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Humanitarian  
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## **Local conflict and the call for justice**

*What 800 Sahelians have to say*

### **Mali National Report**

***Perception study on the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism  
in the border regions of the Sahel***

**This research project has been carried out by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.**

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**Translation**

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## AN 'EPIC, UNUSUAL AND STRATEGIC STUDY'

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This research project on perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism drivers in the cross-border regions of the Sahel has offered a unique opportunity to embark on a major and innovative study at the regional level regarding global issues such as armed violence, radicalization, jihadism and security. The project was undertaken without preconceptions and its multinational scope, through the study of frontier regions of countries in the Sahel, together with the decision to listen to the views and ideas of the region's own people and take account of their perceptions and representations, has contributed to the broad, generous and ambitious orientation of an exercise. In general, very little is known about how the populations most affected by armed violence, extremism and insecurity perceive and react to it. In fact, a dominant paradigm exists regarding these questions, which are generally seen from 'top-down' perspective by national and international institutions. These institutions opt for political, security, police and military responses to violent radicalism based on religion.

While perceptions and representations do not necessarily precisely reflect reality, they contribute towards conveying an idea of its depth, intensity, and texture: its sound, its tonality and its contrasts. Most often what is 'perceived' is a distortion, an exaggerated vision of what is, in fact, 'lived'. However, the characteristic distance between what is lived and what is perceived may also take an inverted form, with the latter offering an attenuated and filtered reconstruction of reality. The respondents express themselves, for the most part, in a sober manner in describing the misfortunes and the mortal dangers they have suffered. The responses of the 800 Sahelians who have been interviewed during this study reveal a practical rationality in the face of the challenges of radicalization, violence and insecurity, which is evinced by vulnerable individual actors whose circumstances are precarious and painful.

In addition to the difficulty and danger involved, readers of this report should be aware of the experimental nature of this enquiry, which was undertaken simultaneously in eight Sahelian countries. This wide area of research, studied in depth over a short period of time, has opened up ideas for action and reflection which have hitherto been disregarded or insufficiently considered. Thus, it has given access to fruitful lines of research and identified latent solidarity networks. It is agreed that this exploratory work should be furthered.

Over a period of between five and eight days, 59 researchers made round trips totalling some 24,000 kilometres, covering the frontier zones linking Senegal to Mauritania and Mali, the zones linking Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and those of the countries bordering on Lake Chad, namely Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon. A questionnaire was used to collect responses from 698 individuals in all, spread throughout these eight countries of the Sahel including, in descending order, 147 respondents in Mali (21 per cent of the regional sample); 120 in Nigeria (17 per cent); 100 in Niger (14 per cent); 88 in Mauritania (12 per cent); 74 in Senegal (10 per cent); 71 in Chad (10 per cent); 60 in Burkina Faso (8 per cent); and 38 in Cameroon (5 per cent). Supplementary in-depth interviews were carried out with more than 50 people during additional consultations.

Through these two stages of the inquiry process, the teams identified a pool of 80 key contacts who were subsequently invited to come to Abuja, Bamako, Dakar, N'Djamena, Niamey, Nouakchott, Ouagadougou and Yaoundé to compare and exchange their perceptions of the reasons for insecurity and violent extremism in their respective frontier zones. Interviews were also set up, to the extent this was possible, with those who sympathised with armed groups or with reformed group members. Lastly, national and international consultants were approached to produce case studies and conceptual analyses which were complementary.

The organisation of the research itself represented a substantial challenge. Problems arose from the recruitment of teams to administer the questionnaire (these were composed of teams of researchers and university personnel made up entirely of nationals from the countries concerned) as well as from the simultaneous initiation of research on the ground in all eight countries. Other issues were associated with the necessity to follow a protocol in relation to security; communication covering the entire group of researchers dispersed throughout the cross-border conflict zones; and the organisation of the transfer of the contact group of key respondents to the various capitals. Plans needed to be constantly revised to react to circumstances and various constraints. These included administrative considerations (permits and co-ordination with the authorities); political concerns (the post-election situation in Nigeria and the transition in Burkina Faso); security scares (Boko Haram attacks in the region of Lake Chad); financial difficulties (failed transfers, budget overruns); technical problems (electricity and internet failures); and even climatic and cultural obstructions (the rainy season and the onset of the month of Ramadan).

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The decision to work with university researchers and interviewers of local nationality rather than with external consultants was a risk, but one which has paid off. The goal was to construct a team which had the most appropriate profile for a method of enquiry which was adapted to local realities; was able to suggest the best places to go; was able to select the most able interviewers; and, finally, was able to bring insight to the analysis of the results. The common methodology across the survey was the outcome of interactions with the eight national teams and thus emerged from a collective effort. The quality of the data and the analysis which has come out of the responses of the 800 Sahelian respondents is opening up a range of options for mitigating their vulnerability to violent extremism and enhancing the resilience of the populations concerned. The study has deliberately ignored the conventional taxonomy of the armed groups and the interpretation of religious motivation which is typical of political science approaches in order to concentrate on a conceptual framework which stays closer to the perceptions of the inhabitants of the cross-border regions themselves.

In the majority of the areas covered, however, the populations received the researchers favourably and opened up to them without any major problems throughout the entire critical phase: the research on the ground. In Mali, the locals were particularly appreciative of the courage of the researchers who had come to see them where they lived and had posed direct questions, going straight to the essential issues. In Nigeria, the teams were all the more favourably received because their respondents were conscious that no-one representing the authorities had ever seen fit to concern themselves with what the population had been suffering for years, since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurrection. It should be noted that, in certain sensitive cross-border areas, unusually, none of the teams were escorted by security forces or police during their work on the ground, despite the fact that the study had laid down no procedure on this issue. However, the teams were, themselves, supposed to announce their arrival and make contact with the public authorities and with the military command in the districts they proposed to visit. Both of these elements formed an important part of the approach since, in the view of those involved in the study it had an impact on the way the neutrality of the study was perceived by local inhabitants. Thankfully, no researcher was worried, even though they were at times in close proximity of security threats.

Amidst the observations, the results and the suggested avenues for further reflection, there are facts which might seem, at first sight, to be embarrassing, since it is evident that the perceptions of the individuals interviewed prioritise some striking truths which demand to be considered. However, within what the responders have to say and their ideas for change there is, above all, a demand for the reinforcement of the state, and a desire for normality and security indissociable from a

citizenship which is in the course of formation. The stories of the respondents, though sometimes tragic, also have the merit of not permitting the future to be previewed in a too deeply apocalyptic a manner. Those involved in this study have refused to analyse the situation using fear as an explanatory principle (the heuristic of fear), although by the end of this research it had become clear that radicalization is a durable phenomenon to which people will have to adapt and respond. At the very moment when the international community finds itself entrenched in a second “war against terror” in the Middle East, the questions dealt with here are not merely of local concern.



**Burkina Faso** - 6 interviews  
1'500 km – 5 days

60 interviews  
Villages around 6 towns  
Languages: Fulfulde

**Cameroon** - 6 interviews  
1'500 km – 8 days

