 2024. "Analysis on the Influence of Religion and Ethnicity on 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria." *Journal of Political Discourse* 4(2).

State House. 2025. "President Tinubu Participates In Historic Eyo Festival." *Villa Updates*, December 28. https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-participates-in-historic-eyo-festival-2/ accessed 21/1/2026.

Suberu, R. 2020. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. US Institute of Peace Press.

Sulaimon, A. 2024. "Islamic group makes U-turn, postpones Sharia court unveiling in Oyo." *Punch*, December 24. https://punchng.com/just-in-islamic-group-makes-u-turn-postpones-sharia-court-unveiling-in-oyo/.

Sulaimon, A. 2025. "Sharia panels good for religious harmony in South-West – JAMB registrar." *Punch*, February 10. https://punchng.com/sharia-panels-good-for-religious-harmony-in-south-west-jamb-registrar/#google_vignette.

Taiwo, B., W. Akinselure, and V. Olumense. 2025. "Abiodun kicks as group launches Ogun Sharia court, invites litigants." *Punch*, January 25. https://punchng.com/abiodun-kicks-as-group-launches-ogun-sharia-court-invites-litigants/.

Thompson O. O and I. A. Adams. 2021. "Defying the Odds: Nigeria's Spiraling Insecurity and Failure of State Responses." *The Indian Journal of Politics* 55 (1&2): 89-113. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361761209_DEYING_THE_ODDS_Nigeria's_Spiralling_Insecurity_Challenges.

Thompson, O. O., A. S. Afolabi, and A. S. Abdulbaki. 2019. "Beyond the capture of 'Camp Zero': Terrorism and insecurity in a failing-weak state." *India Quarterly* 75(3): 303–322. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928419860921.

Thompson, O. O., and O . G. F. Nwaorgu. 2024. "When gods Return in Body Bags: The Evolution of Depositions, Exiles and Medical Tourisms among Yoruba Traditional Rulers in Southern Nigeria, c.1476-2016." *Social Evolution and History* 23 (1): 27–48. https://doi.org/10.30884/seh/2024.01.02.

Tounsel, C. 2025. "Religious Elements of the Sudanese Civil War." *Canopy Forum*, April 4. https://canopyforum.org/2025/04/04/religious-elements-of-the-sudanese-civil-war/.

Ukah, A. F. 2020. "The political economy of religious violence in Africa". In *Themes in religious and human security in Africa,* edited by Ezra

Chitando and Peter Mageto. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003017080-4.

Ukiwo, U. 2005. "The study of ethnicity in Nigeria." *Oxford Development Studies* 33(1): 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360081050009959 2.

Unaegbu, J. E. 2023. "Igbophobia in Lagos and Nigeria 2023 elections: Myth or reality?" *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 21(4): 54–71.

Undiyaundeye, U. A. 2021. "Yorùbá-Igbo rivalry 1937–1970: A historical analysis of the birth of Nigeria's political dilemma." *Indonesian Journal of Social and Educational Studies* 2(2): 190–201.

U.S. Department of State. 2021. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State.

Usman, A. and T. Falola. 2019. *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*. Cambridge University Press.

Yusuf, A. B. 1976. "Legal Pluralism in the Northern States of Nigeria: Conflict of Laws in a Multi-Ethnic Environment." PhD diss., State University of New York.

ABSTRACT

The reintroduction of Sharia courts in Yorùbáland has rekindled debates on religious pluralism, ethnic relations, and constitutionalism in Nigeria's multi-ethnic democracy. This study examines the historical, legal, socio-political, and cultural dimensions of the Sharia controversy in the Southwest, assessing its implications for inter-group harmony, governance, and national unity. Anchored on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the research employs a qualitative design, drawing on interviews with 19 participants across the six Yorùbá states, supported by archival records, media reports, and observations. Findings reveal that while proponents frame Sharia courts as a constitutional right for Muslim communities, opponents perceive them as instruments of cultural domination, religious extremism, and political manipulation. The study underscores tensions between Nigeria's secular constitution and its plural legal system, highlighting fears of Islamisation, cultural incompatibility, and socio-economic disruption. It recommends constitutional clarity, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive federalism to balance religious rights with national cohesion.

KEYWORDS
Ethnicity. Religion. Peacebuilding. Conflict. Islamisation. Nigeria. Yoruba. Sharia.

Received on November 13, 2025
Accepted on February 24, 2026[27]

27 How to cite: Thompson, Olasupo, Tokunbo Stephen Dada, Olugbenga Seun Aina, Bamidele Jinadu, and Surajudeen Oladotun Oladele. 2025. "Sharia in Yorùbáland: navigating religious pluralism and ethnic tensions in Southwest Nigeria." *Brazilian Journal of African Studies,* 10 (20): 178-211. https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.151737.