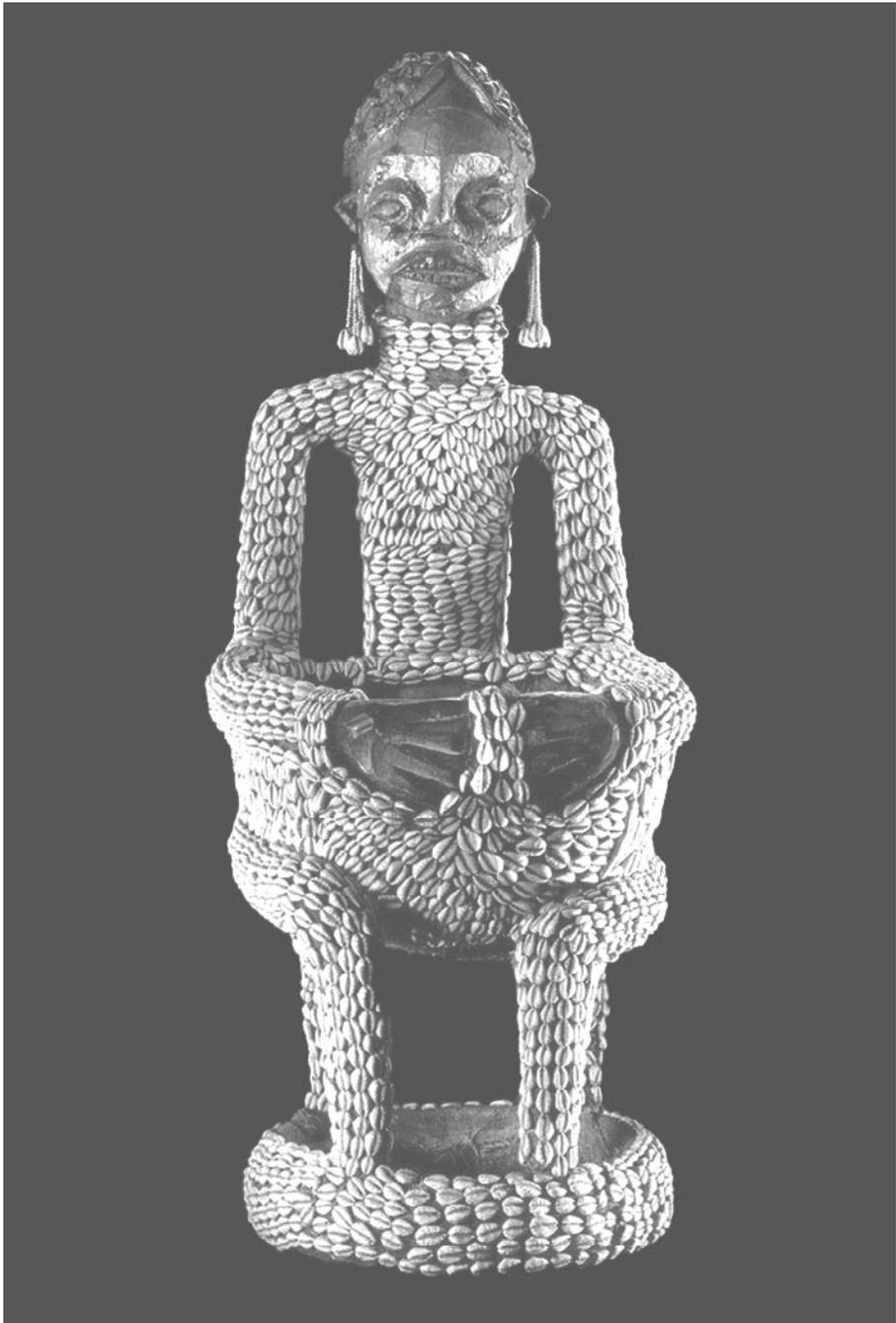


Mapinduzi Journal 7



Ngonso

Thinking and acting from Africa:
what can we learn from
each other?



Cover picture of this Mapinduzi Journal:

Who is Ngonnso?

Looted in 1902 during colonial times by German Kurt Pavel, Ngonnso has spent the past 120 years of her life in museum bunkers, cellars, exhibition stands and now a private room at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. She is a historical representation of the Founder of the Nso community from the grasslands of Cameroon and the spiritual connection to their Ancestors. After discovering her whereabouts around 30 years ago, several efforts have been made by different stakeholders to reclaim Ngonnso. The last stroke was the #BringBackNgonnso campaign that led several efforts such as protests, social media advocacy and diplomatic lobbying and on 26 June 2022, the decision to return Ngonnso by one of the most powerful German cultural institutions SPK was reached. Today, this decision has inspired the claims for return of their heritage by many other communities. As the people of Nso await the final physical return, they are also going after other “objects” collected in the colonial context by Germany.

Mapinduzi Journal 7

Thinking and acting from Africa: what can we learn from each other?

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Introduction

This issue of the Mapinduzi Journal is entitled “Thinking and acting from Africa”. Researcher Loïc Barbedette, some of whose texts we are publishing here, came up with this formula to counteract the harmful cliché that those who work in Africa are often labelled as working “for Africa” or, worse, are seen or see themselves as some kind of saviours of “those poor Africans”. For more than ten years, African and European researchers and practitioners have been meeting under the Mapinduzi banner to advance together in our efforts for Africa and for fairer and more dignified international relations.

The turbulence that has shaken the planet in recent years with the COVID pandemic, but also for the first time in a long time a war in the heart of Europe, the glaring debacle of France's clientelist African policy, the rise of jihadism, the transformations of an international order that many thought was immutable, the growing influence of China as a new superpower, have effects all over the world, but also illustrate the bitter evidence that the occupation of a European country and the human disasters it entails seem to be more important than the wars and conflicts that have been ongoing for the past fifty years and that have cost the lives of countless Africans. And, unfortunately, in Africa fratricidal hatred, conflicts and massacres are on the rise again in countries such as DR Congo, the Sahel countries and Ethiopia.

All this is accompanied by one of the biggest new scourges: the market for rumours and conspiracy theories spread on a massive scale by social media.

How can we think and act together in the face of these seemingly insurmountable challenges? Even face-to-face meetings between colleagues from different parts of the world have become difficult and rare. This seems to us to be all the more detrimental as the new challenges have led to positions that are often very emotional in relation to the situation in the Sahel countries and in relation to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, often depending on the place from which one is speaking, but also on the opinions and rumours one is surrounded by.

We were able to meet virtually at a conference in July 2022 and have been exchanging views over the internet ever since. In this Journal we present you with a kaleidoscope of our discussions and ideas.

Nestor Bidadanure from Burundi analyses what he calls “identity-based radicalism” and expands on new opportunities, alongside the dangers and challenges, for Africa, which for many economic and political reasons is the continent of the future.

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan has allowed us to reprint his excellent article entitled: “Why are they meddling in our affairs? Failure of moral imperialism”. The analysis of a researcher with dual nationality (France-Niger) who has lived in Niger for many years, on the perception of French policy in Africa is a lesson in humility for Europeans and at the same time highlights the dangers raised by the French debacle.

We have chosen to publish three texts by *Loïc Barbedette* from his collection of texts “**Mélanges: Thinking and acting from Africa**” based on his experiences and reflections in working with African stakeholders since 1989.

“Shaker” is both an endeavour and an invitation. An endeavour to take stock of all these years of multiple experiences and to summarise what we are confronted with today. An invitation to all of us, to all of you, to come together to think and act in the face of the enormous challenges. As the points he raises are also on our own agenda of interrogations, we share the text with you in the hope of contributing to a wave of ideas and action from Africa. Regarding the war in Ukraine, for example, he notes: “...this war tells us (once more) the importance of the geo-political issues of the African continent, and our blindness (if not our contempt) with regard to what is at stake in and around it. I am convinced that Africa will have a central place in the future of the world.”

“The Rise of Extremism”, written in 2022, describes some of the warning signs and analyzes the roots of the unforeseen and terrifying rise of religious extremism in West Africa, and gives voice to rural Africans who are directly affected.

Finally, “Short-sighted policies that do not benefit farmers” from 2020 revolves around the transformation of life in rural areas, the forceful return of

uncertainty that we will necessarily have to live with, and the “colonisation of the agricultural sector by **cooperation projects** whose strategies are decided by donors”, with the remote control experimentation that follows. All this benefits agribusiness and ruins the environment. We must therefore ask ourselves fundamental questions: what kind of agriculture, what kind of economy, what kind of society? The lack of vision for a long-term policy, especially among donors and governments, requires strong advocacy against the mainstream.

Belgian researcher *Kris Berwouts* shares his analysis of the UN vote on the Russian aggression against Ukraine. “Why do African countries prefer not to be drawn into Russia’s war?” and analyses Russian influence in Africa.

Dupleix Kuenzob, who works with youth networks in Cameroon, questions the communication and irresponsible attitudes of African leaders in “A-Fricking Crisis: The pernicious path from disempowerment to irresponsibility”

Development expert *Jeanot Minla Mfou’ou* from Cameroon explains a point of view and a hope that is widespread among French-speaking African countries: “Multiple crises in the Sahel and in Africa: what if the solution was to break off or profoundly review relations with France and the West?” Disgusted by French policy, many French-speaking Africans, who were probably previously deluding themselves about the goals of French and European African policy in general, are now turning their backs on the West and hoping that the Russians or the Chinese will be better partners for development.

Flaubert Djateng of the Zenü Network brings together the voices of young Cameroonians on “Russian involvement in cooperation with African countries: What do young people think?” He notes: “These views, although diverse, almost all have several things in common:

- ◆ A strong emotional component, linked more to Cameroonian history and current events and to the role of the colonisers and post-colonisers, notably France.
- ◆ A lack of concrete and accurate information. There is no room for questions or doubts. For example, what are the effects of Russian interventions in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali and Burkina? What alter-

natives exist for countries shaken by crises and conflicts based on poor governance?

- ◆ With one exception, a total lack of analysis and scepticism towards information sources, especially social media.”

Dominic Johnson of the German daily taz takes a look at African and European public opinion on wars and conflicts in other countries in “Not so important...”:

“Everyone in their own bubble: African public opinion reacts with the same indifference to the war in Ukraine as Europe does to conflicts in Africa.” (...) This indifference, which amounts to an acceptance of injustice, must be unbearable for Ukrainians. The same cannot be said for people in the Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and many other war-torn countries who have been confronted with European indifference for much longer as they seek a safe haven or even just try to attract attention. In Germany, therefore, there is virtually no understanding of a worldview that places slavery and colonialism at the centre of world history.

Kris Berwouts shares a report from Dakar: “Will Senegal stand up to extremist violence from the Sahel?”

German researcher *Desiree Zwanck*, who lives in Senegal, provides an in-depth analysis of an often neglected topic: “Women’s empowerment and climate change in the Sahel: what issues, what solutions?” She notes, among other things, that gender mainstreaming means taking into account the perceptions, experience, knowledge and interests of women and men in policy-making, planning and decision-making.

Evariste Mfaume from the Congo analyses the effects of COVID and climate change in DR Congo in “Never give up in the struggle for peace, security and development in the DRC and the Great Lakes region”. In spite of the enormous challenges, he concludes:

“There are high hopes in the fact that the peoples of the Great Lakes region have historical links with much potential to be developed through exchanges, multi-sectoral integrative projects involving youth, women, IDPs, refugees and other special needs groups.”

In his contribution “The State, the people, ethnicity and leadership: Africa in Globalisation”, the Cameroonian writer *Roger Kaffo Fokou* examines the concepts of state, peoples and ethnicity and seeks to understand the reasons for the lack of unity in African countries, highlighting a lack of political vision and adequate governance.

This, then, is our rich harvest of thoughts and proposals, often linked to action already undertaken by some.

What is striking is that several contributions underline the crucial role of Africa in the world to come. Africans themselves will decide whether they will be extras on a stage dominated by others or decisive and important players in this new international order.

One more comment on Mapinduzi: We hope to continue this work, but at the moment we have no funding for the next stage. Most of the work has been done on a voluntary basis, but to be able to meet and publish the contributions requires a least a small amount of funds. We will continue to fight.

Courage to all!

*Christiane Kayser
Flaubert Djateng
November 2022*

African opportunity in the face of radical identity populism

Nestor Bidadanure*

There is a broad consensus among economists today that Africa possesses the wherewithal to become a major global development hub in the near future. In contrast to this good news, a radical identity populism is continuously spreading and causing large numbers of victims among the civilian population. What vision can we oppose to this ideology of hatred of the Other that seeks to derail the train of African hope?

Africa has the wherewithal

It has become a commonplace ritual. All the global economic powers have instituted regular meetings with the political leaders of African countries because none of them wants to miss out on the opportunities the continent offers. According to the United Nations Economic Commission, Africa possesses 54% of the world's platinum, 78% of diamonds, 40% of gold, 40% of chromium, 28% of manganese, 12% of hydrocarbons and thousands of hectares of undeveloped arable land. A country such as Guinea Conakry has the world's largest bauxite reserves, around 40 billion tons. It also has 20 billion tons of iron ore, gold, diamonds, uranium, etc. The same could be said of many other African countries, large and small. The fascinating aspect is that the long tragic periods of slavery, colonisation and apartheid did not succeed in stripping the continent of its fabulous wealth and that the future therefore remains open. Not a year goes by without the discovery of new sites containing mineral and hydrocarbon resources. We know today that the Sahel, once considered a hopelessly arid land,

* Researcher from Burundi

is a huge reservoir of gas, oil and uranium. That Mozambique, which has experienced so many wars and deadly famines, is immensely rich in hydrocarbons and other minerals.

At a time of global energy crisis due to the war in Ukraine, according to the IEA, Africa could supply one fifth of the gas that Europe used to import from Russia. In addition to its huge diamond reserves, newly discovered oil deposits could allow Namibia to export up to half a million barrels a day. Not surprising, therefore, that today, with investment projects at the level of €100 billion in South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and Namibia, the European Union is joining the United States and China in similar initiatives. It should also be remembered that by 2050 one in four human beings will be African and that the continent, which today already has a population of 1.2 billion, will therefore be the world's largest consumer market. The presence of strategic raw materials in Africa means that the continent has the resources in place to industrialise rapidly and will be a good customer for any advanced expertise in the future. Moreover, the fact that 60% of the African population is now under 30 years of age means that they will work and save for a long time. The savings accumulated by the majority of the population will strengthen the internal investment capacity of the countries. All of this is, of course, only possible in a political environment of good governance. It is therefore understandable that the US, the EU, China, Russia, Japan and the middle powers look to Africa as the place to be to preserve and strengthen their position as an economic power on the world stage. The slogans "trade and not aid" and "win-win" partnership that are in vogue at conferences between Africa and various industrial powers sound like a realistic and pragmatic response to the new demand of the African political elites. Many have realised that aid has never developed a country and that only investments aimed at endogenous local, regional and continental development will put Africa on the road to true economic emancipation.

Running counter to hope

For the optimistic forecasts about Africa's future to come true, the continent must overcome a major obstacle: a binary, Manichaeian and dangerous worldview that we call Radical Identity Populism. This is not new under the heavens

nor specific to Africa. Today, however, it is the main cause of instability in the continent. “Populism” refers to the use of demagoguery by some political elites to gain or retain power. The term “identity” characterises the negative instrumentalisation of real or supposed differences such as religion, ethnicity, region, skin colour or nationality to mobilise the grassroots. Here the richness of the diversity of peoples, cultures and beliefs is generally considered and presented, through the media and public discourse, as a handicap to peaceful coexistence. Depending on the country, one or more scapegoats are designated and made responsible for the majority of the society’s ills. The term “radical” expresses the fact that hatred of the different Other can gradually go as far as execution and the legitimisation of genocide.

The phenomenon of Radical Identity Populism is a fanatical and regressive political approach against humanistic, emancipatory and human solidarity ideas. It was used by colonialism to better divide and rule and, at the time of independence, to try to slow down the irreversible march of peoples towards self-determination. In the post-colonial period, radical identity populism was refined according to the zeitgeist and propagated among the people by cynical, alienated African elites with no ambition for their people. Politics in this category is not the pursuit of common happiness, but the art of excluding the different Other and seeking unlimited self-enrichment through the plundering of public property. When radical identity populism rides on the back of religion, it strives to establish a theocratic regime that banishes democracy and tolerates only a one-dimensional view of both religion and politics. It is this totalising fantasy that serves as the ideological basis for the Islamist movements in the Sahel, Somalia, Nigeria, Mozambique and eastern DRC. This sectarian and stigmatising vision also serves as the ideological basis for ethnicist groups that sow death in Africa, as well as for the dictatorial regimes that manipulate identity.

It is therefore safe to say that radical identity populism is the major challenge facing the continent today. First of all, because the identity-based approach, especially in a continent made up of an immense diversity of peoples and cultures, can only constitute a destabilising factor, or even a threat of disintegration. Secondly, because this ideology always runs counter to the continent's truly inclusive emancipation processes. It will be remembered that in 1994, when free and democratic elections ended apartheid and consecrated the victory of Nelson Mandela’s ANC in South Africa, this moment of great hope for Africa and the

world was dampened by the genocide in Rwanda in the same year. While the national liberation movement in South Africa had succeeded in bringing together all the national diversities (race, class, gender) to overcome institutionalised racism, in Rwanda, a country with no ethnic groups, the last genocide of the 20th century was taking place. The genocide of the Tutsis reminded Africa and the world of some basic truths: fascism is not a question of skin colour but a question of ideas, discourse and political decisions. A murderous ideology without borders, the supreme stage of which is genocide. And if it could happen in a country without ethnic groups, in the classical sense of the term (community of language, territory and culture), it could happen elsewhere tomorrow. Finally, by generating instability, Radical Identity Populism can only have a negative impact on economic investment initiatives for development. And in this respect, it is the antithesis of the pan-African dream of a united, prosperous and inclusive continent because it threatens the very existence of nations as such.

Intellectual resistance against Radical Identity Populism

All peoples have experienced dark periods marked by war and poverty in the course of their history. Today's powerful were not always so. They are the product of great moments of ideological breach with an unfortunate past. The heroes admired today are the women and men who defied fatalism and showed their people that a better life for all was possible, but that it was to be won through struggle. It is thanks to these heroes, known and unknown, that the resistance against slavery, colonialism and apartheid bore fruit. Fighting identity-based radicalism today means continuing the struggle of previous generations for a prosperous, inclusive Africa at peace with itself. And since the identity phenomenon is political, it is above all through political education that it must be fought. In order to do this, awareness-raising must be based on at least six major axes:

1. The definition of the nature of the regimes

The aim is to show that the powers and political organisations that use identity-based rhetoric to seize or maintain power are versions of fascist regimes

because they generally share the following common denominators: Manichaeian political thinking; stigmatising of one or more scapegoats; denial of officially recognised genocides; an allergy to democracy; the use of force in the management of public affairs; the constitution of a militia that is guilty of mass crimes and crimes against humanity; the seizing of national wealth; outright corruption and bellicose behaviour.

2. Knowledge of other peoples' experiences

The phenomenon of Radical Identity Populism is not specific to Africa, nor is it new, but it can be better combated by learning from the experiences of other peoples who have faced similar tyrannies in the past and whose multi-faceted resistance emerged victorious. In other words, civic education must draw its content from the universal heritage of resistance against barbarism.

3. Politics as a search for common happiness

Populist elites use politics as a springboard to power. The aim here is access to material wealth, symbolic prestige and control of instruments of exclusion. They spare no expense to achieve their goal. Citizen education must oppose this individualistic and sectarian approach with the other version of politics. That is to say, the search for common happiness, which is materialised by the defence of the public interest.

4. The struggle for sustainable peace

The foundations of a lasting peace are the opposite of the peace of dictators and the peace of the brave. For a dictator, the absence of war means peace, even if all the human development indicators are in the red. Here, poverty may kill as much as war, but as long as there is no sound of gunfire in the country, the tyrant speaks of peace. Sustainable peace is not the same as the peace of the brave, which is limited to the signing of agreements between the belligerents to stop the war and the sharing of the country's resources among the leaders. Here the structural violence that affects the people is not the concern of the actors in the conflict. This is a case of security at the top and continuing insecurity at the bottom. The lasting peace we are concerned with here is a state where the physical and economic security and freedom of all citizens is guaranteed.

5. Participatory and inclusive democracy

A true citizen is aware of their rights and duties. Because we are able to choose our representatives with a clear conscience, through the use of reason and not passion. Learning about democracy begins with the exercise of democracy in civil society associations and political parties. These structures should be seen as parallel universities where the face of the future peaceful society is shaped. Participatory democracy makes it a duty and a right for everyone to speak. Its permanent concern is the inclusiveness of all components of the nation in the policy-making and decision-making processes. For there is no guarantee that an opposition organisation that is comfortable with the under-representation of women and national diversities will change its behaviour once in power.

6. The defence of humanist values

Because barbarism in Africa and elsewhere is usually theorised by intellectuals, it is fundamental to include knowledge of humanist values and Ubuntu in citizenship education programmes. These values should not only be future goals but attitudes and behaviours in everyday life. They are at once the antithesis of the icy cynicism of fascism and the instruments of resistance against injustice in all societies.

The train of hope must roll on

The past is our best ally when it serves as a school of lucidity and a foundation for the love of freedom. Africa has already shown admirable capacities for resistance and resilience throughout its history. It has repeatedly thwarted the pessimistic forecasts that condemned it, by showing creativity and finding in its historical heritage the means to overcome the worst tragedies. Neither apartheid nor the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda caused the collapse of these nations. Proof that Radical Identity Populism cannot stop the momentum of the continent's economic emancipation, if we so choose.

“Why are they meddling in our affairs?” The failure of moral imperialism in Africa¹

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan*

Publicly attacking and threatening to impose sanctions against Senegalese footballer Idrissa Gueye when, as a member of the PSG team, he refused to wear a shirt with rainbow numbers on International Day Against Homophobia is the best way to reinforce both homophobia in Senegal and the rejection of France. Rather than lecturing the African people, Western leaders, authorities, intellectuals and experts would do better to support the people in Africa who are trying to change beliefs, break down prejudices, change mentalities and remove discrimination.

Jean-Loup Amselle recently described quite accurately the complexity of the debate in AOC media: (a) Idrissa Gueye’s refusal to wear the rainbow shirt with the other Paris Saint-Germain players on the day against homophobia; (b) his vehement condemnation by the French Football Federation, along with strong criticism from the media in France; and (c) the multiple support Gueye received in Senegal, on the other hand, including from President Macky Sall. After rightly recalling the post-colonial context of this affair and the recurrent conflict between universalism and particularism, Amselle cautiously avoided taking a position.

Personally, I would go further and take a very clear stand, because behind this affair it is also the overall attitude of Westerners that is being challenged in

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¹ Source and copyright AOC

<https://aoc.media/opinion/2022/06/13/de-quoi-se-melent-ils-lechec-de-limperialisme-moral-en-afrique/mardi-14-june-2022>

Africa, well beyond Senegal, up to and including development aid, which is showing all the signs of being in deep crisis. I think that the radical and outrageous attacks against Ibrahim Gueye are not only inappropriate but must be condemned, and that they are also indicative of a deep-seated problem when it comes to the countries of the South in general and Africa in particular.

How do Western leaders, authorities, intellectuals and experts justify their constant lecturing of African peoples, while forgetting the old adage about people in glass houses and often flouting the very rules they want to impose on others? This arrogant, smug, condescending and hypocritical attitude largely explains the increasingly pronounced rejection of the West (with France in the lead) by a very large part of African public opinion. One consequence of this massive rejection that I find particularly deplorable can be seen in the news but the reason for it should be explained: the support for Putin that is very often on display in Africa, for the sole reason that he opposes the West.

Let us return to the Gueye case. The player did not use any homophobic slurs, nor did he behave inappropriately towards any representative of the LGBTIQ+ community. Had he done so, reprobation would be deserved and possibly even the application of French law. But all he did was to not join a demonstration against homophobia. This is his absolute right. As it was Mbappé's right not to join the French team's endorsement of Coca Cola. Each player is responsible for their own image and cannot be turned into an advertiser or ideological standard bearer against their will. Whether for good or for bad causes.

On the one hand, prejudice must be fought through persuasion and education, and on the other hand, acts of discrimination must be combated through public criticism and the law, but the two definitely must not be mixed.

Is taking part in *Gay Pride* or anti-racism events compulsory, and not doing so homophobic or racist behaviour? That would be absurd. Not joining in a public activity against homophobia does not equate to being homophobic, no more than a Russian tennis player not publicly criticising Russian aggression in Ukraine can be accused of supporting it. The harsh criticism of Gueye is not justified. One may surmise that the attacks were not aimed at his Senegalese identity and that any other player who reacted in the same way would have been subject to this intolerance. But it was precisely because they did not take into account his Senegalese identity that they caused such an outcry in Africa.

Indeed, the fact that Gueye is Senegalese is key to understanding his attitude. By refusing to wear the shirt symbolic of homosexuality, which would undoubtedly have turned him into a pro-homosexual activist in the eyes of his compatriots, Gueye probably did not want to be subjected to an avalanche of jeers and insults in Senegal, where public opinion is clearly homophobic. This seems to me to be very understandable on his part. Perhaps (I have no idea if this is true) he is also personally hostile to homosexuality. So what? In this case, too, it would be his right: insults and homophobic acts are prohibited (not only legally, but also legitimately in my opinion), but not the rejection of homosexuality on a personal basis (as an inner conviction).

The repression of homophobia and all forms of discrimination in France must not infringe on freedom of opinion. It is up to each of us to convince our relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours that a particular form of discrimination they personally and privately carry within them is absurd or harmful. This does not mean that they should be fined or pilloried, as long as they keep their clichés and phobias to themselves and do not publicly attack anyone. On the one hand, prejudice must be fought through persuasion and education, and on the other hand, acts of discrimination must be combated through public criticism and the law, but the two must definitely not be mixed.

To turn now to relations with Africa, not only with regard to homophobia but more generally European interventions concerning sexual and family norms on the one hand, and political mores on the other. There are many moral values now taken for granted in the North that Western policy makers of all kinds, from large development agencies to NGOs large and small, want to impose on Africa, admittedly not by force but through multiple aid conditions: the defence of gay rights, certainly, but also the promotion of women, birth control, the fight against forced and child marriage, the fight against corruption, the promotion of electoral democracy, transparency and accountability, the promotion of civil society.

It should be remembered that in France, these values have only been acknowledged, accepted as widely shared and enshrined in law relatively recently: forced marriage reigned in the time of Molière, who made it a favourite subject of his comedies; the French state under Pétain was, to say the least, not democratic; women only obtained the right to vote in 1945; racist and homophobic remarks were perfectly tolerated a few decades ago; abortion was only recently

legalised; corruption in the construction industry was widespread not long ago and has not disappeared in the arms industry, etc.

Nevertheless, better late than never, and the major progress in the official adoption of these moral values, at least at the level of principles and in public space, is to be welcomed. This does not mean that the reality follows. I am one of many who believe that there is still a lot of work to be done in France itself (mainly in terms of persuasion, but also in terms of the law) to ensure that these values are enshrined in daily life and interactions. The rise of the far right shows that the fight against discrimination has not yet won the day, far from it.

But does this give France's representatives or, more broadly, the decision-makers in the field of development and humanitarian aid, the right to lecture other peoples, and to behave as militants imposing these values on others from the outside? The systematic export to Africa of moral values that have become unavoidable in the West is certainly carried out with the best of intentions, for the benefit of those suffering from discrimination, oppression, or poverty: the idea is to take action "for their good". This is reminiscent, in a way, of the missionary discourses of colonial times. The problem is that this "good" is perceived by most of those to whom it is addressed as "bad", and these "friends who mean well" are often seen as hypocrites bent on humiliation.

The way Western aid works at present, with its ethical injunctions attached to the allocation of funds, has failed.

For this is the crux of the matter. Development projects almost systematically include "moral" conditions in the selection and management procedures of the funds they allocate, conditions that are grudgingly agreed but accepted in the end as they are a prerequisite for receiving aid. African institutions that want to benefit from "projects", i.e. to access aid windows, are obliged to integrate "civil society" into their action, whatever the subject. Obligation to respect a gender parity or quota. Imposing of anti-bribery clauses. Requirement of institutional architectures based on general assemblies with elected boards. Etc., etc.

Some of the aid also goes to projects conceived outside Africa by international experts, to foster behaviour in line with Western moral standards. Typical examples are family planning and anti-child marriage programmes.

Let us be clear. In most African countries, patriarchy is the rule and men overwhelmingly dominate public life (although women are not without

countervailing power); polygamy is widespread; corruption is rampant; homophobia is openly prevalent; democracy is bypassed or reviled. Racism and xenophobia are common and often open. In the Sahel, child and forced marriages are still common and widely validated socially and religiously. Africa (no more than Europe or America) is not an ideal world to be preserved as it is.

We cannot content ourselves with this situation. But who can change it?

An answer is required. The way Western aid works at present, with its ethical injunctions attached to the allocation of funds, has failed. It works counter to its good intentions, because lecturing exacerbates the rejection of the West and by the same token favours the perpetuation of the local practices that it was intended to modify. Leaving aside the problems relating to the civic sphere (democracy, transparency, corruption, etc.), consider only those which, like the Gueye case, concern the private sphere. The interference of rich countries in the family and sexual lives of millions of Africans is probably what most exasperates the majority of African public opinion. These are particularly sensitive topics, where North-South misunderstandings are most acute.

Family planning is a good example. For the majority of rural dwellers and the underprivileged, having many children is part of a common rationale that is economic (insurance for old age in the absence of a pension), social (a large number of offspring is a sign of prestige) and religious (God and Allah bless and favour procreation, as everyone knows), and so secular preaching on the need to restrict births captures all the less attention when it comes from American NGOs or European agencies suddenly posing as protectors of the future of African countries (threatened by population explosion), sources not generally known for such solicitude.

A conspiracy theory widely held in popular circles finds favourable ground here: unable to have enough children and threatened by the expansion of African populations, the Whites want to sterilise them. Among intellectuals, the criticism is against the neo-Malthusian ideology that Western experts want to impose on Africa. And for all of them, it seems unacceptable that the West should meddle in their private lives and want to impose its law on the very heart of the African family.

The same is true of forced marriage of adolescent girls, which remains widespread in Mali and Niger, for example. Still practised by many parents for fear that young girls will become pregnant at an early age and thus bring shame

on the family, legitimised by the ideological domination of a Salafism dating back to the time of the Prophet, accentuated by poverty which allows elders to obtain wives cheap through dowry, combating this practice is not so easy.

Funded by international institutions and piloted by Northern NGOs, when it arrives in the villages it arouses suspicion, which quickly leads to rejection. But why are they still meddling? So their civilization, known for its debauchery, wants to lead our daughters astray and interfere in our family arrangements?

Similarly, publicly attacking and threatening sanctions against an African footballer playing in France for simply refusing to wear a shirt with a rainbow design is the best way to reinforce both homophobia in Senegal (where homosexuality is considered a crime) and the rejection of France. Homophobia thus finds a new legitimisation on the Dakar side as a Senegalese “national value” in the face of an ex-coloniser wishing to impose their own customs (which are also perceived as perverse). Let’s reverse the point of view for a second: what would people in France say if a Parisian development worker seconded to Nouakchott was threatened with expulsion for refusing to sacrifice a sheep for Tabaski?

There is obviously no quick fix. But in the face of the failure of external interventions, there is at least one possible avenue: to support those who, *in Africa itself*, are trying to fight, *in their own way and at their own pace*, against forced marriages, for the right to contraception, against homophobia, for the legalisation of abortion. They exist, and they need a lot of courage.

These activists are in a very small minority, but they are not isolated, as there is a part of the population which does not approve of forced marriages or the repression of homosexuality, which accepts contraceptives and tolerates abortion. But this part remains silent, while on the public, electoral and religious scene, the rejection of values considered as Western is increasingly in the forefront.

Any external support for African activists or leaders who want to change widespread behaviour must therefore be discreet, provided at their request, by listening to them, without imposing this or that procedure or schedule. This implies a complete change of method, and in particular a break with the public and sometimes loud staging and narration by which NGOs and international institutions operating in Africa currently tell the world about the merits of their programmes and the virtues of their interventions.

Only “reformers from within”, wherever they are (in the state or in civil society, above or below, in the city or the countryside) can change beliefs, break down prejudices, change mentalities, remove discrimination. Little by little and step by step. This also involves working through public services (health and school systems in particular), which are often in a state of disrepair and therefore need to be helped to rebuild as a matter of priority rather than constantly bypassed.

“Outside reformers” are neither effective nor welcome given the current forms of their interventions. Their missionary impatience and moral imperialism are often counter-productive, despite their good intentions, if not because of them. Their good intentions mask their dramatic misunderstanding of local realities, and their failure to listen to the reasons why people do what they do. As in the case of Idrissa Gueye.

Loïc Barbedette*

The following three texts – Shaker, The Rise of Extremism and Short-sighted Policies that Don't Benefit Farmers – were made available by Loïc Barbedette* and are part of his collection of texts “Mélanges: Thinking and acting from Africa” based on his experience and reflections in working with African players since 1989. The voluminous collection is organized into 12 volumes, which are available on request in French as downloads (loicbarbedette@orange.fr)¹.

Excerpt from: Thinking and Acting from Africa: Mélanges

1 These are seven series of “mixtures” that cut across the fields and cross-cutting issues I had identified and allow quick access to the themes you want to explore. I have organised them into 12 volumes, which are available as downloads in French on demand (loicbarbedette@orange.fr).

1. LEARNING (4 texts, 34 pages)
2. FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS: (1) Discovering West African farmers' organisations (6 texts, 61 pages)
3. FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS: (2) Some milestones around the West African farming movement (15 texts, 86 pages)
4. SOCIAL CHANGE: (1): The city laboratory and the new city (8 texts, 81 pages)
5. SOCIAL CHANGE: (2) Developments over time (4 texts, 84 pages)
6. SOCIAL CHANGE: (3) Interesting signs to decipher well, more worrying signs (10 texts, 59 pages)
7. AFRICAN YOUTH: (1) From one century to the next: landmarks (5 texts, 47 pages)
8. AFRICAN YOUTH: (2) Being young today in the rural world (10 texts, 51 pages)
9. TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF WEST AFRICAN CATTLE BREEDERS (5 sets of texts, 56 pages)
10. CO-OPERATION: views and practices (5 texts, 28 pages)
11. HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT?: (1) who to talk to? (3 texts, 24 pages)
12. HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT? (2) speaking in the first person: feedback from Africa (1 text, 32 pages)

*French researcher and activist working for over forty years with farmers' organisations and other grassroots structures in West African countries

“Shaker”: an attempt and an invitation behind these “mixtures”

By making these mixtures of texts available, I let everyone agitate the shaker according to their own interests. There is, however, a common title that indicates the direction of an attempt. An unfinished attempt, but one that I propose to share: that of *“thinking and acting from Africa”* around questions that concern us all. One could also say: *“What can Africa contribute today?”* which is a way of reversing the question of “development aid” (how can we help Africa?) which seems to me to bias the cooperation relationship and makes me very reluctant to capitalise on my experience from this angle (“how can we improve?”). I would like to express – I hesitate to say “pass on”, share would be more appropriate – something else, to open up a path. I kind of suggest the question: *“How can Africa help us?”* These mixtures then call for an extension, for exchanges based on these texts and around this question to which these texts provide partial answers.

Of course, Africa contributes its values, arts & customs, know-how, social intelligence, “wisdom”, civilisations... It is not a matter of forgetting this, but I do not think that we are opening up a completely new path or that we will get very far by simply celebrating these riches, especially as in reality we know little about how to make the most of these contributions outside our museums. I believe that Africa (the Africas) can, on the other hand, help us to broaden the patterns of thought and action whose limits we are well aware of if we consider it as a living, speaking social, economic and political configuration that allows us to glimpse questions, angles of view, different responses to our own realities, to renew our ways of thinking about the world. If this is the case, Africa's contribution to humanity is considerable, and it is wholly legitimate to seek to “think and act from Africa”. However, in the extension of the unfinished business of these mixtures, there is a great deal of work to be done to reformulate our questions, and I fully agree with a comment Denis Pesche made to me in his first reaction to these mixtures: this should be a collective effort, and it may

go in unexpected directions. It is a question of making this or these African configurations speak, or rather of hearing what they are talking about. To decentralise ourselves.

One way in could be the always revealing one of crises. It is only sketched in these mixtures. The most topical at the time of writing is the war *in Ukraine*. Rather early, of course, to talk about it. Yet this war has already made Africa talk (or rather keep quiet, which is a way of speaking) to the United Nations; it has made Ukraine and Europe talk to Africa through the mistreatment of African students seeking to return home to escape the bombing. The Kremlin seems to have decided to prolong its hybrid war on the African continent by redeploying its powerful propaganda channel RT to this continent where it is already making its mark through its mercenaries: we see that in the game of regaining its hegemony, Russia is not neglecting the African card. Whatever the outcome, if we think of it from Africa's point of view, this war tells us (once more) the importance of the geo-political stakes of the African continent, and our blindness (if not our contempt) with regard to what is at stake in and around it. I am convinced that Africa will have a central place in the future of the world. This is all the more reason to "think and act" from Africa from now on, not only when working on it.

I am not saying that Africa will propose the model that will save the world, but that it will be a necessary prelude to discover it and build it together.

We will build it by overcoming another major crisis that is already underway: that of ecological mutation, *climate change* and the depletion of resources. Africa invites us to grasp it from the food angle, whereas we are more sensitive to the environmental aspect. Food remains the primary imperative in Africa (and may become so again for us tomorrow); the drudgery of agricultural work, especially for women and young people, also plays a role in their options. Here too, there is room to draw up challenging questions about the agricultural and food transition from Africa, for example, by giving thought to the ambivalence of the attitudes and practices of African farmers in relation to agro-ecology or consumption. The weight of the African voice lies in the fact that it is expressed in extreme situations. The war photographer Laurence Geai observed that, in the extreme situations of armed conflict that she has encountered in very different cultural contexts, the reactions of human beings are everywhere similar and

that she takes the same shots of them (“I just have to be patient and wait: the gesture always comes. I’ve seen it elsewhere, so I know it’s coming”): we meet at the extremes.

I am not saying that African farmers are right in their current agricultural or food practices, but they have their reasons, which may become ours.

The way Africa has so far responded to another global crisis, the *coronavirus health crisis*, has also given rise to a “voice”. Quite a dissonant one, with the disaster expected on this continent at the beginning of the pandemic, as its impact was relatively limited. I don’t like to use the concept of resilience to explain it, as it has become too much of a catch-all word for ideological manipulation, but there is a similarity, as long as you analyse the mechanisms. Here we find the intelligence of the adaptation strategies that have enabled families to survive major disasters in the past (such as the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s), but also the strength of solidarity and, above all, perhaps the effects of a lesser dependence than elsewhere (even if it is tending to increase) in relation to the globalisation of trade, and the persistence of short circuits.

There is a lesson to be learned here about how to hear Africa’s voice: not to be content with listening compassionately (hearing how people suffer – the preferred action in which case is humanitarian), but to sharpen a questioning listening (learning from the way people resist, and acting from their stance).

However, analysis of the impact of the pandemic in West and Central Africa shows that Africa did suffer damage during this period. This was economic and social in nature and related to barriers to the movement of goods and people. But the surveys reveal that, for those who suffered, the restrictive measures linked to the pandemic response plans were only secondary causes, the primary ones being attributed to another major crisis: the security crisis, particularly in areas under the influence of the jihad. Here we have material to think about the question of violence from the African perspective.

I don’t know from where it would be most relevant to hear about Africa. Perhaps from several places, but one of them is certainly the jihad itself, and through the mechanisms of its successes, its appeal to certain young people, its exploitation of long-standing frustrations related to inequalities, its arbitration over land, its recourse to ethnicity, its religious component, and its manipulation of chaos, which some analysts compare to the Kremlin’s strategy of politi-

cal affirmation through violence: this could provisionally close the loop through these four crises.

There is, however, at least one question to keep the loop open: whether it is the question of Ukraine, climate, food, COVID or the jihad, behind them in various forms there is always the question of how we related to space and the construction of an agreement to share it – this is at the heart of the political. One of the tireless explorers of this question that I find particularly fertile is Bruno Latour, who renews the concept of class conflict with that of *geo-political class* conflict, which he sees multiplying on all subjects related to subsistence (including the food question for Africa) and access to land (including land for Africa). Through the encounters between the protagonists that it provokes, it seeks to construct, in a lateral manner, the paths to an agreement to “maintain the habitability of the territory on which we depend”. What places does Africa speak about today in the world to which it and we belong, and how does it speak about them? This includes the issue of mobility and migration, but also that of democracy.

I have talked a lot about “thinking from Africa”, but very little about “acting” from Africa. So the loop remains wide open!

(Plésidy, 31 March 2022)

The rise of extremism

Excerpt from Mutations Sociales 3

*What is missing from this picture of the dark side of the changes taking place today is a reflection on **the rise of religious extremism**. I have read a lot on this very challenging subject, which goes far beyond the question of religion. But I have not been able to write about this very complex phenomenon which I have not yet managed to analyse properly.*

The signs

Missed warning signs

And yet this is a question I have given a lot of thought to and a phenomenon whose first signs I failed to interpret in 1992 in northern Burkina Faso when I observed the proliferation of Arab schools financed by Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, I had already perceived the dangers of the social marginalisation of young people in the 1970s when I concluded my article on the future of youth² in 1978 by fearing that these young “Abrahamic” people would become the Palestinians of Africa, and I observed the demand for religious of disaffected youth, but I had not made the link between the two.

First signs noticed

I began to sense this issue of religious fundamentalism in 2002 in Chad, where I met Wahhabi women wearing the full veil for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa³ and where I tried to work with the first rather mute 'bearded men' I encountered in the Ennedi.

2 See in Mixtures 4 on social change: *“Living in the city for young people in the peripheral areas: Abraham, or Youth and its Future”* (1978).

3 I had encountered the veil in Algeria in 1964, at a time when the revolutionary atmosphere was conducive rather to its abandonment. I then taught literacy to young women in Batna, who removed their veils in front of me to take part in the sessions.

I then had very rich exchanges in Niger with Salamatou Sow about the tensions between the new preachers and the Tidjania, and the public controversies provoked by Muslim scholars to confuse the half-trained fundamentalists.

I came across this question again in Benin through what was said about it in certain community stories where we saw young people who had broken away from the community disappear for a while (leaving for Nigeria), then come back bearded and transformed, and open their own mosques in competition with those frequented by adults.

More recently, I also exchanged views with Mamadou Cissokho in Bamako on the need both of us perceived for FOs to express themselves on this issue.

Lived experience

Two direct witnesses

I listened to Amirou Baraboulé and his son, who are experiencing this problem dramatically in their village, which has come under the control of the jihadists, and gained a better understanding from them of some of the mechanisms through which young people join the jihad. Here, I use my notes from interviews conducted in 2017, on the sidelines of an APSS meeting in Yaoundé.⁴

Ahmadou Dicko, mayor of Baraboulé⁵, cannot read or write, but his father gave him a very thorough traditional education, which did not prevent him not only from sending his children to school, but also from encouraging herders to send their children to school. As mayor of Baraboulé (another singularity of this 'traditional' man who entered the modern political arena at an early age) he supported the construction of schools. He has also refused Malam (Ibrahim Dicko, the Soum jihadist preacher) three times in the past a plot of land in Baraboulé to build a mosque, for which he (and his family) are now receiving death threats. He has taken refuge in Ouagadougou, but is informed daily of what goes on in the village.

His son Mincailou is around 25 years old. He has just finished his second year

4 See Mélanges 7, "Youth" series ("Milk no longer comes from the village")

5 Small emirate of Djelgoodji in the Soum, northern Burkina Faso. Amirou Baraboulé is also president of APSS.

of agronomy. He takes the risk of continuing to sneak into Baraboulé during the holidays and work as a facilitator there. Through his account of this “in-between” period of the difficult pursuit of his studies in the city, where he is penalised in comparison to the “bourgeois” youth, and his life in the village, we see that the stratification of youth is complex.

Mincaïlou is “disadvantaged” in the city, and “privileged” in the village. I talk to him about it and about what's going on with his brothers or peers who didn't go to school. He identifies them as his playmates as a child, but no longer has much contact with them, especially as he only returns to the village for a few weeks each year at holiday time. Some have married and already have children: they are no longer young people and are no longer in the same spheres of life. They greet each other, but have little to say; they live in different worlds. In some ways these young married people are better integrated into (village) society than young people like Micailou.

Rehabilitation of the “losers”

What about the others? Here we enter a grey area, and undoubtedly the heart of something very important. The first impression I have is that these young people have become “invisible” to young people like Mincaïlou. They don't notice them. But Mincaïlou is quite willing to look at them together. The first thing that comes back to him is that these young people look with envy at his Smartphone, his computer, his motorbike as a facilitator. He quickly comes to realise that these young people are very frustrated. Perhaps some of his former playmates now hate him. In any case, they don't seem to talk to each other anymore.

We close in on the subject a little more. These young people (shepherds, labourers, or unemployed) are not happy in the village. Some leave, others take drugs. Mincaïlou agrees - with examples - that this is the group targeted by the jihadist recruiters, who give them the resources to take their revenge and challenge the order that oppresses them and in which they feel devalued. The preachers teach them that their parents' marriage is not in accordance with the Qur'an, and is therefore invalid - and these children throw this in their parents' faces (other breeders have told me about this; it disturbs them very deeply). Similarly, these preachers accuse marabouts and imams of having left the path of the Koran (heretics) and of leading Muslims astray (this discourse has all the more hold as mar-

abouts are far from blameless; “we marabouts are also caught in a trap”, confided Ousmane Mody Ba during the preparation of this GA) – and thus free these young people from the moral authority of those who curse them in the village. They give them guns that are more prestigious than smartphones, they attack teachers and close down schools that have allowed the promotion of Mincailou and other schoolchildren that is humiliating for them. Jihadism rehabilitates these outcasts, these losers.

Yaoundé, December 2017

Plésidy, March 2022

Short-sighted policies that do not benefit farmers

(from a FONGS monitoring, 2020)⁶ Excerpt from Mutations Sociales 3

Who can say what tomorrow will bring?

One is afraid of saying something trite when talking about the uncertainty currently prevailing in every area and that was further accentuated in 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic⁷.

The most important uncertainty is definitely the one resulting from the depletion of resources and climate change. Senegal is already experiencing the effects. This is compounded by the instability caused by the rise in violence and the increase in armed conflicts. While Senegal has so far been sheltered from the destabilisation associated with the rise of extremism, recent experience in other West African countries, such as Burkina Faso where it was not expected, shows that we can't be sure the threat will pass us by.

What is certain, however, is that if nothing is done to change the course of the current competition for resources and profit maximisation, the imbalances will increase and inequalities will grow. The farmers' movement and FONGS cannot turn a blind eye to this.

Learning to live with uncertainty

Modern times do not like uncertainty. In the 18th century, the advent of *Western modernity* introduced the idea that progress in science, technology, the economy, and social and political organisation would make it possible to master

⁶ note 18: "A wall to break through – the implementation of the second FONGS strategic plan 2017/2021" (October 2020, 64 pages).

⁷ According to the World Bank's *biennial Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report* published on 7 October 2020, the pandemic is likely to push between 88 and 115 million more people into extreme poverty this year and up to 150 million by 2021, depending on the severity of the economic downturn. A large proportion of the "new poor" will be concentrated in countries that already have high poverty rates, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

the world, eradicate disease, and *make beings and things permanently and unlimitedly available*. A way of thinking was thus imposed on the world in which *everything that appears must be known, dominated, conquered, made ever more predictable and available* to ensure well-being and to satisfy consumption whose constant increase would be the sign of human progress, at the price of an unrestrained exploitation of resources considered inexhaustible.

It is this modern illusion of omnipotence in controlling the world and its riches that is now being defeated by the “*emergence*”, in the words of the German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa⁸, of “*erratic crises that reveal the futility of a desire for control that leads to generalised chaos*”. We must therefore learn to live with uncertainty, or more precisely relearn, because Western modernity is recent in the history of humanity and since the dawn of time man has dealt with uncertainty: traditional African thought constructs a relationship with the world that is not based on the omnipotence of man.

Working on the transformation of family farms, FONGS had undertaken an in-depth reflection in 2013 on the ways of an African modernity that are not those of Western modernity, and noted that it consisted of farmers “thinking about their lives in a new way”⁹. It would be desirable for the federation to take up and further examine this reflection. There is indeed an urgent need to “think about life in a new way” in order to face the current uncertainties. Current policies do not do this.

“Modernity” is not “modernisation”

In “The Long March of African Modernity” (1990), the anthropologist Jean Copans distinguishes between “modernisation”, which is the simple imposed or mimetic (and therefore unreflected) acquisition of “extra-African” innovations or models of behaviour, and “modernity”, which is the indigenous, native production of new practices and a vision of society.

Modernity is thus based on a new way of thinking, ideas and dreams (i.e. a “modern project” of life), a new philosophy and a new political vision. His hypothesis is that an African modernity, different from Western modernity, is in the process of being constituted, and that it is the condition for Africa to master the present and the future of its societies.

(excerpt from “Senegalese family farms invest and modernise”, 2013)

8 Hartmut Rosa – “Making the World Unavailable” (Ed. La découverte, January 2020, 144 pp.)

9 FONGS – Les exploitations familiales sénégalaises investissent et se modernisent – (synthèse d'étape, 2013, 69 pp.)

Short-sighted political visions that do not benefit farmers

A headlong rush

At the end of the review of FONGS activities from 2016 to 2020¹⁰, I announced that I would return to the last book written by **Abdourahmane Faye** in which he courageously applied himself to “deconstructing utopias”, making an *uncompromising critique of the successive agricultural policies applied in Senegal*¹¹. He summarises the constant strategy in the formula: “*always do more of the same*”. He shows that “*the model in force since colonisation is governed by the objective of producing more agricultural goods and foodstuffs*” without ever succeeding in achieving food self-sufficiency (...). “*The programmes that embody this production and productivity-oriented model on the ground focus on crops and livestock and ignore the land and herds dimension, as well as the need for reproducibility and the constant search for balance that are at the root of farmers’ family strategies*”. He denounced “*political agendas built on the short term and the search for ‘inaugurations’*”.

This headlong rush is the result of the resignation of the state, which is reflected in the “*colonisation of the agricultural sector by cooperation projects whose strategies are decided by donors and consist for the most part in experimenting with solutions that are supposed to have succeeded elsewhere*”, and by a “*watered-down discourse by the authorities on the cohabitation of agribusiness and family farming*” which hides a “*clear inclination towards agribusiness which pursues the colonial logic of the trade economy*”, while family farms are only allocated “*the means to keep them alive*”¹².

Abdourahmane Faye highlights five consequences of these short-sighted policies:

- ♦ the **growth effects** that may appear are “*volatile and artificial*”: these policies may “*register apparent successes when the global and environmental situation is favourable, but may lose everything at the first economic and environmental*

¹⁰ See accompanying note “A wall to be pierced”, Chapter 1

¹¹ Abdourahme Faye – “Réussir l’agriculture sénégalaise”, l’Harmattan, 2018, 202 pages.

¹² A. Faye recalls that an annual envelope of 40 billion is allocated to family farms to develop 2 million hectares, while a French company, the *Compagnie agricole de St Louis*, received 20 billion in funding to cultivate 4,000 ha of rice in the Senegal River Valley.

shock” (Senegal is likely to verify this once again with the feared consequences of the coronavirus pandemic)

- ◆ the search for **self-sufficiency** is stalled because these policies do not address family farms, although they are the main providers of food, but promote “*a modernisation that only benefits a minority of large producers and market operators to the detriment of the vast majority of farmers*”.
- ◆ the effects of these policies on the environment and the **destruction of resources** are ignored: “*Let us never forget, agriculture, exports crude oil, which also exports the fertility of our land, without any measures to replenish it for obvious reasons of competitiveness, and in the long term compromises its productivity*”.
- ◆ **the expropriation of the land of small farmers** and their exit from agriculture as a result of *land speculation by wealthy nationals*, particularly through the influx of foreign agricultural investors.
- ◆ the impasse in which **rural youth** find themselves when the “*poisonous speeches of youth employment agencies and agricultural projects since 2000 lead to the appalling reality of the desertion of integrated youths as soon as the end of their assistance is envisaged*”.

Among the events that have occurred in the context since 2016, I could have mentioned the death in 2018 of another friend of the farmers, Samir Amin, who had coined two very operative concepts to analyse the situation described by Abdourahmane Faye: that of “unequal development”, to account for the domination of the “periphery” which produces the bases of the world’s wealth by the “centres” of global capitalism which seek to extract maximum profits from it, and the concept of “extraversion” which characterises the economies of the periphery exploited by the centre and reinforces their dependence. These are concepts that are now, wrongly, forgotten. This oversight reflects the way ideas are being de-politicised.

Critically address the questions: what kind of agriculture? What kind of economy? What kind of society?

The order in which these three questions are asked is not irrelevant. Current policies put the ECONOMY first and their answers to the question of what kind of economy to promote are based on the assumption that there is no alternative to the dominant neo-liberal model driven by the profit motive in a globalised market. The AGRICULTURE adapted to this economic order must then be competitive, productive and high-tech. To face the current climatic and demographic challenges, the focus is on “intelligent agriculture”, which is supposed to increase productivity by limiting the emission of greenhouse gases¹³.

These politicians know that this economic order has dangerous consequences for SOCIETY: it creates wealth for some and poverty for others, it deepens inequalities and reinforces exclusions and frustrations, but this unequal social order comes last on the agenda and is not questioned. It is seen as a necessary step to allow the wealth of the richest, as long as it continues to grow, to ‘trickle down’ to the poorest. These policies do not seek to establish more social justice but rely on the “resilience” of farmers and simply provide for mitigating measures (social nets, etc.) that attenuate the effects of inequalities among the most vulnerable to prevent the risks of a social explosion and rising insecurity.

Traditionally, farmers ask these questions in a different order:

- ◆ *They start from the family, the village, the community – thus from the SOCIETY, which is the matrix of their identity.*
- ◆ *This “peasant” identity is embodied in their activities (FARMING, CATTLE BREEDING, FISHING, CRAFTS) which is not only what allows them to feed themselves, but what builds and maintains their relationship with nature (the land, animals, water, fire...), and founds their culture.*
- ◆ *Their exchange of goods and services, i.e. their proximity ECONOMY, is organ-*

¹³ The fashionable concepts of *Climate Smart Agriculture* (CSA) or the *New Green Revolution*, which are currently very popular in the international community, also raise many reservations because they restrict the impact on food and nutritional security to agricultural production, overlook agro-ecology and allow the use of pesticides, chemical inputs, GMOs, etc. (see GRET – “*Climate smart agriculture: innovative solution, or political concept?*”, June 2014, and Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung – *False promises: The alliance for a green revolution in Africa* (AGRA), July 2020).

ised on the basis of the complementarity of their activities. But it is strictly speaking a 'political economy' in the original sense of the term¹⁴, in which the roles and position of each person are defined according to the different visions of society held by each major socio-cultural group (Wolofs, Fulani and Toucouleurs, Serres, Mandingos, Diolas, Lebous, Bassaris in Senegal).

Farmers' responses to questions of society, agriculture and the economy are ordered by their vision of the world and of life. They are determined by a real "social intelligence" which is cruelly lacking in the world today and which Abdourahmane Faye clearly perceived when he invited us in his book to "listen to the farmers" in order to "change course". (...)

"Take another look at what can only drive us straight into the wall"

This invitation was made in 2019 by Mamadou Cissokho during the book signing ceremony of Abdourahmane Faye¹⁵.

The wall we fear is that of a *world that will become unlivable* the day it has exhausted its natural resources by living beyond its means, that of a society torn apart because it has exacerbated violence by maintaining injustice and deepening inequalities.

The blindness that leads straight into the wall is the headlong *rush* maintained by the illusion of omnipotence in the control of the world and its wealth, and the *evading of vital questions* by using development rhetoric that has sani-

¹⁴ Charles Gide, the father of social economy, recalled that the thinkers who created the concept of **political economy** in the 17th century defined it as the study of economic production *and its relationship with the laws and customs*. This is in line with Mamadou Cissokho's idea when he says of rural people, whose "*way of life is social, economic and cultural at the same time*" that "*you cannot differentiate between activities, habits and customs*" (speech by Mr Cissokho at the dedication ceremony for Abdourahmane Faye's book in Dakar, May 2019).

¹⁵ "*Leave us our ways of life, use our skills to improve them. Your skills will only lead us straight into the wall. Those who have gone before us in the West are now changing their minds on this. Now they are saying 'you mustn't plough any more', they say 'we made a mistake, don't do what we did. We have to go back to the basics of nature', and we are pushed into this, we say 'this is the number one objective'. If those who taught you now say that it is not good, stop! And come so that together we can create new dynamics, which are farmers' dynamics*" (excerpt from Mr Cissokho's speech at the book signing ceremony of Abdourahmane Faye in Dakar, May 2019).

tised its political dimensions and smoothed out the rough edges of reality to extinguish any hint of resistance. An agreed discourse, full of ambiguities, which, in Cissokho's words, allows everyone to "say the same thing when we don't think the same thing". A discourse that numbs and disarms.

Thus, the discourse on poverty and "vulnerable groups" forgets the mechanisms of domination that produced them; the consensual invocation of 'inclusion' avoids analysing the sources of exclusion; the discourse on 'good governance' masks the realities of the oppression suffered by those who are exploited; talking about "land reform" rather than agrarian reform opens the door to land grabbing; invoking "resilience" distracts from the idea of resistance; focusing on "employability" ignores the organisation of the economy and the mechanisms of social exclusion at work; by speaking of "professionalisation", the superiority of the high-tech business model driven by the search for profit is postulated over practices and knowledge concerned with the reproduction of resources and the equitable distribution of wealth, and the "success stories" of young "agripreneurs" or "start-ups" or the new "champions" that are dangled in front of young rural people are mirages that conceal the new dominations that are being prepared between the winners and losers of market competition; by extolling the virtues of "public-private partnerships", we are endorsing the withdrawal of the public service mission and the guarantor of the common good of the States.

Behind these words that govern us are interests that are not those of the farmers or the human community, and there is a worrying shift towards national or individual interests. The motivation of the European Union when it initiated the Valletta Action Plan in 2015 to invest more heavily in development and poverty attenuation in Africa was clearly to limit the migratory flows that have become unwanted in Europe. Closer to home, the latest message on Switzerland's international cooperation strategy 2021–2024 marks a very disappointing turn for this former staunch supporter of the West African peasant movement, which now emphasises "Switzerland's overriding interest"¹⁶.

16 See the intervention of CETIM (Centre de recherches et de publications sur les relations entre le Tiers Monde et l'Europe, Geneva) at the 45th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the new orientation of Switzerland's development cooperation policy (16 September 2020)

The absence of a long term vision and of hindsight with regard to the medium and long term consequences of this inward-looking attitude marks an alarming regression in thinking.

Fortunately, as shown by the CETIM's position (and it is far from being the only one) or the movement of reflection that was stimulated in 2020 by the formidable analyser of the contradictions and inconsistencies of the current system, the coronavirus pandemic, there are still committed watchdogs who denounce this blindness and seek to "*break through the wall*". (...)

Why African countries prefer not to get embroiled in Russia's war

Kris Berwouts*

Africa voted very divided on the UN resolution condemning the Russian invasion in the Ukraine. What is the political impact of the conflict on Africa's cohesion?

The outrage over Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not the same across the board: in Africa, the picture looks rather different. "As Africans, we do not feel involved in this conflict at all". Or perhaps the invasion offers a new opportunity for African countries to distance themselves from Western interference?

Cease military operations in Ukraine immediately: that was the demand of the General Assembly of the United Nations in early March, laid down in a new, recently approved resolution. An overwhelming majority of the UN member states, 141 out of 193, supported the resolution. A small minority did not: 5 countries voted against, 35 abstained and 12 simply did not vote at all.

Is the Russian influence on the continent greater than we thought?

The proportions were entirely different when solely considering the 54 African UN Member States. 28 of them, just over half, voted in favour of the resolution. Of the total of 35 abstentions, almost half came from an African country (16), and of the 12 countries that did not vote, 9 were African. Eritrea was the only African country to vote against.

On the other hand, the African Union (AU) did explicitly condemn the Russian invasion. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa and his Senegalese counterpart Macky Sall, who recently became president of the AU, are actively seeking a role as mediator.

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What exactly is happening in Africa? Is the voting behaviour of the African UN member states driven by an anti-Western attitude? Is the Russian influence on the continent greater than we thought? Are the few fledgling African democracies already in decline?

Putin in Africa

Africa is hot. From different angles, countries are trying to assume strategic positions on the continent. Raw materials are important, but also demographics: Africa, with its 1.3 billion inhabitants, is already the third largest market in the world, just after China and India. In addition, it has an ideal location, at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, and the promise of a number of emerging countries, which are expected to claim economic leadership in the near future.

Nobody wants to miss out. The old colonial powers will not be pushed aside and new players are emerging. The United States expanded its presence in Africa during the period of decolonisation. China stepped in at the beginning of the century, when it was in need of more raw materials to consolidate its newly acquired status as an economic superpower.

And today, even more countries are putting their foot in the door: India, Turkey, Israel, Brazil, and also Russia, among others. At present, Russia has 40 embassies in Africa. Only China (52 embassies), the United States (48) and France (47) do better.

Russia is also attempting to build a counterweight to the US military unit in Africa.

After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it became internationally isolated. To break through that isolation, the country actively sought influence and allies in Africa. In October 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin received 43 African heads of state at a Russia-Africa summit in Sochi. He promised to cancel debts and double trade over the next five years.

Russia is also attempting to build a counterweight to the US military unit in Africa, the United States Africa Command or Africom for short. The US is planting a network of army bases on the continent for control and, if necessary, rapid intervention.

Russia, too, is aiming to ensure access to ports and naval bases. This will en-

able it to support possible military operations in the Red Sea, which separates East Africa from Asia, and the Mediterranean, which borders the North African countries.

Therefore, Russia's Africa policy is linked to its Middle East policy, with an important role for Syria, for example. Strategic locations for Russia are the ports of Berbera (Somaliland), Massawa and Assab (Eritrea), Port Sudan (Sudan) and various maritime facilities in Libya.

Other Russian priorities are the Suez Canal, the eastern Mediterranean and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, which connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. Additionally, Russia is trying to gain a foothold in southern Africa in Mozambican ports. It has also conducted joint naval exercises with South Africa.

After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it became internationally isolated. To break through that isolation, the country actively sought influence and allies in Africa.

Weapons and fake news

Russia's quest for influence and allies in Africa is mainly centred on that military domain. Russia has displayed little ambition to become a major economic partner. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the annual turnover of Russian companies in Africa is about 20 billion dollars, a little less than a tenth of both Chinese and European turnover.

However, in the African security market, Russia did become an important player. Arms trade is of paramount importance here. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), from 2016 to 2020, Russia was the world's second largest arms exporter after the US. It signed up for 30% of all weapons sold to sub-Saharan African countries during that period.

SIPRI further estimates that in those four years, 18% of Russia's total arms exports went to African countries. The main African buyers of Russian arms are Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal and Zambia. Russian weapons enjoy a solid reputation on the continent: they are considered affordable, easy in maintenance and reliable.

African customers seem increasingly interested in fighter planes, helicopters,

tanks and air defence systems. The fact that Russia does not ask critical questions about human rights is no detail.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Wagner Group was involved in massacres in the Malian town of Moura at the end of March.

Russia has signed some 20 military agreements with African partners in recent years, considerably more than in the decade before the Sochi summit. Those agreements concern cooperation in the field of security. In 2021, for example, such agreements were concluded with Nigeria and Ethiopia, Africa's two most populous countries, both of which have ambitions for leadership in their region.

The Russian government and the Wagner Group both declare that they have nothing to do with each other, but everything indicates that there is close cooperation.

An important, by now almost mythical instrument for the implementation of Russia's Africa policy is the paramilitary Wagner Group. Officially, this is a private company that operates independently from the government. The group sends mercenaries to conflict areas all over the world. They are then deployed in combat situations, but also to protect mining interests, including in Madagascar and the Central African Republic. The Wagner Group would have about 6,000 troops at its disposal. Most of them are Russian veterans, but Syrians have also been spotted in a number of countries.

The Russian government and the Wagner Group both declare that they have nothing to do with each other, but everything indicates that there is close cooperation, for example with the Russian military intelligence service GRU.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Wagner Group was involved in the massacres in the Malian town of Moura at the end of March. There, Wagner assists the government, which came to power after a coup, in the fight against jihadism. Between 27 and 31 March, 300 civilians were executed without trial.

In recent years, Russia has also invested heavily in disinformation campaigns in Africa. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, there have been at least 16 operations of what the Russian government itself calls "ambiguous warfare". In doing so, they deliberately stir up grievances and discord within a particular country.

The aim is often not so much to convince, but to confuse citizens and foster disillusionment or apathy. Fake news campaigns have been identified in all

countries where the Wagner Group is active. This approach hardly differs from the way Russia supported President Trump's candidacy in the United States in 2016. Facebook, Twitter and TikTok are used as important weapons in the dis-information battle.

Anti-Western voting behaviour?

There are several reasons why far fewer African countries supported the UN resolution against the Russian invasion. One is that many African countries are very sceptical about NATO and, by extension, the West. Political opinion and the press in various African countries increasingly regard the traditional Western allies as hypocrites.

Western countries have lost a lot of moral credit with their interference, and this is reflected in the voting behaviour. From an African perspective, the West is mainly concerned with its own economy and population. Western countries constantly refer to democratic values and human rights, but only act when their own economic interests or liberal agenda are at stake.

The way in which the West got rid of Libyan President Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011 particularly shocked many Africans. NATO, led by France, bombed targets in Libya and Gaddafi was killed. Those actions destabilised not only the country but the whole region. More or less the same can be said about the fall of Saddam Hussein. Many Western countries have lost a lot of moral credit with their interference, and this is reflected in the voting behaviour.

Not bound

For many countries in Africa, the current confrontation between Russia and the West brings back bad memories of the Cold War. The first thirty years of independence were heavily coloured by it. In those years, Africa was no more than a pawn on the Cold War chessboard.

The two power blocs confronted each other via third countries, sometimes in the most cynical manner. For example, the United States and the Soviet Union clashed over the Somali-Ethiopian conflict, and the way in which this

was done defied all imagination. The US supported Ethiopia, the Soviet Union Somalia. When the Marxist military deposed the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, the superpowers simply changed sides.

The war in Ukraine may well be an impetus to revive the Non-Aligned Movement.

Several wars and civil wars were the result of this division into power blocs, with a heavy toll in human lives, due to a conflict in which Africa basically had nothing to do. Not voting with the West is a firm refusal to step back into the bipolar logic into which Russia's war is pushing the world.

The 16 abstentions and 9 countries that did not participate in the vote can at least partly be explained as an expression of the desire to remain neutral.

Africa is comfortable with the multi-polar world of the turn of the century, and feels comfortable with diverse interlocutors. The war in Ukraine may well be an impetus to revive the Non-Aligned Movement, analysts, journalists and think tanks suggest.

This was the alliance through which countries, especially from the Global South, tried to navigate between the two blocs during the Cold War, with varying degrees of success. The movement was never disbanded, but has led a rather dormant existence in recent decades.

For a number of countries, the vote on the UN resolution was probably just the opposite. During the Cold War, they were supported by the Soviet Union in their armed struggle for independence. Apparently, to some extent, Putin's Russia remains the heir to this gratitude. This is true, for example, of a number of countries in southern Africa, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique, where liberation movements waged a long armed struggle.

Other countries depend on Russia, for example, for the fight against internal uprisings or for the supply of grain and fertilisers. Some countries therefore do not dare take a stand against Russia. The same applies to many countries that voted in favour of the resolution, but then allowed their dependence on Western partners to weigh in.

In some Western media, especially American media, it seems as if the democratic countries in Africa voted for the UN resolution and the autocratic countries voted against or abstained. But that is very short-sighted. Two of the most established African democracies, South Africa and Senegal, not only abstained, they are also just trying to mediate.

Mediating

“As Africans, we do not feel involved in this conflict at all,” says **Alphonse Ntumba Luaba**, who has a long record in Congolese and African politics. “Europeans fight each other over power and influence. We do not feel it is about values. For us, the wave of solidarity with Ukraine is shocking, because it confronts us with the double standards in the *compassion business*. The chance that this conflict will divide us seems extremely small to me.”

Ntumba Luaba was secretary general of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) from 2011 to 2016 and in 2020 coordinated the cell that prepared President Tshisekedi’s presidency of the African Union. During that presidency, from February 2021 to February 2022, he was Tshisekedi’s right hand man.

“I do not think that voting on the UN resolution says much about how countries here view democracy and good governance or not.”

Alphonse Ntumba Luaba

What does he think of the African attempts at mediation with Russia? “I think it is good that Sall and Ramaphosa are trying to mediate. We do not know if it will succeed, but better this than doing nothing. Many people feel that Putin should look for a way out without losing face. Perhaps Africa can play a role in that.”

Ntumba Luaba has a great understanding of the ins and outs of African multilateral institutions and the various sensitivities at play. Does he also see the vote on the UN resolution as a choice against democracy, a symptom of emerging autocracies? “I don’t think it says much about how countries here view democracy and good governance or not. It does say something about the international governance that is imposed on us here from the West. We are thoroughly fed up with that. We find it especially hypocritical.”

This article was translated by Brita Vandermeulen

A-Fricking Crisis: The pernicious path from disempowerment to irresponsibility

Dupleix Kuenzob*

Have the ruling class or the youth of sub-Saharan Africa ever heeded the voice of the numerous deaths among African youth seeking to escape the spectre of hunger, war, political manoeuvres and political violence? Isn't the Africa we want¹ ultimately about the fricking money we seek even if we have to climb over the bodies of the victims? Or are we looking for a continent emptied of the children most likely to build it?

These questions simply express a desire to understand why the vicious circle of violence still lingers in the continent, in the so-called Black Africa part. Our message is not to add to the macabre tales that have abounded in literature and the media in recent years, but to question the responsibility of the actors and stakeholders in the bewildering scenes that social media sometimes seem to revel in with no regard for human sensitivity.

These questions arise because it is difficult to establish responsibility. On the one hand, there is a desire to make some people less responsible, and on the other, a feeling of irresponsibility that is willingly attributed to others. But beyond all these considerations, a path is emerging that would lead from disempowerment to irresponsibility. And this path is eminently pernicious.

I mention this because the organisation I work for is challenged by its discourse. Its philosophy is contradicted by the current clandestine migration, of which the Mediterranean is the only witness and the favourite terrain of these

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¹ Vision idea of the African Union's Agenda for 2063

young people who have decided to kill themselves by suffocation. Literally and figuratively. Literally, insofar as the desert crossing plunges many of the pilgrims of exile into a dehydration that ends up taking their lives. Figuratively speaking, since we have increasingly watched, stunned, as the coast guards suffocated those who resist and brave the desert and the sharks in the sea and jump the apparently electrified barrier of Melilla that separates the Moroccan enclave from the Spanish coast.

We are frustrated by facts and deeds in our belief that instead of “letting young people dream every day of leaving, i.e. ‘fleeing’ their country because they believe they can find elsewhere what their country has not given them, we must make them believe that they can get from their leaders what they need... instead of abandoning young people in their daily struggles for survival, we must teach young people to fight for their prosperity and that of their country”.

The mention of this frustration is not just an admission of powerlessness or incapacity. The implicit messages we perceive and receive from the actors on the ground, whom we believe we are addressing at the base (populations) and the top (leaders) of the social pyramid, show that we are far from having a following, even though we are accepted, listened to and understood.

The first level of contradiction, as mentioned above. Few leaders are concerned about the mass departure of their young people. What paths do they take? Where do they go and what happens to them? Domestic political agendas do not deal much with these kinds of issues, which seem to be at a far remove from urgent concerns, even though they are a shocking reality. From this point of view, the discourse we can hold lacks a receptacle. On the part of the leaders, the vision they set for themselves is struggling to materialise in laws, policies, programmes and projects. There is no shortage of explanations. Very quickly, in some cases, history is invoked to remind us that Black Africa was dispossessed of its resources, that it suffered from colonisation and the slave trade and that the potential it can boast of is mortgaged. This elegant way of disclaiming responsibility has survived time and generations. The implicit and even explicit message conveyed since independence is that the continent has been impoverished by the colonialist who sold the goat and kept holding the rope.

Let us acknowledge that this hypothesis is not wrong. In fact it is so true that there has been a passionate international push for European museums to return cultural *property looted in Africa*. Let us stop at this point with the responsibility

of the coloniser and ask a question. How do we organise ourselves to preserve current property from further looting? For decades, economic news has shown that many African countries suffer from corruption. This hampers economic growth, undermines the rule of law and wastes valuable skills and resources. Because of this, companies are reluctant to invest in order to escape a much higher cost of doing business. This corruption is unfortunately the work of internal actors who have perverted the structures of the state to serve exclusive and “exclusionary” interests.

By turning into predators, the confirmed and presumed protectors of public property are inexorably moving towards an irresponsibility that confounds our assumption that citizens can easily obtain from their leaders what they expect to find elsewhere. **This other level of contradiction** turns out to be the cornerstone that determines the pernicious path taken by many states. For instead of federating efforts to free themselves definitively from a historical tutelage, the dignitaries who make up the political class engage in endless battles, the outcome of which keeps each of the protagonists captive to a third thief, just as in La Fontaine’s Fable in which two thieves fighting over a stolen donkey see the donkey taken away by a third robber. This is how political quarrels divide national elites, fragment political parties, aggravate social crises and, in some cases, lead to civil wars, the resolution of which calls for international action, thereby admitting that we are unable to talk to each other and solve our own problems.

Yes, the deficit of dialogue within states and between leaders is a flight from responsibility that forms **the other aspect of the contradiction** that our narrative comes up against. How can we relentlessly accuse the West of being the cause of our misfortunes and at the same time be unable to agree on a minimum that would allow us to live together in the long term? Many attempts to find a way out of crises are thus brought before the one who is identified as the cause of the misery of our states. It could be said that it is the African countries themselves that hand over the whip others beat them with. It would appear, then, that responsibility is shared. Only if we look clearly, this sharing of responsibilities arises from the irresponsibility of those political actors who have made the denial of others the reason for their existence.

Under these conditions, efforts to build a framework for the younger generation in which they can still develop a dream are so thin that we are left with

no arguments to convince youth that they are a force for change. The reason for young people's scepticism can be found in at least two considerations. The refusal of the West to repair the damage it has done to Africa, which absolves the continent's leaders of responsibility for Africa's current plight, and the negation of these leaders to rise from the ashes of their suffering by anticipating future shocks through parsimonious management of relations with their citizens. This second consideration challenges the responsibility of leaders in their approach to governance which does not give a clear indication of assuming the independence and sovereignty of their states.

We observe that in Africa south of the Sahara, a large number of leaders abuse their power and put in place mechanisms and systems to annihilate any counter-power, becoming the torturers of their own people, replacing yesterday's torturer, who continues to make use of yesterday's victim with the latter's contribution. Thus we believe that in Africa, we have succeeded in moving from disempowerment to irresponsibility.

Multiple crises in the Sahel and in Africa: what if the solution was to break off or radically review relations with France and the West?

Some reflections based on a view from below

Jeanot Minla Mfou'ou

Introduction

My view is that of an African citizen who lives, observes and analyses what is happening in his continent.

In the context of this reflection, I am interested firstly in the Sahel zone - an expression that refers primarily to the territories of the G5 Sahel member states facing a major security crisis involving armed gang rebellions, jihadist insurgencies, coups d'état, and the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and migrants - but also beyond this, since I will be looking at both military regimes and Russian intervention in Africa. However, given the very broad scope of the issue, my thoughts and modest analyses will be based primarily on the cases of Mali and the Central African Republic.

Some facts about Mali and the CAR, the two countries on which I base my analysis

Similarities between the two countries

They are both former French colonies, and like most French-speaking countries, everything or almost everything has long been and – in some cases – re-

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mains under French influence: the economy, politics, culture and so on... Since the time of independence, the French army has trained and equipped the armies of these two countries. But in addition, there has been a very long presence and intervention of French forces through different operations with multiple and varied well-known names. And as if that were not enough, the still unstable situation in these countries led, again under French influence, to a United Nations intervention. For decades, UN forces have been intervening in these countries with troops from various countries in Africa and elsewhere, with the aim of establishing peace.

Despite all this, these two countries have not known peace for years and are among the least developed in Africa, a real paradox in view of the immense natural resources they abound in. Instead, both countries have long had rebellions, which in Mali take the form of terrorism with various jihadist groups or movements of various denominations, and in the CAR, repeated “coups d'état”. All the operations conducted were mere window dressing; the old demons quickly took charge again.

In recent years, there have been regime changes in both countries

In the CAR, this happened through elections, and the new authorities decided to diversify their military cooperation by calling on Russia, which offended France and led to its withdrawal. There was a military coup in Mali. The new authorities in charge of ensuring the transition before the return to a civilian regime also decided to diversify their military cooperation by calling on the Russians. This again offended France, which once again decided to withdraw to the point of almost breaking off relations with Mali.

For some years now, the Russians have been present and have intervened in these countries, among other things, on a military level, through Russian mercenaries for some, and soldiers for others. Without wishing to debate opinions or interests, it is certain and recognised by all that the Russians are present and intervene militarily in these countries, alongside the national armies through various means: training, supply of arms and other equipment and even operations on the ground.

From this new Russian presence we can make some observations and note that:

France has disengaged from these two countries and is highly critical of their governments, to the point of breaking off or freezing civil and military cooperation.

The situation in these countries seems to be stabilising. In the CAR, the last presidential and legislative elections almost did not take place without this Russian intervention and presence. I was lucky enough to go on a mission to the country just after the election. During my stay, I was able to hear from Central African citizens. A few months ago in the year 2022, the president of this country, a respected professor of mathematics, declared and affirmed that his first objective in taking power was to stabilise and secure the country, which has been done, and that he will now calmly embark on the country's development. He was serene. In Mali, despite the withdrawal of French military troops, the authorities also say that they are calm and that the securing of the country is well under way.

My analyses and hypotheses in the form of findings and orientations or perspectives

Based on the facts that I have just described, I would like to make a few analyses and outline some tracks for reflection.

The West, and France in particular, is heavily involved in the crisis in the Sahel and in several African countries. Not only were these countries colonised by France, but it still has a strong presence and influence there (French-speaking countries). France has intervened militarily for years in various forms, military cooperation, military bases, training, technical assistance, etc. Despite this, these countries have remained unstable and very poor for a very long time. In view of all these facts and consequences, lessons must surely be drawn; this cooperation should be reviewed or even broken off to put an end to this French influence.

The United Nations, through its multinational and peacekeeping forces and other initiatives based on Security Council resolutions, either to authorise mili-

tary interventions or to embargo these countries, not to purchase arms and so on, have encouraged or aggravated the instability of the Sahel countries and particularly Mali. The same can be said of the CAR despite the enormous resources deployed. If not put an end to them, at least rethink them because they have resulted and are resulting in situations of great instability and do not effectively protect the civilian populations. There are many examples of this in our two countries and beyond in the DRC and Côte d'Ivoire where these UN interventions have not achieved the objectives fixed at the outset.

Change in leadership through some military coups or credible elections can be a guarantee of improvement in some countries

New leadership in some African countries through elections or military coups can change the situation in the Sahel and in Africa in general and bring peace. Africa needs leaders ready to work on taboo and complex issues such as cooperation with Western powers, particularly France, the role and presence of UN peacekeeping forces and the role of the UN in their countries. This requires courage and the willingness to take risks because the forces on the other side do not want to let go. The forces of change in Africa need to be supported by other types of power to resist, such as BRICS and others. And it is in this respect that the contribution of Russia and even China (military and economic cooperation) constitutes an interesting possibility.

In conclusion, the jihadist groups and other rebel forces that destabilise African countries, and in particular those in the Sahel, often have the support – voluntary or involuntary – of a certain international community through Western powers. In addition, some media also under the influence of Western powers equally play a very negative role and contribute to these crisis situations. This whole very complex situation needs to change. But this change is not easy to achieve, and it is even risky. To achieve it, systemic work is required, through the advent of new and courageous politicians and leaders, the review of old partnerships, the diversification of cooperation in several areas, particularly military and security, to achieve stable countries and a new Africa. Of course, a necessary condition is the support of the citizens who are the first concerned.

Russian involvement in cooperation with African countries: What do young people think?

Flaubert Djateng*

Hostility towards France expressed in a strong manner by the authorities of Mali, along with praise for Russian cooperation; the brutal invasion and bombing of Ukraine by Russia with its consequences on world affairs; these events have been in the news for more than a year. After the public outcry, there followed diplomatic measures, statements, sanctions against Russia, etc. We are living through upheavals on a global scale with uncertain prospects for stability.

Africa is often described in terms of its untapped mineral resources, but in recent years, it has been described more in terms of its untapped human resources, particularly relating to youth. On average, more than 60% of the population of the African continent is under 25 years of age. Among the speeches, political statements, countless newspaper articles and the like on Russia's role and its implications for African development policy, the position of young people is barely perceptible. We see them reading and relaying fake news on social media. We approached some young people to find out what they think, listen to their opinions, and understand what prospects they see with the arrival of the Russians in Africa.

There is Mali's frustration with France's political interference, the coup system in Burkina Faso, which is becoming the vicious circle of a continually disrupted state life, and the Central African Republic, the scene

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of security abuses by Western defence forces, which are also denounced for their human rights violations. Among all these vague urges, what will be the remedy that will push the countries of the Sahel towards a recognition of the ancestral values that seem to be ignored in these contexts? From an ideological perspective, it would be interesting to analyse Russia's presence in the Sahel countries, where the partnership seems a "laissez-faire" one, like a niche for positioning itself. Knowing that in international relations, "states have no friends; they only have interests", this should be a time for joining forces rather than autocratic and insurrectionist battles.

Josiane Ondoua, facilitator of Humanees, CSO in Cameroon

The situation that prevails today in relation to the special operation conducted by Russia against the Western block is no longer played out only in the theatre of the conflict (on Ukrainian soil). We understood this clearly when President Macky Sall and President Mahamat, respectively current president and chairman of the African Union Commission, visited President Putin in Moscow. The urgency of the wheat and fertiliser crisis has made a number of actors sweat, notably the lobbies, the multinationals and the people, because they are the ones who are footing the hefty bill for this ping-pong of the giants.

Russia's approach is to show the rest of the nations the way to liberation, which involves two main elements:

- 1 – Independence or assumed sovereignty
- 2 – Mastery of security and defence tools.

It is from this rationale that voices of self-determination in Africa are trying to release this energy. These include Mali, Burkina Faso, CAR and Guinea Conakry. For young people, this is the path that must be taken, despite the harsh reality, despite the economic circumstances and the upheavals. As one pan-African said: We would rather be free in poverty than rich in slavery.

This thirst for freedom has a price, though, that of rebuilding states, educating through values and re-appropriating our ways of life. Young people love the world and its diversity, but they also want their autonomy,

they want to produce what we eat and process what we produce on this continent.

Djibrila Youssoufa, Head of PIVJET International, CSO in Cameroon

Do you really think that young people have something to say that can change things? I do not think so. I often say that international relations are like a music wire that needs to be stretched and loosened to make life pleasant. The war, the Russian offensive against Ukraine, is nothing more than Russia's defence of its right to exist and the refusal of a uni-polar vision in this world. For some Western states, on the other hand, the world should only have one vision, the one dictated by the NATO member states. However, for Russia, it is imperative today to let each people determine its own destiny. The only way for Russia to get this message across is to attack the people who decided to serve as a base for those who think that the uni-polarity of the world belongs to the NATO countries. We have to tell ourselves that Russia is prepared to wage this war to the end, firstly for its own sake, and secondly for the sake of all those countries that cannot make themselves heard, but are keen to see the world situation change in terms of the balance of power on the international stage and, above all, in terms of the way in which the self-determination of peoples is decided.

Dr Nkulu Atangana Jean-Pierre Loïc, Head of CRC, CSO in Cameroon

Since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, we have seen that this war has continued to influence diplomatic relations between European countries and between African countries. This war continues to have effects beyond what could have been expected at the outset, the deterioration of Franco-African relations, shortages of all kinds and inflation. It is a war that has had much influence on Russian-African cooperation, especially as the relationship between Russia and Africa has grown stronger.

In terms of military cooperation, for example, we have seen Russia provide military assistance to Burkina Faso. In Mali, we saw the French army being dislodged in favour of the Russian army. As Russia takes

more and more steps to increase its influence in Africa, Franco-African cooperation has inevitably slowed down or even regressed.

African society has not been spared, since the Russian-Ukrainian crisis has led to shortages of wheat, gas and petrol. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has not only had negative effects, it has also been an opportunity for African countries, and Cameroon in particular, to realise that it was perhaps time to limit imports of basic foodstuffs and opt for the transformation of our wealth and local consumption.

I think that the Russian-Ukrainian crisis is an opportunity for Africa to shake off the long European colonisation, to finally structure itself, build itself up and shine. This is the time for Africa to exploit the potential it has in abundance and to blossom into one of the world's leading powers, as it was millions of years ago.

Mariane Dieutchou, Lawyer and civil society actor

Initially, Russia was seen as the saviour of Africa from the clutches of the West, notably France. Now it has been transformed into a toxic and dangerous actor for the countries in the Sahel in the throes of a security and political crisis. As Mali and Burkina Faso struggle to cope with the growing crises in their territories, Russia has played its cards right by cleverly exploiting the failures of France, the failures of the French-backed regimes, but above all the anti-French sentiment already present in the minds of the Sahel population.

This influential power has mainly made use of a strategy based on social media. Social media, with their ability to manipulate public opinion and especially young people, have only aggravated the political and security situation in these countries. The information that circulates found an audience in the emotional and enthusiastic internet users who had only one reflex: act to do themselves justice and claim their identity.

And so we, the young people of Cameroon, in view of this brief analysis and the negative consequences visible in the Sahel countries, believe that Russia's presence and actions in countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso need to be reoriented in the direction of supporting the process of returning to peace and political stability.

Jacqueline Mouna – Communication Manager DMJ, CSO in Cameroon

These views, although diverse, almost all have several things in common:

- ◆ A strong emotional component linked more to Cameroonian history and current events and to the role of the colonisers and post-colonisers, notably France.
- ◆ A lack of concrete and accurate information. There is no room for questions or doubts. For example, what are the effects of Russian interventions in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali and Burkina? What alternatives exist for countries shaken by crises and conflicts based on poor governance?
- ◆ With one exception, a total lack of analysis and scepticism towards information sources, especially social media.

The continued presence of colonisation in the words of young people is a decisive factor. The relationship between African countries and former colonial powers is still marked by the domination of the former colonialists, with many negative consequences for the African states. Although it is important to analyse colonisation in order to learn from it, it should nonetheless be noted that in the minds of young people, colonisation is like a screen or a spark that sets off ideas in a particular direction. It is time to move beyond this permanent frustration in people's minds and to open up to more in-depth analyses that make visible the factors and actors capable of influencing the course of processes in the lives of African peoples.

The positions of young people are hasty and sometimes without prior analysis. It is important to facilitate moments of reflection and questioning of events. Information sources are of great importance here, both for the quality of the information and for the intention of the authors. The accessibility and ease of use of social media must be balanced by cross-checking and triangulating information before taking a position. Otherwise, social media influences will reinforce the naivety of uneducated youth and manipulations will not bring any change. We could also wonder how to initiate spaces (virtual or face-to-face) for discussing ideas, where contradiction produces meaning and reduces unnecessary polemics. Spaces that are not places to let off steam or vent hatred, but to learn and at the same time understand what is going on, and then invent ways to overcome the constraints and difficulties that plague Africa's development.

It will be essential to create dialogue with young people on all these points, to provide them with verifiable information and help them deepen and de-emotionalise their thinking. We, the elders, cannot shy away from this essential task, even if the road is long.

“Not so important ...”, Africa and the war in Ukraine

Dominic Johnson*

Everyone in their own bubble: African public opinion reacts with the same indifference to the war in Ukraine as Europe does to conflicts in Africa.

There was a time when, at *Taz*¹, some old leftists were amused by the proposed title “Blacks against each other – 1,000 dead”. This was in early 1993, when Mobutu’s soldiers in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) were attempting to suppress the democratic movement through campaigns of terror.

The headline was never published. But it was a time when a global racist perception of world events was prevalent, according to the motto: everywhere, blacks are killing each other. In South Africa, the white apartheid regime exacerbated ethnic violence in black townships at the cost of thousands of lives. In the US, there was talk of “*black-on-black violence*” in the ghettos plagued by the drug wars. The genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994 was originally misrepresented as a mutual massacre of Hutus and Tutsis; in Germany it was referred to as “tribal conflicts”. The French president at the time, socialist François Mitterrand, uttered the following infamous phrase: “In those countries, genocide is not very important.”

Just thirty years later, the whole world has become aware of racism. But be-

* Foreign & Africa Editor, German newspaper TAZ (die tageszeitung)

¹ Taz, Die Tageszeitung, a left-wing German daily newspaper that has aged better than its twin sister Libération – (editors’ note)

hind the “blacks killing each other” view, the attitude remains the same. With the exception of conflicts involving Islamic terrorist groups, the rest of the world is routinely indifferent to wars in Africa.

More emotion is expressed when diplomats talk about genocide in relation to the Ethiopian army’s action in the rebel province of Tigray than in relation to the massacres or the ongoing hunger blockade. The international approach to civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic or Nigeria is more concerned with restoring state authority than protecting the civilian population, even when the perpetrators of these massacres are invested with state authority.

It doesn’t matter who kills whom and what the reason or dynamics behind these bloody crimes are. A short time ago, security forces killed dozens of people in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad, during a crackdown on protests against the continued rule of the transitional president, Mahamat Déby. Was anyone outside Africa moved by this?

There is no understanding in Germany of a worldview that revolves around colonialism

It is no wonder, then, that hardly anyone in Africa is concerned about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The governments of the rich industrial countries have as good as no understanding of the fact that the African public has as little interest in the horrors in Ukraine as the European public has in the conflicts in Africa. The UN refrains from naming and shaming, and demands that all parties reach a solution at the negotiating table, but otherwise does not commit itself. The West’s double standards are blamed: the West once pushed for the overthrow of Gaddafi, but is now fighting Russia’s “intervention” in Ukraine.

It is hardly perceived that Ukraine is fighting a defensive war against Russian imperialist and terrorist ambitions for domination and that human beings are fighting for their survival. Voices like that of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine, who in September became the first and only African politician to visit Ukraine and go to Boutcha, remain isolated calls in the wilderness. “*The bold-*

ness with which the Ukrainians are resisting Russia's aggression teaches all those who are fighting for freedom, peace and self-determination that they must never give up in the face of a superior power," wrote the Ugandan, who was immediately accused of being a US puppet.

The indifference starts at their own doorstep within mainstream African circles. There is little humanity in the clash between poverty and wealth in African megacities. African governments rarely criticise each other, except in the interests of their own propaganda. It was not the African states that pushed to draw the lessons from the genocide in Rwanda, but survivors and their friends around the world.

Solidarity with the guilty

The indictment of Sudanese dictator Bashir for genocide in The Hague, following the mass killings in Darfur, provoked a wave of solidarity among African leaders, not with the victims, but with the perpetrator. Denouncing colonial injustice is frequently a state doctrine; demanding post-colonial justice can cost lives, from Zimbabwe to Algeria.

This indifference, which amounts to an acceptance of injustice, must be unbearable for Ukrainians. The same cannot be said for people in the Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and many other war-torn countries who have been confronted with European indifference for much longer as they seek a safe haven or even just try to attract attention. Sooner or later the bill will arrive.

"Not so important" in world news

One Congolese commentator described the war in Ukraine as a "peripheral" conflict that would ultimately have as little impact on the course of the world as the Vietnam War once did. "Not so important", therefore. Such an analysis is only understandable as long as the major events of the twentieth century are not viewed from the perspective of the Second World War or the East-West conflict, but from that of the dissolution of the colonial empires and the triumph

over European imperialism. In Germany, therefore, there is virtually no understanding of a worldview that places slavery and colonialism at the centre of world history.

An African *Taz* – daily newspaper – would perhaps put the headline “Whites against each other – 1,000 dead” for an article on the war in Ukraine. The *Taz* article on Zaire in 1993 finally appeared under the title “Bloody triumph of Zaire’s dictator”: it named the culprit. But real solidarity across continents remains wishful thinking.

Will Senegal stand up to extremist violence from the Sahel?

Kris Berwouts*

Religious extremism is wreaking havoc in West Africa. In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Jihadism is a daily reality. We went to Senegal with a question: what are Senegal's strengths for dealing with and vulnerabilities to the risk of Jihadism spilling over from the Sahel?

Poverty makes young people vulnerable to Jihadism. Even a young, well-organised democracy like Senegal must be on its guard against this insidious danger. MO*journalist Kris Berwouts talked to concerned experts on the ground: *“Potential extremists do not need much persuasion, because people are very much yearning for messages of hope.”*

In several West African countries, Jihadism has taken root with devastating effect, and experts are also concerned about Senegal. I came here to gain a better understanding of what makes this country vulnerable to Jihadists, and how the Senegalese can resist extremist violence and simplistic messages.

On my first evening in Dakar, I sit in one of these folksy fish restaurants at La Pointe des Almadies, the westernmost point of the African continent. I dine with Mokhtar Dayo (not his real name, Author's note), who is in charge of security at the regional office of an international NGO. He follows closely the security situation in the different countries in the region. He has a good grasp of

*Kris Berwouts is a Belgian researcher who has been working for more than thirty years in and with Africa, in particular in DR Congo
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the challenges presented by Jihadism – the religiously inspired ideology that calls for waging a “holy war” against “infidels”.

“Senegal is a high-risk country,” Mr Dayo says. “Look at the situation in the neighbouring countries: Jihadism has almost completely invaded Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The security situation is also worrying in Mauritania and Nigeria”. Mr Dayo is originally from Burkina Faso himself.

“The fundamentalists are looking for a gateway to the sea. This is why you can see the pressure increasing at the moment in countries in the Gulf of Guinea, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, Togo and, to a lesser extent, Guinea and Senegal. As the phenomenon is still in its infancy, Senegal should take adequate security measures to address this challenge”.

A few days later, **Cheikh Tidiane Gadio** welcomes me in his office as chairman of the Institut Panafricain de Stratégies (IPS), amid photos of a series of progressive African and African-American leaders from history: Thomas Sankara, Malcolm X, Amílcar Cabral. Gadio has a long experience in Senegalese and regional politics.

“The Pandora’s box that NATO opened has destabilised the whole of the Sahel region in the long term and given a decisive boost to terrorism”.

Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, President of IPS

Cheikh Gadio was Minister of Foreign Affairs and a presidential candidate. Today, he is vice-president of the Senegalese Parliament, and special envoy for Mali on behalf of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*. Few people have as good a grasp of the issues of Jihadism as he has. Ten years ago, he was the first to sound the alarm about the coming wave of Jihadism.

For Mr. Gadio, the situation is clear: “*The current history of the fundamentalist threat can be traced back to a fatal mistake: NATO’s offensive to ‘liberate’ Libya from its president Gaddafi.*” In so doing, he points the finger at the NATO air operation 11 years ago, which was supposed to support the uprisings against the Libyan dictator during the Arab Spring.

“*Who gave them the right to impose a regime change? This was an act of war against Africa. The Pandora’s box opened by NATO destabilised the entire Sahel region in the long term and gave a decisive boost to terrorism.*”

The aid given to the uprising in Libya triggered a chain reaction: the country

fell apart and the regimes that supported it crumbled. In Mali, the resulting power vacuum became a breeding ground for militias and Jihadist movements, which quickly acquired heavy weapons and gained a foothold in neighbouring countries.

African heads of state and the African Union did not react strongly, and the West was not aware of the danger for a long time either. Now everyone is panicking”.

Young democracy

Why would Senegal be under threat of Jihadism? It is one of the best established young democracies in Africa. Doesn't fundamentalism and extremist violence thrive in weak states, with a serious democratic deficit and a tradition of poor governance?

Senegal is the first sub-Saharan country where a president has voluntarily left office. On New Year's Eve 1980, then-President Léopold Sédar Senghor, who led his country to independence in 1960, handed over to Abdou Diouf. Senegal quickly developed a well-established multi-party system, a functioning parliament and lively social debate, supported by a free press and civil society.

The Senegalese security services are well organised. They also manage to play their role within the bounds set by the republic – above the political fray – and do not allow themselves to be reduced to instruments of power. The rule of law exists in Senegal.

Even well-functioning institutions are no guarantee against Jihadist pressure. The Jihadists seek precisely those places where the state is vulnerable.

The icing on the democratic cake was a few non-violent alternations. In 2000, Diouf lost the elections to Abdoulaye Wade, who himself lost to the current president Macky Sall twelve years later.

But a functioning democracy is not a permanent achievement anywhere in the world. “Today, the Senegalese regime sidelines the opposition”, writes **Halewijn Timmerman**, a social entrepreneur living in Senegal who runs an online

blog for MO*. He cites the way President Sall refuses to clarify whether or not he will seek a third term, which inevitably causes unrest and confusion.

Nor are well-functioning democratic institutions a guarantee against pressure from extremists, who seek out the places where the state is vulnerable. The holes in the Senegalese net are in the east of the country, more precisely in two areas around the towns of Kédougou and Matam. These are located squarely in the Sahel region.

The heat and drought make life and the consequences of global warming more difficult in this region. People there do not have the opportunities that are available elsewhere in the country. They have less access to education, health care and water. There is thus a sense of exclusion in this part of the country: people do not feel fully integrated into the rule of law and the democratic system.

These areas are even more vulnerable to Jihadist infiltration, due to a combination of three ingredients: the presence of natural resources, the informal economy – which keeps a significant amount of exploitation and trade under the radar – and the proximity of borders.

The city of Matam is located on the Senegal River. On the other side of the river is Mauritania, and Mali is nearby. Kedougou, on the other hand, is almost on the border with Guinea, less than 100 kilometres from Mali. Not much further away, you are already in Guinea-Bissau. There is artisanal and small-scale gold mining here.

This represents a twilight zone in which Jihadism, drugs and arms trafficking and other forms of crime can flourish. Money flows are difficult to map, making money laundering and terrorist financing easier.

Poverty makes you vulnerable

I spent the first few days of my trip in Dakar, where I was introduced to Senegalese Islam. It places great importance on community service, mysticism, generosity and humility, in a spirit of openness and tolerance. All this is now under pressure from conservative circles. We shall come back to this in the second article.

The city has an artistic and intellectual scene that could not be farther re-

moved from Jihadism. At the time of my visit, artists from all over Africa were attending the Biennial of Contemporary African Art, a festival whose core values are diversity and freedom of expression.

A fair amount of time passes before I head east. I have a bit of trouble building my network of contacts. When I finally leave, I am advised to take a night bus to avoid the heat. 43°C in the early afternoon, fortunately about six degrees “cooler” than a few weeks ago, before the first rains. The journey was long and arduous. A crash with cattle crossing the road meant a delay of several hours. When I finally arrived in Matam, battered and exhausted, one thing was clear: from here, the busy streets of Dakar seemed like another planet.

“Potential extremists do not need much persuasion, because people are very much yearning for messages of hope”.

Sonhibou Ly, youth worker

In his dusty office in the local department of the Ministry of Youth, I talk to Sonhibou Ly. “*Young people have few prospects here,*” he says, “*and the government is well aware of the danger this represents.*”

President Sall himself was born in this region, something which has set a positive dynamic in motion: infrastructural works, development projects with a focus on agriculture; a battle against malnutrition. And, in addition to this, all kinds of programmes for young people are being set up.

For the time being, they are not having the expected impact. Opponents say that this is because of corruption. And because the regime appoints its barons to strategic posts: high-profile individuals who supported the election campaign, and not necessarily the most competent people.

“*Never underestimate how vulnerable poverty makes people,*” says Mr Ly. “*Potential extremists do not need much persuasion, because people are very much yearning for messages of hope. So they send eloquent people who know the Qur’an well. With a few well-chosen verses, they immediately capture the youngsters’ attention. Often the Koranic school is the only education they have received.*”

On the margins

In a village a few dozen kilometres from Matam, we talk to the local police chiefs and officials. They are very much aware of the Jihadist danger, but feel that they have it under control. They know the terrain well and have the trust of the people.

“We keep a close eye on where and what is being built with outside money,” says a commissioner. *“The Jihadists try to gain a foothold here by building or renovating mosques or Koranic schools. Or they improve the water supply. But they are not the only investors. Islamic NGOs do the same, with money from Saudi Arabia. And the diaspora is also very active. Senegalese people, mainly in France, also want to contribute to their home country. We try to make the distinction, even if it is not easy”.*

“Many people live on the margins of society, especially in places that are a bit off the beaten track”.

Aya Diaw, lawyer

“Beware,” Sonhibou Ly – the youth worker – warns. *“It would be a big mistake to think that the threat is coming directly and only from elsewhere”.* People sometimes react with jealousy towards Senegalese who come from other parts of the country and have enough money to live a comfortable life here. Of course, there is a lot of pressure from neighbouring countries. But the core of the problem is the lack of integration, the feeling among many people that they are not fully part of the national dynamics. The feeling of being marginalised.

Especially young people, according to Mr Ly: *“Many young people are trying to leave this region. They are under heavy psychological pressure from their families and the whole community to go and earn money elsewhere in order to support the community. This makes them more susceptible to hate mongers”.*

“The lack of prospects is the most serious factor,” Halewijn Timmerman adds. He worked in this region for three years. *“Young people have nothing to do here, and it's getting hotter and hotter. It is becoming very difficult to make a living from cattle breeding and agriculture. If I had been born here, I would have left this region long ago.”*

Women

“Many people live on the margins of society,” says lawyer and human rights activist Aya Diaw (pseudonym). “Especially in places that are a bit off the beaten track”.

Diaw works for a Senegalese platform for the empowerment of women and girls. She lives in Dakar, but remains very attached to her home town, Matam. Among other things, she stands up for victims of rape.

“The extremist messages of Jihadists are not always so far removed from people’s everyday lives.”

Aya Diaw, lawyer

“A large part of the population here is nomadic and follows the rhythm of the seasons. For them, there are no borders. They have virtually no access to education or health care.

These are communities where domestic violence is rife. Here, 11-year-old girls are raped by 50-year-old men. For the families of the victims, the only honourable solution is for the perpetrator to take the raped girl as his wife. This means that he can continue to rape her for the rest of his life, but in a legalized setting.”

“This is a society where there is a lot of violence. You can understand that the extremist messages of Jihadists are not always so very far from people’s daily lives.”

Remarkable dynamics

Back in Dakar, I spoke with Alioune Tine, a leading member of Senegalese civil society and a prominent human rights defender. He is a former director of Amnesty International/West and Central Africa, and works as an independent expert on Mali for the UN Commission on Human Rights.

“The fact that Jihadists are gaining a foothold here cannot be seen in isolation from Fortress Europe. In reaction to this, you see a wave of anti-Western sentiment swelling.”

Alioune Tine, human rights expert

“The Jihadists are here”, warns Mr Tine. “They work in the shadows. The fact that they are gaining a foothold here cannot be seen in isolation from Fortress Europe, Europe’s restrictive immigration policy. Europe has never been so inaccessible to Africans. We experience it as a rejection here. For us, this protectionism is diametrically opposed to the universal values that Europe claims to defend – of human rights and democracy. Africa feels it is being treated disrespectfully.

In reaction to this, you see a wave of anti-Western sentiment rising. Here in West Africa, this means that more and more people are totally rejecting ‘Françafrique’, the post- and neo-colonial mindset with which France has continued to treat the region – as a colony even after independence”.

The dynamics are remarkable: Europe keeps Africa out, African youth feel excluded and become militantly anti-Western. This becomes fertile ground for Jihadism, so the West tries to support African leaders in their fight against the phenomenon.

Alioune Tine clarifies: *“The Senegalese president is perceived as being strongly pro-French, which undermines his credibility among a significant part of the electorate. The opposition is trying to exploit this situation. The United States is helping us to set up a security system. In the border areas, Senegal closely monitors potential Jihadist movements and activities, in collaboration with the international community. The intelligence services work very well.*

The Jihadist network is continually growing in Senegal. There are sleeper cells, and from time to time incidents occur that the authorities try to keep under the radar.”

“The extremist groups work in a very systematic way”, Alioune Tine continues. “They have already announced that they want to expand to the West African coast, because they want to ship raw materials from the areas they control. Extremism and smuggling are not so different from each other here.”

Participation and debate

Back in Belgium, I met Omar Ba, a Senegalese-Flemish militant for an inclusive society. Mr Ba is very actively involved in a number of African non-profit organisations. He wonders how Jihadism should be tackled.

“I think the solution lies in a more inclusive economy, a fairer society that makes clear choices against corruption, one that creates opportunities and possibilities. Education must be a priority.”

“There is also a need to improve legislation for the nomadic communities,” he points out. “They are falling through the cracks at the moment. How can you still be a nomad in a world where everything is privatised? Large populations are falling outside the system, and this is dangerous. We need to make room in the system for these groups.”

“Senegal has a truly democratic culture, which involves participation and debate”, Mr Ba emphasises. “This is not the case in other countries in the region. Here people can express their discontent and disagreement. We have to preserve this, for our tradition is under pressure.”

Women's empowerment and climate change in the Sahel: what are the issues at stake and the solutions?

Desiree Zwanck*

Introduction

Despite decades of efforts by governments, civil society and technical and financial partners, the situation of women and girls has changed little in the Sahelian countries, which continue to rank last on the gender equality index. This is partly due to discriminatory norms that are changing only slowly, but also to the marginalisation of gender issues, underfunding and lack of skills among the actors tasked with implementing gender approaches.

Very often, the political will does not seem to go further than strategies and policies that are not very innovative and do not find their proper level of implementation. Women remain relatively uninvolved in the formulation, planning and implementation of environmental policies. On the other hand, there are case studies, tools and flagship actions that produce good results, but they are not systematically scaled up and remain rather ad hoc.

In the context of the Sahel, women and girls constitute the majority of the informal labour force in many value chains related to agriculture, agro-forestry and fish and dairy processing. However, they are excluded from the benefits of this work because of their marginalisation in political, social and economic life. They are also limited by insufficient access to and control over resources, particularly land. Furthermore, there are structural barriers to education, training and information (e.g. on climate variability) to be taken into account.

* Desiree Zwanck is an independent gender consultant based in Dakar, Senegal.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a surge in gender-based violence¹, which is not restricted to the context of armed conflict. In the Sahel, there is a high level of social acceptance of certain forms of domestic violence, coupled with a lack of mechanisms for the prevention of and response to gender-based violence.²

As a result, women remain perpetually marginalised, and vulnerable to the environmental effects of climate change, such as desertification, as well as to the social consequences, such as conflicts between communities that also increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. The effects of climate change in the Sahel, coupled with the lack of access to electricity, energy insecurity and the price of energy which is prohibitive for women, mean that women are overburdened with both domestic and subsistence work – a reality that should be factored in to any development programme.

While country contexts are similar, there are also differences in how gender affects the capacities of women and girls to cope with climate change and to participate in the implementation of environmental policies. In addition, there are differences by sub-region and between different population groups.

This paper seeks to show that, firstly, gender mainstreaming is necessary and, secondly, the gender mainstreaming approach does not exclude the need for specific action. Mainstreaming means taking into account the perceptions, experience, knowledge and interests of women and men in policy-making, planning and decision-making.³

This paper presents some of the main problems and points to gender transformative solutions by different actors. Of course, there are many other noteworthy initiatives that could be presented, including by smaller civil society actors and also by large-scale private sector initiatives focused on financial and digital inclusion. However, this paper takes the approach of focusing primarily on the fundamentals of natural resource management and uses that are equitable, transformative, empowering and fair for women and men.

1 <https://jdwsahel.org/2020/07/19/rapport-detude-des-vbg-sous-la-covid-19/>

2 See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/gender/overview/> and the OECD country-specific SIGI.

3 Enabel (2018), 2019-2023 Gender Strategy Paper: We for Her. Web: https://www.enabel.be/sites/default/files/gender_strategy_2019_2023_enabel_en.pdf

1. Framing: Gender transformative approach

The gender transformative approach should contribute to changes in three areas: a) individual capacities, b) gendered expectations ingrained in the social relations in different institutional sites (e.g. household, community), and c) institutional rules and practices.⁴ This includes changes in decision-making processes that occur in key places at community and household level, control over assets such as income and land, collective action, levels of knowledge, informal norms and values such as societal attitudes towards women's mobility or women's work, psychological well-being, such as women's sense of self-esteem and life aspirations and visions.⁵

While placing them within a broader and more ambitious framework, this concept aims to include approaches that are limited to access to female beneficiaries and partners and to specific training and activities on "gender". The gender transformative approach is multidimensional and holistic; it must be carried at the highest level of responsibility by convinced and involved leaders, through concrete commitments and the accompanying resources.

The process of empowerment is as important as the goal and means that women should not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to means and opportunities (such as land and employment), but that they should also be able to use these rights, capabilities, means and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions (through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions).⁶ Contributions aimed at promoting women's empowerment should facilitate women's expression of their needs and priorities and a more active role in promoting these interests and needs. Everything related to clean technologies, food processing and preservation, forest management, reforestation and water management is of direct concern to women.⁷

4 Wong, Franz et al (2019): Implementing Gender Transformative Approaches In Agriculture CGIAR: Collaborative Platform for Gender Research Implementing Gender Transformative Approaches in Agriculture <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334169673>

5 CFR. EU (2019), Gender transformative approaches in a rural world: Tackling root causes of discrimination against rural women and girls. Web: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/gender-transformative-approaches-in-a-rural-world-brief-20190412_en.pdf

6 UN Women (2020), The power of working together. Emerging practices that advance women's economic empowerment.

7 WHO (2016), Climate change, gender and health. Web: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/204177/9789242508185_fre.pdf

2. Women and climate change – an overview

Women are particularly affected by the impact of climate change and the degradation of natural resources, and are the last to be displaced by disasters such as floods and droughts. In addition, women are generally over-represented in poverty statistics, but under-represented in decision-making mechanisms.⁸

Across the continent, agricultural transformation and women's empowerment are inextricably linked. African women provide the majority of the labour force in any agricultural or agro-forestry value chain, but they are excluded or lack the skills to make a profit in the more lucrative segments such as processing and marketing. This is not only an economic injustice, but also a barrier to African countries reaping the full benefits of agriculture for the eradication of poverty, sustainable growth and development.⁹

In addition, the global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the persistent disparity in economic and social livelihoods as well as the overexposure of women to the virus, the increased workload, economic damage and domestic violence they face. Women bear the brunt of the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. In sub-Saharan Africa, 89% of jobs are informal; 86% of men are employed in the informal economy, compared to 92% of women.¹⁰

The degradation of natural resources affects women's livelihoods. Indeed, their productive activities depend on these resources, which are being degraded as an impact of climate change. Women are therefore severely affected, as they can no longer access the materials they need to prepare meals or make products to sell. This limits their strategies for ensuring the survival of their families.

The main effect of climate change on women is the increase in the amount of work.¹¹ Droughts, floods or lack of rain damage cereal crops, which means that families do not have enough cereal for food. Women therefore have to work

8 UNDP (2009), Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change.

9 GIZ (2020), Gender-Transformative Change in ATVET. Web: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2020_en_Gender-Transformative_Change.pdf

10 AfDB (2021), African Development Bank Group Gender Strategy - 2021-2025. Web: <https://www.afdb.org/fr/documents/strategie-du-groupe-de-la-banque-africaine-de-developpement-en-matiere-de-genre-2021-2025>

11 EU (2011), Report on Women and Climate Change https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2012-0049_FR.pdf

hard to find alternative activities and to obtain the income to buy the necessary products as it is their responsibility to provide food. In addition, they have to invest more time and effort in searching for water and wood because of their increased scarcity and desertification and overexploitation. As a result of under-nourishment, overwork and breastfeeding periods, there is a higher prevalence of malnutrition among mothers and small children.

Many “gender and adaptation co-benefits” are documented.¹² The creation of forest massifs and the restoration of natural forests, the enhancement of green belts around cities have an impact both on soil and water conservation, biological diversity and the supply of forest products exploited by women for food and medicine. The promotion of appropriate bioclimatic architecture, using local materials and energy-efficient investments, improves the living conditions of women and their families and saves natural resources.

3. Sectoral analysis of the Sahel context

This chapter presents examples related to some issues, although many others could be highlighted, such as value chains, forest management or vocational training.

Water management and access to land

When water is scarce, women and children (sons and daughters often help their mothers in this task) are forced to go further and further away and walk for miles to find water. Women’s plots of land are more vulnerable to climate change. Climate change is exacerbating soil and cropland degradation and women’s plots are often the most affected. Indeed, they often cultivate a personal plot of land, of lesser quality (quality of the land, access to water, etc.) and they do not benefit from the necessary equipment and inputs (chemical fertilisers, compost, improved seeds) normally used on the family farm. In addition, techniques such as stone cordons, which require great physical strength, are not ap-

12 CARE, Adaptation, Gender and Women’s Empowerment. Web: https://www.carefrance.org/ressources/themas/1/770,Adaptation_genre_et_autonomisation_d.pdf

plied on women's plots. As a result, heavy rainfall and runoff washes away much of the vegetation cover.¹³

Biofuels:

In the Sahel, women are often responsible for collecting and producing food, collecting water, meeting hygiene needs and providing fuel for heating and cooking. With climate change, natural resources such as water and firewood are becoming increasingly scarce, making these tasks more difficult for women and girls who are forced to invest time and physical strength in travelling greater distances to find and transport the necessary resources. The promotion of fuel diversification and renewable energy has a direct impact on women's living conditions by reducing the drudgery of collection, and reducing respiratory illnesses caused by the inhalation of carbon dioxide smoke. Improved stoves can reduce the time spent on cooking or commercial production by up to 75%. The time saved and the health improvements allow for more productive activities and investments.¹⁴

Transhumance

Historically, farmers and pastoralists in the Sahel worked together effectively (pastoralists benefiting from grazing crop residues and farmers from animal dung), but competition and conflict have now become a concern between farming and pastoralist communities in the Sahel, due to the degradation of the soil and competition for water and land resources (grazing vs. farming).¹⁵ Women and children are significantly affected by this collapse in livelihoods, being forced to migrate to urban centres during the dry season. While men are often responsible for herd management and migration, women tend to be re-

13 Oxfam (2011), Climate Change and Women Farmers in Burkina Faso: Impact, Policies and Adaptation Practices. Web: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/rr-climate-change-women-farmers-burkina-130711-fr_0_3.pdf

14 GIZ (2019), Accelerating the adoption of more climate-friendly cooking energy solutions in Senegal and Kenya: Project proposal to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Web: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/ESA%20and%20ESMP_Climate%20Friendly%20Cooking%20in%20Kenya%20and%20Senegal_EnDev_GIZ%20FP%20to%20GCF_French.pdf

15 USAID (2017), Climate Change Risk In West Africa Sahel: Regional Fact Sheet. Web: https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2017%20April_USAID%20ATL_AS_Climate%20Change%20Risk%20Profile%20-%20Sahel.pdf

sponsible for milking and processing tasks and the marketing of dairy products such as curdled milk, butter and cheeses and may take part in decisions about the use of this income.¹⁶ The income from dairy products is therefore a key resource that allows women to negotiate as contributors to household income. Projects that invest in their activities could prevent them from being forced to migrate to urban centres with their children in times of scarcity to earn a living through precarious domestic work or begging.¹⁷

Agriculture: example of Niger

Agricultural productivity in Niger is generally low. Women have lower productivity and therefore a 66% lower agricultural output per hectare than men.¹⁸ Women's participation in production in floodplain areas is even lower (98.3% men vs. 1.7% women), as they are denied access to these areas due to the fertility of the soil. In addition, women are organised in groups and are the main actors in terms of processing agricultural products.

Women have limited access to the market due to cultural constraints. They are limited to selling their agricultural stock within the village, as they are rarely allowed to go to markets in the surrounding villages due to social norms. To be able to sell outside their village, they are obliged to entrust their production to relatives, which increases their transaction costs and impacts on the economic profitability of their farms.¹⁹

Research in Allakaye, in the Maradi region, shows that most women in this rural community need their husband's permission to undertake activities outside the home.²⁰ Asking permission from their husbands can already be a barrier to empowerment for some women. Moreover, if the man's response is negative, this is an almost insurmountable obstacle for women. According to 69% of the women interviewed, one of the reasons why their economic empowerment is not expressed more in the home is because their husbands are conservative.

16 Oxfam (2014), Food crisis, gender and resilience in the Sahel: Lessons learned from the 2012 crisis in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Web:

<https://www.oxfam.org/fr/publications/crise-alimentaire-genre-et-resilience-au-sahel>

17 UNOWAS (2019).

18 AfDB (2020b), *ibid.* for the following figures in the same paragraph.

19 WFP (2017), Empowering Women in West African Markets: Case Studies from Kano, Katsina (Nigeria) and Maradi (Niger). Web: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000064377/download>

20 *Ibid.*

100% of the husbands said that they feared losing the respect of other community members if their wives became more autonomous in the household. Image in society is an important factor in women's empowerment processes.

Fishing (Senegal)

In Senegal, artisanal fishing employs 80,000 fishermen, most of whom are young men. Women are very active in the sub-sector, and are mainly involved in the processing and conservation of fishery products.²¹ The decline in fishing activities is caused by the scarcity of fish products, the destruction of landing facilities and the growing insecurity. The main activity of women in these coastal sites is the processing of fish products, and they are particularly affected by these impacts, which most often lead to the displacement of populations.²² In spite of this, the Senegalese state continues to sign partnership agreements and grant fishing licences to foreign vessels that are destroying the prospects of local fishermen.²³

On the other hand, women are actively engaged: In Senegal, FENATRAMS, the National Federation of Women Fishery Product Processors and Petty Fish Traders, has 10,000 members and helped to devise a National Plan for the Adaptation of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector to Climate Change, Horizon 2035,²⁴ which takes into account the specific needs of women at several levels (e.g., diversification of economic activities and the creation of multi-purpose centres).

The NGO Enda Graf Sahel's transformative approach²⁵ has helped 4,800 fisherwomen in the Saloum Delta to rehabilitate the mangrove ecosystem, which had been degraded by industrial overfishing and climate change. They have carried

21 FAO (2018c).

22 UNESCO (2014), Impact of Environmental Change on Human Migration, Case Study: Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. Web: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002287/228713f.pdf>

23 Senagriculture (2020), Senegal: women in artisanal fisheries propose solutions to help young people. Web: <https://www.senagriculture.com/article/Senegal-les-femmes-de-la-Peche-artisanale-proposent-des-solutions-pour-aider-les-jeunes>

24 Republic of Senegal (2016), National Plan for the Adaptation of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector to Climate Change, horizon 2035. Web <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/Sen186289.pdf>

25 WECF France (2021), Gender and Climate Solutions. Web: https://wecf-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GJCS-2020_French_Web_double.pdf see also an interesting report on women in the shellfish value chain by the same organisation from 2009: http://www.prcmarine.org/sites/prcmarine.org/files/6_Des_Femmes_et_des_coquillages.pdf

out reforestation, shellfish seeding and organic market gardening programmes. Trained in advocacy, 20 of them have joined local fisheries regulation committees and banned access to protected areas. A new resource management consultation framework has allowed them to advocate for the restriction of fishing permits. By using improved ovens to process fish products, CO2 emissions can be reduced by 75%.

- A series of gender research and training initiatives have helped to significantly reduce domestic violence and strengthen economic solidarity:
 - Analysis of gender relations in the economy and governance of the fisheries sector
 - Participatory analysis of the division of labour within households, which has led men to join in with women on some household tasks
 - Research on masculinity by young activists in local communities
 - Standardised training modules on gender inequality and women's leadership
- 4,800 fisherwomen trained in public speaking, leadership and advocacy
- Setting up of 6 economic interest groups for agriculture and fisheries
- Organic market gardening: the transformation of agricultural products that improve and diversify the diet of families.
- The distribution of 200 improved stoves reduces wood fuel consumption by 75%
- 180 women increase their income and 200 benefit from a revolving fund to stimulate the transition. 20 women leaders elected to local fisheries regulatory bodies.

4. The Great Green Wall (GGW) and gender

Recognising that crises are largely rooted in poverty, injustice and lack of basic services, several donors have decided to combine their actions, with a view to supporting the long-term stabilisation and development efforts of the G5 Sahel countries, including in terms of gender equality. In 2019, the World Bank launched a renewed investment of more than US\$5 billion for 11 countries in the Sahel, Lake Chad and Horn of Africa regions to revive the GGW. This funding is intended to restore degraded landscapes, improve agricultural productivity, develop climate-resilient infrastructure and increase livelihoods and

employment.²⁶ The Great Green Wall has proven to be an effective approach to reclaiming land in a region that is disproportionately affected by climate change. Yet rather than bringing social benefits, the planned extension could run the risk of increasing tensions in the community if unintended consequences are not taken into account.

Unfortunately, gender is often mentioned as an add-on in GGW guideline documents, not as an integral part of the work. And yet the stakes are enormous. Increasing the value of degraded land, as the GGW initiative aims to do, changes the way land users will calculate decision-making - with increased agricultural value, the land can be appropriated by non-traditional farmers for agribusiness, which could displace the local population, as a report by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group in Niger²⁷ showed: land was effectively restored, but plots were also sold outside the community and what little access women had to land was further reduced. One of the lessons learned is that such projects must be designed with customary tenure arrangements in mind, they must be flexible and incorporate a component for negotiating land for women. Since restoration mainly benefits those who have access to land, some women and young people are particularly disadvantaged in the Sahel. There is a need to ensure that clear and enforceable land use agreements are in place prior to land restoration activities, in order to protect the land use rights of the most vulnerable.

Projects that support land and resource restoration can ensure that women and young people benefit by addressing barriers to participation related to social and cultural norms. For example, given that in certain regions, the participation of some women in cash-for-work programmes is prohibited by social norms (and in practice by their husbands, families and communities), programmes need to provide alternative income-generating options to ensure equity. Evidence of the impact of women's investments on land must be carefully considered, as this is the first step in ensuring that the Great Green Wall leads to equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

²⁶ <https://www.ifad.org/de/web/latest/-/news/ifad-and-gcf-scale-up-action-to-improve-life-for-millions-of-people-and-restore-ecosystems-in-africa-s-great-green-wall>

²⁷ IEG (2020), Community Action Program and Community-Based Integrated Ecosystem Management Project Web: https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar_nigercommunityactionprogram.pdf

5. Gender, peace, and climate issues

Weaknesses of the state and women's potential.

Conflict, political instability and terrorism can block or reverse progress on development and gender equality, displacing thousands of people and undermining governments' efforts to address the effects of climate change. Poor governance, weak institutions and corruption limit the ability of states to mediate and resolve conflicts over resources, provide basic services and enforce resource rights.²⁸ In addition, gender discrimination and unequal access to decision-making processes prevent women – often those most affected by climate change impacts – from coping with changing conditions. According to UNOWAS, the representation of women in conflict management mechanisms is often weak in affected countries and should be strengthened.²⁹

Many state partners are expected to implement gender activities but face this task without a gender strategy or action plan. Most partners lack expertise.³⁰ As a result, good gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment approaches have not been incorporated into broader planning, budgeting, training and evaluation structures. The low number of women staff in structures and programmes, combined with limited social and gender analysis and gender training of staff, leads to a lack of uniform gender mainstreaming knowledge, practice and budgeting. It should also be noted that all too often gender is confused with “woman”, without also taking into account intersecting factors such as age, socio-economic variables and disability.³¹

28 Crawford, Alec (2015) Climate change and state fragility in the Sahel. Web:

<https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/climate-change-and-state-fragility-in-the-Sahel-fride.pdf> and International Alert (2018), If Victims Become Perpetrators: Factors contributing to

vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the Central Sahel. Web: https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_ViolentExtremismVulnerabilityResilience_EN_2018.pdf.

29 UNOWAS (2019), Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Towards peaceful coexistence. Web: https://unowas.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_pastoralisme_fr-avril_2019_-_online.pdf

30 Sexual and reproductive health and rights in national adaptation planning processes. Exploring a pathway to realizing rights and resilience to climate change, February 2021. [Download \(pdf 48 p.\)](#)

31 LuxDev (2006), Towards more inclusive practices: a resource on how disability, gender and age intersect. Web: https://f3e.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/IntersectionnaliteHandicapGenreAge_NO09.pdf

In all Sahelian countries, a conflict-sensitive approach that strengthens women's potential for inclusive dialogue and mediation is needed; and it is also important not to leave out young people. The land-use planning dimension – an important entry point for negotiations with land chiefs for the respect of women's quotas – is also of great importance for mitigating the conflicts between pastoralists and farmers that are increasingly marking the region. This is also where women can play a central role in restoring and conserving the soil and other natural resources.

Dimitra Clubs

The Dimitra Clubs (set up mainly by the FAO) are informal groups of men, women and young people – mixed or not and with a maximum of 30 members, often of the same generation – who decide to confront the common problems they face in their daily lives, to identify possible solutions and join forces to solve them, using the resources at their disposal. Dimitra Clubs enable women/girls and men/boys to participate in their own development and to make their voices heard; they encourage dialogue and collective action.

“Through the clubs, people have been able to speak much more freely in the villages and young people and women are no longer subject to social constraints that prevent them from expressing themselves at village assemblies or even participating in the decision-making process at the village level” (Club Dimitra Evaluation, FAO, 2021).

Dialogue with men

Added to this is the fact that achieving the ideal of dominant masculinity is seriously challenged by widespread economic deprivation. Young men also feel oppressed and diminished by family authorities (inter-generational conflicts) as well as by different governmental institutions.³² Women's empowerment cannot therefore be achieved in a vacuum; men must be involved in the process of change. The gender approach can prevent negative or unintended consequences on relationships within households, such as physical or emotional abuse or con-

³² [International Alert \(2018\)](#).

trolling behaviour by men or the reinforcement of existing gender stereotypes.³³ This highlights the need for adequate awareness and proactive monitoring of these potential unintended impacts.

The “School for Husbands” approach is a positive example in this sense. In this approach, the nutritional behaviour of mothers, infants and young children are no longer limited to mothers of young children, but ways are explored to support nutrition and family planning practices by involving other household members, such as mothers-in-law and husbands.

Members of the school meet approximately twice a month to discuss and address specific reproductive health issues in the community. They seek solutions based on their own knowledge and experience or that of resource persons, such as health personnel. The group dynamic gives members the opportunity to observe different perspectives on nutrition or maternal health and serves as a tool to promote changes in attitudes and behaviour. Equally important is the change in dialogue within couples, as well as the awareness of the importance of women’s health and the greater consideration given to their opinions and needs.³⁴

Associations

Women’s groups contribute above all to meeting the challenge of lack of economic means. Their first mode of intervention is based on the traditional “tontine” system. In these groups, which are based on trust and voluntary membership, people commit to regularly contributing a fixed sum of money to be redistributed among the group. While the modest level of rural women’s contributions does not allow tontines to pay out very large sums of money, they do provide women with capital they would not be able to obtain otherwise and

33 CARE International (2013). Men, Gender Equality and Gender Relations in Mali. Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey. Web: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/men-gender-equality-and-gender-relations-mali-findings-international-men-and-gender-equality>; Schulz, Dorothea E. & Diallo, Souleymane (2016): Competing Assertions of Muslim Masculinity in Contemporary Mali. In: Journal of Religion in Africa, Vol. 46, p. 2019-250.

34 UNFPA (2011), A “school for husbands” encourages Nigeriens to improve their family’s health. Web: <https://www.unfpa.org/fr/news/une-%C2%AB-%C3%A9cole-des-maris-%C2%BB-encourage-les-nig%C3%A9riens-%C3%A0-am%C3%A9liorer-la-sant%C3%A9-de-leur-famille>

which allows them to start up income-generating activities. Other women's groups and associations offer micro-credit to their members (often based on the tontine contribution system) or facilitate access to micro-credit from other organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Women's associations are a gateway to improving women's access to credit so that they can expand their activities. Men, on the other hand, who often have easier access to investment, may take over women's place once women have made a value chain more profitable. It is often observed that traditionally "female" value chains are "invaded" by men once women are more commercially successful, hence the need to accompany women's growth. Similarly, there needs to be negotiation and dialogue with men so that they do not encroach on women's gains in value chains and they make room for women.³⁵

Lastly, it is important not to remain at the level of micro-savings, micro-credit and micro-projects. Associations can be transformed into economic interest groupings and these can be transformed into real companies. They need adequate financing, entrepreneurial and technical training, strengthening of ecosystems, digitalisation and a medium to long term vision. As a rural activist once poignantly stated at a meeting, "we are not micro-women".

Renewable energy

To address the issues of energy poverty that hinder women's advancement (from girls' education to business opportunities and free time), several actors in the Sahel are now offering simple and affordable solar products coupled with emerging financing models. These include solar refrigerators, solar water pumps and other simple solutions at the lower end of the energy scale, such as solar lanterns and solar home systems with mobile phone charging capability. It allows children to study after dark, women to do their chores safely and families to stay connected by mobile phone. The green transition offers unique

35 Mainstreaming gender in agricultural policies and farmers' organisations: The Regional Farmers' Network – ROPPA has created methodological tools for the participation of farmers' organisations in the definition of agricultural policies, within the framework of the revision process of regional and national programmes launched by ECOWAS. The report published with IFAD, "Farmers Speak Out: Vision and Recommendations of African Farmers' Organisations for the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme" presents several regional civil society initiatives and highlights the role of women, who represent 40% of the membership.

opportunities to reduce gender inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa, representing a chance for women to claim new jobs in different sectors. In addition, the transition to green economic activity can be coupled with upgrading and formalising women's current activities in the informal economy, waste management and agriculture, through collective action and women-led networks.

Excellent practice: UN Women works with REFAN³⁶, the Northern Women's Rice Network, as part of its Value Chain Programme for Climate Resilient Agriculture. The network, with 25,000 members, is a key agent in the rice value chain in Senegal. Facilitating REFAN's access to information, knowledge and finance for selecting sustainable energy options can have a significant impact on the rice value chain, a strategic sector for food security in Senegal, and a considerable demonstration effect for other value chains. Aware of this potential, UN Women and the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Rapid Entrepreneurship Department (DER) are supporting REFAN in improving skills and governance, as well as in access to private funding, in collaboration with the Green Climate Fund, to make the rice value chain more ecological and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

High quality seed is a prerequisite for high yields, and as climate patterns are changing in Senegal, the lack of quality seed adapted to the new weather conditions has been a major limiting factor in women farmers' productivity: *"Before the introduction of Farmer Field Schools, women were unable to find quality seeds. Sometimes they used male farmers' leftover seeds. As part of the programme, and in collaboration with the FAO, 5 farmer field schools using a total of 10 hectares have allowed 588 women farmers to produce 40 tonnes of climate change adapted seeds. Using these new improved seeds has meant that women farmers no longer face delays in their production cycle. Women who participate in the field schools can either use the improved seeds in their fields or sell them to other farmers, thus generating additional income and improving climate adaptation beyond their own crops. The project has also supported the initiation of new cereal banks, in the dry season, to support women's livelihood strategies after the granaries have been depleted, which usually occurs early, well before the rainy season."*

Partly as a result of the boosting of organisational capacity and previous training in agricultural processing under the programme, *"many women's cooperatives were able to apply their skills to new products and 'reinvent' themselves as part of*

36 UN Women (2021).

the solution in the COVID-19 response. In total, more than 7,000 women across the region were trained or retrained online and through video tutorials on how to produce hydro-alcohol gel and antiseptic soap between April and July 2020. Organisations such as REFAN (Northern Women Rice Producers) in Senegal were also able to secure large public contracts to supply grain to food transfer programmes during the crisis response. While the impact of the crisis on women farmers in the region was significant, the technical, business and organisational skills acquired during the programme helped women to cushion the impact to some extent and enabled them to bounce back more quickly, thus helping to make their communities more resilient.”

Conclusion

In view of the above, a concerted effort should be made to ensure that women are informed and represented to allow them to speak out and act through the local bodies and committees that manage the distribution of land and resources, so that their interests are taken into account in a coherent manner and inequalities in treatment and access are reduced. What is required is a conflict-sensitive approach that empowers women in their potential for inclusive dialogue and mediation.

Some common issues emerge across countries, such as women's access to land and participation in local governance structures or barriers to their full participation in value chains. In all countries, training is a crucial factor for a gender-based approach; both for women (in terms of professionalization and the learning of agro-ecological practices), for men (on gender equality issues to reduce the risk of resistance to women's empowerment), for women's organisations (especially on green entrepreneurship and renewable energies) and finally also for state actors at all levels (to build their capacity to implement the different gender strategies, policies and tools that are already at their disposal). This capacity building should also aim at triggering the empowerment process by pursuing strategic interests and working on social norms. If women are held back by their families and communities, if they lack self-confidence, or if they are blocked by policies that are blind to their needs, they may not even dare to take the initiative despite their skills.

In all countries, a conflict-sensitive approach that strengthens women's potential for inclusive dialogue and mediation is needed; and it is also important not to leave out young people. The land-use planning dimension - an important entry point for negotiations with land chiefs for the respect of women's quotas - is also of great importance for the mitigation of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, which are increasingly prevalent in the region. This is also where women can play a central role in restoring and conserving the soil and other natural resources. For gender to be firmly embedded in rural governance bodies, action-oriented measures are needed, in particular continuous gender training with a view to practical application. Commissions should strengthen both their gender balance and their operational and management capacities.

Female entrepreneurship and the positive contributions of women to agriculture and pastoralism should be strategically highlighted.³⁷ Local organisations, community media, women's networks, especially those focused on women's entrepreneurship, can be strategic partners in developing initiatives to provide training and functional literacy for women at community level. Community media should also be engaged in the development of social change programmes that are culturally sensitive but also empowering for women.

However, there are also important differences. Senegal, with its well-developed infrastructure and stable political context, offers opportunities for forward-looking approaches to digital entrepreneurship, but it is also negatively affected by large-scale investments and economic partnerships that often come at the expense of nature conservation and especially of rural women. In Niger, discriminatory gender norms, women's low level of education and their widespread exclusion from agricultural value chains are major challenges.

Given the imbalance of decision-making power and the weight of traditional gender norms, it is crucial to engage with men on gender issues. It may be necessary to adopt a "gender champion" approach (men who are allies of women and who engage in protecting and supporting them and educating other men) that trains and engages male community leaders to become allies, advo-

37 Women's FG in Togone and Dosso, 06-07.06.22. Respondents rarely mention the problems of shepherdesses, who are particularly vulnerable because of their lifestyle. The possibilities of further supporting opportunities for the transformation of pastoral production should therefore be explored so that this can benefit women.

cates and peer educators. We found that women have increased protection needs that must be met, particularly in relation to gender-based violence. Protection concerns are intimately linked to social cohesion and must be taken into account in community-based actions.

Also, more analysis of women's social networks is needed to better understand how gender inequalities are reproduced through social norms that limit women's choices and opportunities and hinder cohesion among them.

In this context the promotion of Dimitra clubs (see above) may be key.

Recommendations

Sahelian context, gender and climate

- Increased vulnerability of women to the environmental effects of climate change, as well as to social consequences, such as conflicts between communities.
- In the Sahelian context, women and girls make up the majority of the informal workforce in many value chains;
- They are excluded from the benefits of their work because of their marginalisation in political, social and economic life
- Insufficient access to resources, especially land, for women;
- Structural barriers to education, training and information (e.g. on climate variability);
- Discriminatory standards;
- Marginalisation of gender issues, underfunding and lack of skills among actors supposed to be implementing gender approaches;
- Strategies and policies that are not very innovative or gender inclusive ;
- Low involvement of women in the formulation, planning and implementation of environmental policies;
- Good gender practices are not systematically transposed on a larger scale and remain rather ad hoc
- Lack of access to electricity, energy insecurity for women;

- Overload of work for women (both domestic and subsistence)
- Strengthen a spirit of reinvestment, sustainability, anti-assistance among women and their communities through ownership, contribution and empowerment, counting on a change in attitudes

Initiatives and good practices

- For men, achieving the ideal of dominant masculinity is seriously challenged because of widespread economic deprivation.
- Strengthen a spirit of reinvestment, sustainability, anti-assistance among women and their communities through ownership, contribution and empowerment, counting on a change in attitudes.
- Taking into account the age aspect, as this region has one of the youngest populations in the world, which requires youth-friendly approaches;
- The promotion of technologies and infrastructure that are both climate change friendly and also serve women's practical and strategic interests, such as improved stoves, photovoltaic installations, multifunctional platforms and improved irrigation systems;
- Women's empowerment and capacity building (e.g. in climate-friendly agriculture and financial inclusion);
- Strengthening women's community structures, such as farmers' organisations, to increase their bargaining power and representation, particularly with regard to land access;
- Vocational integration and job creation for women, integration of women in agricultural value chains;
- Gender balance, participation in decision-making and women's leadership;
- Gender mainstreaming in all climate-related policies, programmes and initiatives;
- Promotion of innovative approaches and promotion of women and girls as innovators (while integrating lessons learned from 'tried and tested' approaches);
- Youth inclusion, intergenerational dialogue, micro-projects and incubators for girls' empowerment.
- "School for Husbands", "gender champions" approaches.

Risks and risk mitigation

- Risk: The gender approach can prevent negative or unintended consequences on relationships within households, such as physical or emotional abuse – Mitigation: facilitating gender and intergenerational dialogues and strengthening women's voices in peace processes, as well as involving men in reproductive tasks such as child nutrition;
- Risk: Weakness in gender analysis is a major risk factor in achieving the objectives of national policies which, instead of fighting poverty, risk aggravating it by promoting the impoverishment of a large part of the rural community, namely women and their associated groups. Examples: overburdening of women with additional activities, sometimes not adapted to their needs – Mitigation: Gender expertise in the country programme teams, further analysis of specific gender-related fields of investigation, design of gender strategies, monitoring, evaluation and continuous learning.
- Other weaknesses often found in the analyses: Using households as a unit of measurement does not take into account the different power and decision-making relationships, unequal distribution of household assets and other internal inequalities between men and women living in the household – Mitigation: gender analysis
- Gender is confused with 'woman', without also taking into account intersecting factors such as age, socio-economic variables and disability

It is often observed that traditionally "female" value chains are "invaded" by men once women are more commercially successful, hence the need to accompany them in gradual growth. Women's associations are a good entry point to improve women's access to credit so that they can develop their activities.

Never give up in the struggle for peace, security and development in the DRC and the Great Lakes region

Evariste Mfaume*

I. Introduction

The past three years in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been marked by episodes of political turbulence, which has led to the break-up of the coalition of two major political groupings: *Cap pour le Changement* (CACH) and *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC) respectively under the leadership of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, and his predecessor Joseph Kabila Kabange, which gave rise to the sacred union of the nation. Given that it is clear that in the Congolese political architecture, the ambitions of the major leaders are not exactly lined up to support of the current president in the 2023 elections, the new orientations are beginning to take form in 2022, with election fever dominating the discourse of political actors at national, provincial and local levels.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region have been severely shaken and affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of climate change and, most recently, the repercussions of the socio-econ-

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<https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2019/9/5d80f561a/militant-rdc-consacre-vie-defendre-cause-deplaces.html>

<https://drcongo.un.org/fr/17595-evariste-mfaume-est-le-laureat-regional-pour-lafrique-de-la-distinction-nansen-du-hcr-pour>

omic crisis caused by Russia's war in Ukraine, which has further strained a very fragile global situation, in an environment of manipulation, disinformation, the instrumentalisation of social media, the rapid spread of fake news, which is unfortunately gaining the applause of the public masses and pushing young people to unheard-of acts of violence, whereas the time has come for a profound collective awareness to reflect, act, survive, prosper, and develop in solidarity and with dignity; or spin out of control and collapse further.

The different components of society; the political leadership of the DRC and the region, civil society, the public and private sectors are encouraged to join their efforts to tackle political instability, social fragmentation, socio-economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change!

II. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in DRC

Apocalyptic message: as soon as the cases of COVID-19 victims were announced in China, with horrific images of the dead in Italy, Spain, the United States, etc., stable countries with modern, solid infrastructures, panic was seen on the faces of political leaders and those in charge of health in Africa, particularly in the DRC and in the Great Lakes region, due to the way they communicated, organised the response, and organised the general framework for handling the situation. This left the field open to rumours, apocalyptic messages of the end of the world supported by biblical references, and conspiracy theory, which is well known in Africa and which consists of looking for scapegoats at all costs instead of engaging one's own responsibility to face a problem. A frightening message in the DRC and the Great Lakes region, for example, is that the vaccine is a Western fabrication to block the reproduction of young girls and boys, that anyone who is vaccinated against COVID-19 will not be able to have children; reducing the number of Africans the better to dominate them being one more trick of neo-colonialism.

The dissemination of these intoxication messages by certain political leaders in high office on radio and television channels with a massive followings, on social media supported by a fringe of the intellectual and religious community and influential local leaders, had a major impact, creating massive resistance

on the part of the population to be vaccinated, even if certain officials later back-pedalled on their position.²

III. Analysis of prevention and response to COVID-19 in the DRC

In March 2020 the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared a state of health emergency with a range of restrictive measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of consequences: there is unpreparedness, which starts with chaotic communication, the ministers contradict each other in the information with the response coordination unit, coordination between Kinshasa and the provinces is a problem, at the level of the provinces the situation is increasingly complicated: people do not have clear information on the pandemic; practically the majority of the population – especially in rural areas – does not believe COVID-19 is a reality, it is taken in by rumours on social media that convey conspiracy theories and look for scapegoats. Consequently, the measures already in place in Kinshasa and in some provincial towns: Bukavu, Goma, Bunia, Lubumbashi, Kwilu, are hardly followed at all in the interior and the population is almost abandoned!

Young people and women are the most vulnerable groups because, living from hand to mouth, they are forced to ignore the measures of the Congolese government and the WHO and seek food in the informal sector: from the fields, gold mines, fishing, livestock, transport, petty trade, etc.

Schools and churches were closed but lockdown was not implemented in the major cities, etc. It was towards the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 that the DRC took the response against COVID-19 seriously, with convincing results in the city centres. Vaccination was just introduced and tentatively accepted in rural areas at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022.

In the artisanal mining sector, promiscuity is an issue. Some young male students whose schools have been closed have joined the artisanal miners to help eke out a living for their families; while young girls have taken up petty trading

² <https://afrique.lalibre.be/66326/covid-burundi-et-rdcongo-pays-les-moins-vaccines-du-monde/>
https://reliefweb.int/attachments/379c6001-b360-3a81-8591-f4bff5a2c4fb/CV-20220513-fre_0.pdf
<https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/coronavirus-le-burundi-accepte-de-recevoir-des-vaccins-covax-mais-une-condition-418725>

around the mines to help their families as well, and are therefore exposed to dropping out of school and working as prostitutes, having early marriages and unwanted pregnancies. In these population groups, people do not believe in the virus at all, and feel that there are many local, traditional treatments that can cure COVID-19.

Despite the severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local household economy, the population continues to build resilience in its efforts to provide for the needs of the communities from a survival perspective in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, fishing, petty trade, handicrafts, etc.

IV. Impact of COVID-19 at regional level

Thousands of elderly people suffering from chronic diseases living in the coastal, central and highland regions of Uvira, Fizi, Mwenga (Itombwe sector community) in South Kivu province, Kabambare in Maniema province, Kalemie in Tanganyika province), who traditionally sought effective health care in Burundi, died because of the closure of the land and lake borders.

Thousands of young people living in the coastal, central and highland areas of Uvira, Fizi, Mwenga (Itombwe sector community) in South Kivu province, Kabambare in Maniema province, Kalemie in Tanganyika province, who are candidates for admission to the universities of Burundi, more accessible according to their needs and financial means, have been blocked on the other side of the border because of the closure of the land and lake borders.

The resumption of cross-border traffic gives hope to communities along the border: traders on both sides of the borders between DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia have heaved a sigh of relief to resume their activities in the spirit of free movement of people and goods; young Congolese students are now flooding into the universities of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda; young Burundians and Rwandans are crossing into the DRC in large numbers (Bukavu, Kamanyola, Uvira, Baraka, Misisi) for agricultural activities, small-scale trade, construction sites, artisanal mining, fishing, etc.

Some women have given up, but others continue to work, keeping in mind the spirit of interaction with the M'Bakazi of Burundi without crossing the border.

V. Crises and natural disasters that reinforce conflict and poverty

a) Context, issues and outlook

While the Democratic Republic of the Congo's institutions were preoccupied with managing the COVID-19 pandemic, with restrictions that suspended field missions, the armed groups active in eastern DRC, both local and foreign, and their political and financial support in the DRC, in the region and in the diaspora in Europe, the United States, Australia, and South Africa found themselves in small pockets of the national territory, acting as petty tyrants; the security situation continued to deteriorate on the ground in Ituri, North and South Kivu in full view of everyone and with impunity; the protection of civilians was jeopardized.

In a context dominated by hyper-fragility, characterised by the manipulation of identity-based conflicts, with the strategies of certain political players, community leaders, and leaders of armed groups who, in the form of their speeches, refer to the treatment of the past to boost the peace and reconciliation process necessary for the construction of a Congolese nation based on unity and national cohesion, which is indispensable for stability, progress and sustainable development.

Unfortunately, in the background, many of these actors are conveying a hateful narrative on the balkanisation of the DRC, on the UN mapping project, on transitional justice, with the aim of indexing groups of communities they are hostile towards in order to set them against each other, as if they alone had committed serious crimes during the periods of war in the DRC (1996, 1998) in complicity with neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda. Yet all the communities in the DRC aspire to peace and access to transparent and fair justice. These conflict entrepreneurs propagate messages of hatred, discrimination and division, which are spread all day long on social media, and these messages are gaining ground in the run-up to the forthcoming 2023 elections.

Recently, SVH has begun to fear the polarisation of young fighters within armed and civilian groups towards more dangerous extremism because here and there they are instrumentalised by Congolese political players inside and outside of the republican institutions in the provinces, in Kinshasa and in the diaspora, in view of the acts perpetrated by various groups of young people, in

plain sight and with impunity: with this situation, there is reason to seriously fear more violent actions in the future in Eastern DRC.

The attitude of some FARDC officers in complicity with several Congolese armed groups who operate at different times in coalition with foreign armed groups from Burundi or Rwanda for economic or financial reasons (money, minerals, wood, cows, taxes, etc.) in exchange for arms or ammunition, creates a climate of mistrust towards them among the population. These dealings, a vast business network, reinforces the security dilemma because clearly instead of playing the role of deterrence, protecting civilians and building trust, this game feeds the war economy of national and foreign armed groups that destabilise the proper functioning of the state, and favours the infernal cycle of violence.

MONUSCO, a strategic partner of the FARDC, is paying the price. According to the balance of power on the ground, each armed group that is ailing accuses MONUSCO of supporting the enemy group, propaganda plain and simple.

b) Impact of climate change in DRC

To give just one example: Torrential rains fell on the town of Uvira, in South Kivu, on Thursday 16 to Friday 17 April 2020, after the Mulongwe River broke its banks, flooding that caused a lot of material damage and loss of life. The flood waters swamped the entire town of Uvira. At least 2,000 houses were flooded by these waters. And the disaster was not limited to homes. The facilities of the National Water Distribution Company (REGIDESO) were washed away or even destroyed by rainwater.

Alongside the Crisis Unit set up by the authorities, MONUSCO and humanitarian partners have been actively engaged since the outbreak of the disaster to help the authorities and the population cope.

c) Impact of climate change in DRC and the Great Lakes region

In Burundi, the Rusizi River, one of the tributaries of Lake Tanganyika, overflowed on Sunday 19 April 2020. The floods mainly affected the inhabitants of the commune of Gatumba in the suburbs of Bujumbura, affecting 27,000 people.

In Burundi, markets, fields of crops and schools were destroyed. This situation largely affected the coastal areas of Lake Tanganyika from the Uvira-Baraka-Kazimia area (21,690 homeless people), in Tanganyika province (Kalemie) to Tanzania (Kigoma province). Large rivers such as the Ruzizi along Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC have destroyed agricultural infrastructure, leaving thousands of people homeless and in a very vulnerable social and economic situation.

VI. Impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on DRC and the Great Lakes region

As one might say: “problems never come alone”: In addition to the horrific images of extreme military-political polarisation that are shaking the world, the fate of civilians, the stigmatisation of some refugees from Ukraine in their reception in some host countries, etc.

The collateral effects of this war are being felt heavily in the DRC and the Great Lakes region, while purchasing power is under the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, the stalemate of the war in Ukraine is causing yet another shock: to supply on the world markets. This is coupled with a threat to the next harvests: Wheat, maize, vegetable oil, sunflower, meat... None of these foodstuffs have escaped the price hike caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The FAO index, which is based on monthly changes in the international prices of a basket of commonly traded food commodities, averaged 159.3 points in March. This is an increase of 12.6% since February, “*a month in which it had already reached its highest level since it was created in 1990*”³, the UN organisation laments.

³ <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-food-price-index-posts-significant-leap-in-march/fr>

VII. SVH's contribution to the definition of the national and provincial Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program (P-DDRCS) strategy in DRC

Our reflection is based on the following three (03) strategic considerations:

1) It is clearly known to all that the various past phases of the DDR in Eastern DRC have not yielded sustainable results. These cycles are part of the current vectors of conflict and violence which are deeply rooted; and the context is therefore volatile and highly complex; the feeling of fear of the other raised to the community level; the feeling of self-defence in the villages under heavy political manipulation is increasingly strong; knowing that there is a close link between the different communities and the armed groups who follow minute by minute everything that happens in Kinshasa, Bukavu, Uvira, Nairobi etc.; a major challenge for P-DDRCS in South Kivu;

2) At a time when in Kinshasa, Goma and Bukavu, political players, DRC partners, international and national stakeholders and donors believe in community-based DDR, an approach that is in principle civilian and not military and that focuses on reintegration and stabilisation, the expectations of armed groups active on the ground are more focused on “*material and financial interests and privileges*” within the FARDC; practically the majority of local armed groups in South Kivu, among the most important, are under the command of generals; this not insignificant or a coincidence, it is a politically motivated strategy;

3) So far the level of consultations initiated with the communities, armed groups and other key actors in South Kivu are still on the periphery, superficial with “simplistic methods” (e.g. the format of the recently implemented provincial consultation framework on 27. 04. 2022 in Bukavu, which is far from being inclusive and is already causing complaints) while the wound is deep; many actors observe the architecture of the current process of the P-DDRCS mega-programme in South Kivu with great reserve, mistrust and pessimism.

From these considerations, here are a few ideas, messages and recommendations:

1) Carry out rigorous and regular diagnostics of the dynamics on the ground to keep team management informed in real time and adjust the implementation

strategies accordingly, foster a formal and informal active listening approach with key players. Avoiding these actors would result in short-lived peace and stability with nice pictures, a situation that could reinforce the resurgence of conflicts, harden the political positions of armed groups and the communities' resistance to the process; pushing towards a vicious circle and a security dilemma.

It is high time that the South Kivu P-DDRCS took serious measures in a chain of actions that reassure everyone, to establish the essential trust of the various actors who have a solid physical presence on the ground for better collaboration: learning – ownership – sustainability. All of which should be done within the framework of coherent, well-targeted, well-coordinated processes.

2) Develop a coherent, transparent communication strategy in Bukavu as well as in the territories, the ETDs (decentralized territorial entities) and even in remote villages; with messages that clearly explain the strategic orientations of the P-DDRCS programme⁴, the role of each actor at his or her level, the resources and the limits. Given that the whirlwind of the elections planned for 2023 in the DRC risks politicising the stabilisation process in the province, a dimension that should be taken seriously, knowing that local armed groups are connected to political supporters, the South Kivu P-DDRCS teams should go beyond their political mandate, without falling into propaganda, neutrally, and demonstrate commitment, integrity and professionalism to achieve a positive influence on the situation. All of which should be done within the framework of coherent, clearly-targeted, well-coordinated processes.

3) This complex environment needs a robust multi-actor intervention with concrete measures, not the light sprinkling we have been experiencing for many years in South Kivu. In my view, the South Kivu P-DDRCS programme should be coupled with a well thought-out plan for political engagement, placing communities at the centre on the one hand, and real state leadership at all levels of governance on the other, to address taboo issues and red lines: (examine and gain a deeper understanding of the sources of funding and supply of local armed groups, their political and financial support, their network at provincial, national, regional and international level, and thus concomitantly address conflicts of identity, land, customary power, by strengthening the mechanisms of

4 Disarmament, Demobilisation, Recovery, Community and Stabilisation Programme

peaceful cohabitation and social cohesion in a participatory and inclusive manner...) and, on this basis, adapt specific action strategies in coordination with the National Monitoring Mechanism of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement for Peace and Security (MNS), with MONUSCO, and with regional organisations, in particular the International Conference for Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region (ICPGR), the regional political bureau of the African Union, and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Great Lakes Region. As they say, *“Great ills require great remedies”*.

A glimmer of hope: DRC's accession to the Community of East African States (EAC)

The recent accession of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the Community of East African States (EAC) represents investment and trade opportunities, according to Professor Serge Tshibangu, special representative of the president of the Republic and focal point at the presidency of the Republic for the DRC's accession to the EAC:

“We have what are called advantages in investment and advantages especially in trade itself. This is what we shall put first. That means, with a market of something like 90 million consumers, the products that will interest the investors, the investors who would come to invest in the DRC. This will of course mean job creation, opportunity for our entrepreneurs, for our businessmen, so these kinds of opportunities can only be created when you have a consumer market that will then allow these investors to come and make good on their investments,” he said.

“But we also find a market of almost 140 million consumers. This means that even for us, it is a good market for our farmers, cocoa producers and fruit growers ...” insisted Professor Tshibangu. However, Al Kitenge, an economic analyst and strategist, argued that *“to succeed in joining the community of East African states, the DRC will have to meet several challenges, notably that of the nation's competitiveness”*.

With this accession, the area of the community, which is naturally plagued by internal dissension, has almost doubled. The DRC is a large market of more than 87 million inhabitants in a territory of about 2,345 million km. This opens

the way to a frantic race with huge economic interests and geopolitical stakes. The reality is that the economic stakes of each member country have weighed heavily on the agenda for a common future. Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are lining up with commercial ambitions for fruitful exchanges with the DRC and vice versa.

One challenge remains: the DRC is still one of the poorest countries in the world: the World Bank estimates that 73% of the Congolese population, or 60 million people, live on less than \$1.90 a day⁵.

A study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research, a Kampala-based think tank, indicates that the East African Community could earn an additional \$240 million a year in export volume, an increase of 28% through trade with the DRC⁶. Rwanda and Uganda would be the main beneficiaries. For the integration of the Democratic Republic of Congo within the EAC, it will be essential to *determine which goods are most in demand in the DRC*: “Without this knowledge and without setting preferential trade conditions, the union risks remaining a political entity only”.

Conclusions and recommendations

1) Simplistic methods do not help the DRC and the Great Lakes region establish lasting peace. If we really want to have sustainable results, let us agree to tackle together difficult processes in which we will absolutely go through turbulence, in which we undertake to commit ourselves with great vision, with sacrifice, with self-sacrifice to finally achieve better results.

We will have proudly served the communities and peoples of the DRC and the Great Lakes region. In view of the complexity of the issues to be addressed, alliances, synergies and joint measures are necessary to pool efforts into well-coordinated, holistic and coherent interventions for greater impact.

5 <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/drc/overview#1>
https://charcot.etab.ac-lyon.fr/spip/IMG/pdf/congo_pauvrete.pdf
<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02909695/document>

6 <https://www.theafricareport.com/188301/by-adding-drc-east-africa-upgrades-into-a-coast-to-coast-trading-bloc-of-280m-people/>

2) The Congolese government, which has the primary responsibility for securing and protecting people and their property, should ensure that, within the framework of the state of siege, it combats, at all costs, any abuses and settling of scores that could give free rein to arbitrary behaviour rather than justice at this crucial time, in strict compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law, and in the fight against impunity under the principle of zero tolerance advocated by the Head of State;

3) The political commitment of the DRC and the States of the Great Lakes region (security, stability and national cohesion), the fight and resilience to the socio-economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the domestication of the international commitments made by the DRC and the States of the Great Lakes region on the prevention and fight against the disasters of climate change with concrete measures, macro programmes in the prevention and strategic management of the precursor effects of a situation that already promises to be catastrophic on the ground. The DRC should move quickly from words to deeds by adopting the best practices that have proven successful elsewhere in Africa and the world.

The Congolese authorities must take the COVID-19 pandemic very seriously at all levels of governance, in close collaboration with the WHO and the various research institutions in the world, with drastic and coherent measures; taking into account the economic gaps that are plaguing the economy in general, and small earners with no savings in particular, who are the most vulnerable, in the short, medium and long term.

The need for good information on the pandemic to circulate nationally through reliable channels is essential (because we are in a war of rumours and untruths about COVID-19), here the role of civil society is very important to encourage the chain of communication especially in rural areas;

4) The security situation in Eastern DRC is generally fragile. Communities of all persuasions are suffering horribly and yearning for peace, security and development. Faced with this war in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a rigorous diagnosis of the current situation based on a solid analysis is essential to gain a thorough understanding of the key players, the deep-rooted motivations, the internal and external ramifications, the sponsors, and to create

relations and ways out. The issue is not solely military, it is also social, political, economic, cultural and environmental in its national and regional dimension; it challenges the governance of the Congolese state at different levels, and requires a global, well-targeted, coherent and carefully coordinated intervention;

5) With the P-DDRCS, it is time for a broad consultation that puts strategic reflections on the table so that the Congolese state can take on the security, stabilisation and development of the eastern provinces of the DRC in all its complexity, based on a clear vision, clear priorities, and a coherent, innovative and holistic strategy that takes into account the needs of community reintegration of combatants eligible for demobilisation, while at the same time taking into account the suffering of the communities that are becoming increasingly vulnerable. The DRC's partners should follow and accompany this programme in a spirit of effective coordination on the basis of very clear technical and operational guidelines that will give the civilian population hope;

6) The enormous efforts of the humanitarian players in the conflict zones of Eastern DRC deserve to be secured and protected by the Congolese government, as these efforts contribute hugely to saving human lives and relieving the suffering of the population. Given the close links between poverty and armed conflict, spaces for dialogue on NEXUS are to be strongly encouraged towards the transition from emergency to stabilisation to sustainable development. Large-scale, multi-sectoral, well-coordinated, integrative programmes and projects are needed at national and cross-border level.

7) The Congolese government's new national anti-corruption strategy 2022-2026 – in addition to Kinshasa as the seat of institutions – should extend to the provinces as part of the mechanisms for rigorous investigations, independent enquiries and fair access to justice for all.

8) MONUSCO should review its early warning mechanisms to enable it to work effectively on civilian protection, prevention and response in collaboration with the defence and security forces, based on close collaboration with the communities, local authorities and civil society organisations, while developing an

appropriate communication strategy on its mandate, prerogatives, pillars and limits. It should also be supported by a well-equipped working group, based in the communities, capable of regularly updating context analyses, alerting the team to security threats and providing real-time updates to the management team for proportional action.

9) Regional integration⁷ remains an indispensable path to peace, stability and prosperity in the DRC and the region: the historical, geographical, cultural and economic links between the DRC and Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania, whose peoples lead highly interdependent lives, are a great opportunity to be capitalised on: regional partners and organisations (MONUSCO, UN agencies, World Bank, INGOs, CSOs, embassies, AU, EU, CEPGL, ICGLR, Office of the Special Envoy) should strengthen the facilitation of connections: contacts, visits between states in the region in cross-border areas affected by conflict, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, population displacement: with support, accompaniment, follow-up mechanisms on the ground; bearing in mind that beyond political considerations, one of the root causes of conflicts here is difficult access to quality education, lack of modern infrastructure, poverty etc..

There are high hopes in the fact that the peoples of the Great Lakes region have historical links with much potential to be developed through exchanges, multi-sectoral integrative projects involving youth, women, IDPs, refugees and other special needs groups.

⁷ www.banquemondiale.org/fr/news/opinion/2015/05/08/world-bank-managing-director-coo-sri-mulyani-indrawati-difference-peace-lasting-regional-integration
<https://icglr.org/index.php/fr/developpement-economique-et-integration-regionale>
<https://www.un.org/press/fr/2019/cs13970.doc.htm>

The state, the people, ethnicity and leadership: Africa in globalisation

Roger Kaffo Fokou*

Summary: Formed at the Berlin Conference in 1884 without the continent's elites and peoples, the countries of Africa today are still struggling, more than 50 years after "independence", to build nation states. Competition and confrontation between ethnic groups within and outside the borders inherited from colonisation, governance that is generally decried, political leaders who are disliked with a few exceptions, the overall gloomy picture explains these fragilities which are the breeding ground for crises and instabilities, paving the way for war entrepreneurs, the most dreaded of whom today operate behind the black banner of jihad. But this is by no means inevitable. The same causes elsewhere have produced different effects, thereby charting paths that the Africa of today and tomorrow can/could and should/will follow.

Key words: Nation state, people, ethnicity, globalisation, governance, leadership, development, sovereignty.

Introduction

The globalisation that has imposed itself or has been gradually imposed on the planet, half phenomenon and half project, was for a long time intended to be positive. Armed to the teeth with science, it aimed to solve all the problems that

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have arisen/will arise for living beings/humans, in the common home.¹ Then ideologies won out over science at the turn of the 19th century and this led to two appalling world wars. Some people then began to dream about the death of these ideologies, and this dream found its prophet in Francis Fukuyama's announcement of the end of history in 1992². Thirty years later, the world does not seem any happier, and conflicts of every kind and intensity continue to dominate the front pages of our daily newspapers and the headlines of our audio-visual media.

While in Europe, the nationalisms that re-emerge in conflict mode³ may at the same time be a cement against exogenous influences, in Africa in recent years the difficult construction of the nation-state offers all neo-Khalifas and other war entrepreneurs a complex but favourable ground for the fulfilment of their ambitions by means of jihad or other equally violent processes. All this usually leads to terrible consequences: decaying state systems, violent xenophobia, internal and trans-state conflicts, external military interventions⁴, civilian populations victims of atrocities⁵, war crimes and crimes against humanity...

However, the future of Africa has never raised as much hope as at the beginning of this 21st century⁶. This hope could be dashed if the current trend were to continue. To progress towards “development”, this continent obviously needs

1 “I believe in the future of Science: I believe that Science, and Science alone, will solve all the meaningful questions; I believe that it will penetrate the secrets of our sentimental life and that it will even explain to me the origin and structure of the anti-scientific hereditary mysticism that co-exists with the most absolute scientism. But I am also convinced that people ask themselves many questions that mean nothing. Science will show the absurdity of these questions by not answering them, which will prove that they do not have an answer”. Félix Le Dantec in *Grande Revue*, quoted by Jules de Gaultier, *Revue philosophie de la France et de l'étranger*, 1911.

2 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Paris, Flammarion, coll. History, 1992

3 “Nationalism is war”, François Mitterand, speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 17 January 1995.

4 Harmattan (Libya, 2011), Serval (Mali, 2013), Sangaris (Central African Republic, 2013), Barkhane (Sahel, 2014) for France, MINURSO, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MINUSTAH, MONUSCO, MINUAD, FNUOD, UNFICYP, FINUL, FISNUA, MINUSS, MINUK, MINUL, UNMOGIP, ONUST for the United Nations.

5 In Eastern DRC (for almost 25 years), in English-speaking Cameroon (since 2017 when the conflict between the Cameroonian government and the Ambazonian separatists broke out) or elsewhere.

6 Cf. Roger KaffoFokou, *Demain sera à l'Afrique*, L'Harmattan, 2008; Jean Ping, *Et l'Afrique brillera de mille feux*, L'Harmattan, 2009; Amadou Camara, *Mon optimisme pour la jeunesse africaine*, L'Harmattan, 2018.

to break out of the vicious circle of the current conflicts. But how will it achieve this? It must logically start from a good diagnosis in order to envisage strategies that could open up serious avenues for the future.

Without entering into the debate between partisans of the primacy of exogenous versus endogenous causes, here we will focus on a part of internal causality that is usually considered, not without bias, as overdetermining: political causality. How can African countries in their current state of constitution/construction and governance be considered as mortgages for their own future plans? A number of fundamental concepts would then emerge: 'state', 'people', 'ethnicity', 'governance', 'leader/leadership', etc. The referents of these concepts, sometimes hollow, sometimes raised, engaged in complex relationships, could well contribute substantially to explaining the past, present and future difficulties of many African countries.

1. State, people and ethnicity: more than half a century of fruitless search for "national unity" in Africa

Speaking of the relationship between ethnicity, people and the state, it is undoubtedly necessary, here and there in Africa, to go back to the source of the problem that it continues to pose: the Berlin Conference of 1884. In the absence of African peoples and "kings" and thanks to the inclusion of the notion of "sphere of influence" in the proceedings, the conference delegates organised the division of the continent according to their appetites. The map resulting from this iniquitous division is generally considered to be sociologically "incoherent": the political entities formed comprised ethnic patchworks. There are at least two things to say here.

Firstly, what is an ethnicity? Coming from the Greek *ethnos*, ethnicity refers to both people and nation. It is a "group of individuals who share a certain number of civilizational characteristics, in particular a common language"⁷. An ethnic group is therefore a cultural and not a biological entity. The unity of the ethnic group is supposedly based on the "community" of certain civilisation characteristics, the most obvious of which is linguistic "proximity" which

7 Le Robert Dictionaries – *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* 2017.

should not be equated with “identity”. What extension should or could be given to this proximity? It is here that the two sides are divided according to their respective positions. Thus, taking a stand against a certain imperialist and colonial science with a “divisionist” aim, Abolou Roger Camille points out, with regard to Africa, that “ethnography, ethnology and anthropology to a certain extent appear to be imperialist instruments for splitting up geographical spaces, breaking up cultural areas, multiplying ethnic groups, etc.”⁸ Thus, based on this “science”, it can be said, according to the number of real or presumed “languages” or “dialects”⁹, that there are more than 250 ethnic groups in Cameroon, and nearly 2,000 in Africa. For many African linguists, however, this is not only the result of an ideological bias but also of a genuine misunderstanding of the deep mapping of African languages. According to Abolou Roger Camille, there are far fewer languages and cultures in Africa: “According to Owusu (1997), in 1959, Murdock identified nearly 2,000¹⁰ African ethnicities speaking the same language, sharing the same cultural system”¹¹. The *Atlas of Africa* is more measured and mentions 16 language families. On such a basis, the ethnic map of Africa in general and those of the African countries could be completely redrawn in a less “divisionist”, more unifying way. And many states that were previously considered multi-ethnic could suddenly become nation-states that had not recognised themselves as such.

Secondly, this multi-ethnicism that has been so liberally applied in referring to African states, no matter how it is determined/identified, is not historically exclusive to this continent nor to its states. In East Asia in 475 BC. In the late Zhou dynasty, China was “broken up” into 149 principalities from which 17 rulers emerged, and then reduced to 7 principalities during a period known as the “Warring States”¹². In Europe, the Holy Roman Empire (10th-19th century) was made up of over 300 political entities. The same can be said of Italy before the “risorgimento”¹³ and certainly of many other states on many continents.

8 Camille Roger Abolou, “De la raison des langues et ethnies africaines” in Rev. ivoir. anthropol. sociol. KASA BYA KASA, no.9 – 2006

9 Very often the boundary between a language and a dialect is difficult to distinguish.

10 Figure taken from *Atlas of Africa*, Editions Le Jaguar, 2000, p. 56

11 Camille Roger Abolou, op.cit.

12 Hervé Beaumont, *Chine*, Editions Marcus, 1994, p.18

13 The “risorgimento” runs from 1848 to 1871.

Perhaps the ethnic reality has been handled more poorly in Africa than elsewhere. Further studies are needed on this subject. As far as Europe is concerned, Guy Héraud is in no way indulgent with regard to the role of history in the political fragmentation of this space into cells that too often fragment cultural communities: *“History has mutilated ethnic groups, dislocated language groups, imposed unnatural solidarities or barriers. If you look at the current European states, you will see that there is hardly a single one that does not encroach on foreign groups or is not itself a victim of such encroachments”*.¹⁴ And on this patchwork, the European peoples have built states in which their citizens today recognise themselves more than in the ethnic groups of yesterday. It is at this level that the relationship between State, leadership and governance must be questioned.

2. State, governance and leadership: examples from elsewhere

What is a State? In international law, it is a territory, a population and a sovereign government. But the notion of population, which is too neutral, has been successfully toppled in favour of that of “people”. And with the concept of people comes the concept of the nation¹⁵ and consequently the nation-state, as shown by the creation of the League of Nations at the end of the Great War. The principle of nationality, according to which the state and the nation must coincide, was later formalised in the United Nations Charter (Articles 1–2). Even if there is still an ongoing debate about the definition of nation, the ethnic conception of nationhood (common language and origin) seems to be prevailing long term and has at least two major consequences.

Firstly, it leads to a correction of the resolutions of the 1815 Vienna Congress through a reorganisation of the European geopolitical space in the sense of a fragmentation of multi-ethnic states. The Treaty of Versailles redrew the map of Europe on an ethnic basis, dismembering Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Secondly, it allows the regrouping of certain ethnic entities that were

14 Guy Héraud, *L'Europe des ethnies*. Brussels, Bruylant-L.G.D.j., 1993, p.32

15 French universalist conception represented by Renan and Fustel des Coulanges, opposed to the German ethnic conception represented by Fichte.

scattered at the time: the cases of the German and Italian states certainly attest to this. When it developed in a multi-ethnic state, the idea of nationhood thus led in some cases to the dissolution of the latter and the birth of several national states¹⁶. In another schema, the scattering of close ethnic entities into several multi-ethnic states could lead to new reconfigurations, as the existence of a common language and culture can bring people together and serve as an ideological cement for the establishment of nation states. However, it should not be assumed that these people-states, where they exist, have forged themselves. History has shown that they have generally benefited from special governance through exceptional leadership.

In Asia, China sank into divisions and internecine warfare with the fall of the Zhou dynasty (256 BC), whose power was then merely symbolic. Everything changed, however, with the arrival in 221 B.C. of King Zheng (reigning as Qin Shi Huangdi). He was a powerful leader who established more effective governance: in just sixteen years of reign he destroyed the existing feudal states and succeeded in unifying the country to which he gave his name (the word China being a linguistic alteration of Qin). A brutal and uncompromising ruler, he was able to combine these “flaws” with an indisputable political vision: “As a despot, he embodies, for history, the ‘Caesar’ of China. He reorganised the country into 36 command areas, unified the laws, standardised the currencies (the round coin with a square central hole), weights and measures, the calendar and the distance between wagon axles. He simplified writing, established a road network from the capital Xianyang (near Xi’an)”¹⁷.

In Europe, the driving force behind German unity was undoubtedly the reaction to external threats: French domination of the German states was the result of a unified organisation of the French ethnic groups; Napoleon’s subsequent defeat was the consequence of an expansion of the empire to include other ethnic groups that were too different, if we take into consideration Fichte’s view¹⁸ on the question of ethnicity. Otto von Bismarck, Minister-President of

16 The break-up of Yugoslavia from 1991 onwards as a result of violent inter-ethnic conflicts is one example of this.

17 Hervé Beaumont, *op. cit.*

18 “The first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and have the power of continuing to make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong to-

Prussia, played a central role in this unification: “Bismarck pursued an economic policy based on accelerating industrialisation through large, innovative groups [...] financed by powerful banks, benefiting from low wages and oriented towards exports. At the same time, he improved agricultural productivity [...], passed protectionist tariffs and enacted various social laws to combat the influence of the socialists [...] and against work accidents (1884), old age insurance (1889). He also unified the currency of the Empire by creating the mark, which replaced all the old currencies in circulation (thalers, florins, groschens, etc.) on 1 January 1876.”¹⁹

These examples, many more of which could be found, show the powerful link that exists between the state, the type of leadership and governance, which explains the periods of disintegration of political entities (Shang and Zhou dynasties in ancient China) or consolidation and influence (Bismarck’s Germany or Cavour’s Italy). What does this tell us about political leadership in Africa?

3. The leadership of "independent" African states: a double deficit of sovereignty and political vision

Most African countries achieved “independence” in the late 1950s²⁰. Called upon – often by the former metropolis in the case of Francophone Africa – to lead nationless states at a time when nationalities had conquered international law and when the principle of nationality had been enshrined in the UN Charter, African leaders faced an enormous challenge. But while the “principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples” served magnificently in the fight against external domination, it became possible to instrumentalise it in the service of internal divisions that could go as far as the vague desire for in-

gether and are by nature one and an inseparable whole. Such a whole, if it wishes to absorb and mingle with itself any other people of different descent and language, cannot do so without itself becoming confused, in the beginning at any rate, and violently disturbing the even progress of its culture.” Fichte, “Address to the German nation” (1906), accessed 03/08/2022.

¹⁹ Pierre Bezbakh, “Bismarck (1815–1898) and the Origins of German Power”, <https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/02/13> accessed on 03/08/22

²⁰ Ghana, for example, became independent in 1957. The case of Liberia, which became independent in the middle of the 19th century (1847), must be excluded.

dependence within the new states²¹. The most common mantra of these early African political leaders was “national unity”. More than half a century later, the results are more than mixed: few of these states can now claim to have become nations, nation states. Why has the intermingling that seems to have worked quite well elsewhere on other continents and enabled the building of solid, powerful and dominant states not worked in Africa so far? There are certainly a multitude of reasons for this, but we will focus on the sovereignty deficit of these states and the lack of political vision of their leaders.

On the first point, it can always be argued that sovereignty is a very relative notion, especially in the context of globalisation with “zones of influence” where major powers rub shoulders with medium-sized powers and small, sometimes minor states. In the case of the African countries formerly dominated by France, it cannot be denied that the main clauses of the secret independence agreements, largely not yet denounced, leave little room for speculation about the servitude organised at the expense of these countries in favour of France. André-Marie Mbida, Prime Minister of French Cameroon in 1957, expressed himself unambiguously on the subject: “*I assert without fear of contradiction that Mr. Jacquet told me verbatim in February 1958 that the French government was considering giving some independence to Cameroon on condition that the territory agreed to join the French Union. In September 1958, I met the same Jacquet (...) at the French National Assembly. I was accompanied by my colleague Germain Tsalla. In front of us, Mr. Jacquet repeated verbatim on three occasions that Cameroon would be given fictitious independence in order to facilitate the procedure for lifting the trusteeship, and that Cameroon would then join the Franco-African Community*”²². These clauses concern the confiscation by France of monetary policy, the first right to purchase natural resources as well as the priority given to French companies in the awarding of public contracts, the exclusivity of defence policy, the obligation to make French an official language... Even today, French-speaking African countries are forced to use the CFA franc managed by the Treasury Department of the French Ministry of the Economy, despite the almost complete shift in public opinion in these countries on the

21 The Biafran war in 1967 comes to mind.

22 Atangana Martin René. “Financial relations between Cameroon and France and the image of France in Cameroon (1946–1956)” In: *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps*, no.32–33, 1993. *Colonisations en Afrique*. pp. 47–52

issue! We can see how this poses the problem of the quality of African political leadership over the past half-century even more acutely.

Which African heads of state have been the most popular in the last 50 years? Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Congo's Patrice Lumumba, Burkina Faso's Thomas Sankara and South Africa's Nelson Mandela are on the shortlist for Africans, whether from North, South, East or West. The first was one of the founding fathers of pan-Africanism, a utopia that has not been crushed despite relentless attempts; the second left his mark through integrity and his ability to oppose imperialist forces to the point of supreme sacrifice for his country; on the third, a powerful light is shed by this sentence, taken from a site unlikely to have any biased sympathy towards him: "*His passionate defence of Africa and its capacity to develop on its own has marked several generations of Africans, beyond the borders of his native Burkina Faso*"²³; the fourth was the founder of a peaceful multi-ethnic South Africa, the "rainbow nation", which says it all. These men came into politics with a strong vision and fought for it without bargaining. Exile, death, life imprisonment did not make them back down.

In contrast to the former, who are the most reviled African heads of state of the last 50 years? To list them would be tedious. What have they done overall to deserve such a reputation? The correct question would be "what did they not do?". They all talked about national unity in multi-ethnic states, but often governed for their own ethnic group relying not on cooperation but on ethnic competition. In Cameroon, the so-called regional balance policy, adopted without consensus, led to the exacerbation of ethnic rivalry and resulted in the rise of hate speech, inter-ethnic violence, and finally today a deadly separatist conflict. In Rwanda in 1994, one of the worst genocides of all time took place.

Is transcending ethnic groups to build true nation-states beyond African countries? Most certainly not. We have seen above how the ethnic situation of African countries can be presented in a different and even radically opposed light depending on the ideological bias. Since the basis of ethnicity is not biological but cultural and civilizational, it is surprising that there is an obvious desire in some African countries to freeze the current ethnic realities borrowed from colonial taxonomy and to use them as tools for political planning. How

23 <https://webdoc.france24.com/burkinafaso-thomas-sankara/> accessed on 04/08/2022

can we build a people, a nation from multiple ethnicities (whether they are defined in a broad or narrow sense) by cultivating and prioritising the differences between them, notably through the mechanisms of ethnic quota policy? In the opinion of Joseph-Désiré Som I, although presenting advantages in terms of the equitable representation of minorities, *“these mechanisms, instead of allowing for more social justice by promoting equality between citizens, contribute to fixing, and even amplifying, the antagonisms between members of linguistic, religious or ethnic communities, which are essentialized.”*²⁴ In another context, we have seen how Bismarck implemented a systematic policy of standardisation rather than differentiation, copied from the rival French model of the time. And so what can we therefore learn from the French model? We have to go back to the 16th century because, as we have seen, language is one of the fundamental criteria for defining ethnicity.

In 1539, by the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, François I imposed on the whole of France the language of the Court and of Ile-de-France, which was called “Français” for the occasion. With this act, he united the country, strengthened the monarchy and gave a decisive impetus to the emergence of French national feeling. It should be noted that this founding act was carried out at the expense of Latin, a foreign language inherited from Roman colonisation. How can African states hope to build nations on foreign languages while at the same time encouraging isolationism on the basis of ethnic languages or those considered as such? Lack of vision, method or political will? Perhaps all three at the same time.

Unpatriotic and what is more, incapable of sacrifice, these political leaders have not taken, do not take, the political and personal risk²⁵ of challenging the iniquitous neo-imperialist agreements that vassalize their countries and have governed/govern them as old-fashioned trading posts, providers of raw materials without added value, unable to raise sufficient resources to provide themselves with the infrastructure to initiate the development process. The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the richest countries in the world, but

24 “Public action in ethnic matters in Africa: regional balance in Cameroon. Ethnicity versus nation?”. Master’s thesis presented by Joseph-Désiré Som I Università della Svizzera Italiana, 2014, pp. 9–10

25 The assassination of Thomas Sankara was no doubt a consequence of this risk-taking.

its immense territory is inaccessible due to a lack of communication routes and viable infrastructure. It is also plagued by deep-rooted mal-governance, which makes it a prey to traffickers, multinational companies and numerous armed groups, all of whom are attracted by its mineral wealth. One only has to analyse the impact that infrastructure and economic development have had on the social, cultural and ultimately political development of states that have been successfully unified elsewhere on other continents to appreciate the scale of the waste.

Qin Shi Huangdi, who brought China out of the chaos of the Warring States period, proceeded to profoundly transform the country, both on the material level (he even legislated on the distance between wagon axles, established a road network from the capital to the entire country) and on the immaterial level (harmonization of laws, currencies, weights and measures; simplification of writing). In other words, he implemented a major programme of institutional and territorial development. In Cameroon, 60 years after independence, it is still not possible to reach all the regions directly from the capital, which means that the territory continues to divide the state into “several countries” that are almost foreign to one another, a situation that is conducive to possible separatism. The same reality is in evidence in the DR Congo, where people living in Orientale province and Katanga find it difficult to think of the authorities in Kinshasa as governing the country of which they are citizens. We can see how such confinement by enclosure, however involuntary, can lead to ethnic isolationism and thus become an obstacle to the project of national unity and development.

Conclusion

It is said that a people only gets the leaders it deserves. Can such a statement be applied to today’s African states? First of all, perhaps, they should become people-countries, nation-states: for the moment they are generally only population-states. African political leaders talk a lot in their own context about the “nation” and like to address the “people”, but one should ask them who they are really talking to. Few have shown the necessary will or given themselves the appropriate resources to succeed in the project of transforming these populations

into peoples, these population-states into nation-states. Here and there, we still have to deal with wobbly carriages, threatened with scattering their loads and colliding at every bump. It would be an overstatement to speak of putting the ox before the cart: here, the cart does not really seem to have been seriously thought of yet. The plain will undoubtedly plough itself, with the help of time. Or under the influence of repeated incantations. Should we therefore despair? Not at all! We have talked about political leadership, but today there is also, increasingly, civil society with a different kind of leader. In Roman times, civil society was the totality of society, as opposed to natural, unsocialized, uncivilised society in the etymological sense. This confusion was to prevail until the era of the monarchy, even if the monarch appropriated the representation of this monarchical civil society and became himself the civil society. Eighteenth and nineteenth century liberals removed civil society from the state sphere and turned it into an economic organisation opposite the political one. We can see that from antiquity to the 19th century, civil society was transformed but retained a certain amount of power and exercised it openly or discreetly but effectively. This state of grace came to an end in the 20th century when civil society, in an attempt to gain its independence and neutrality, found itself caught in the vice of the objective alliance of political power (holder of legal and coercive means) and economic power (holder of the financial means). It then lost a large part of its means of action and only played a useful role in the socio-economic and political field. Today's African civil society, which is even more destitute than its counterparts on other continents, must show even more determination and inventiveness. Because civil society alone has an awareness of the issues and challenges to be overcome on the continent in the face of timid powers, more concerned with preserving themselves in order to reproduce, it must give itself the means to contribute substantially, alongside the States, to advancing Africa's development agenda.

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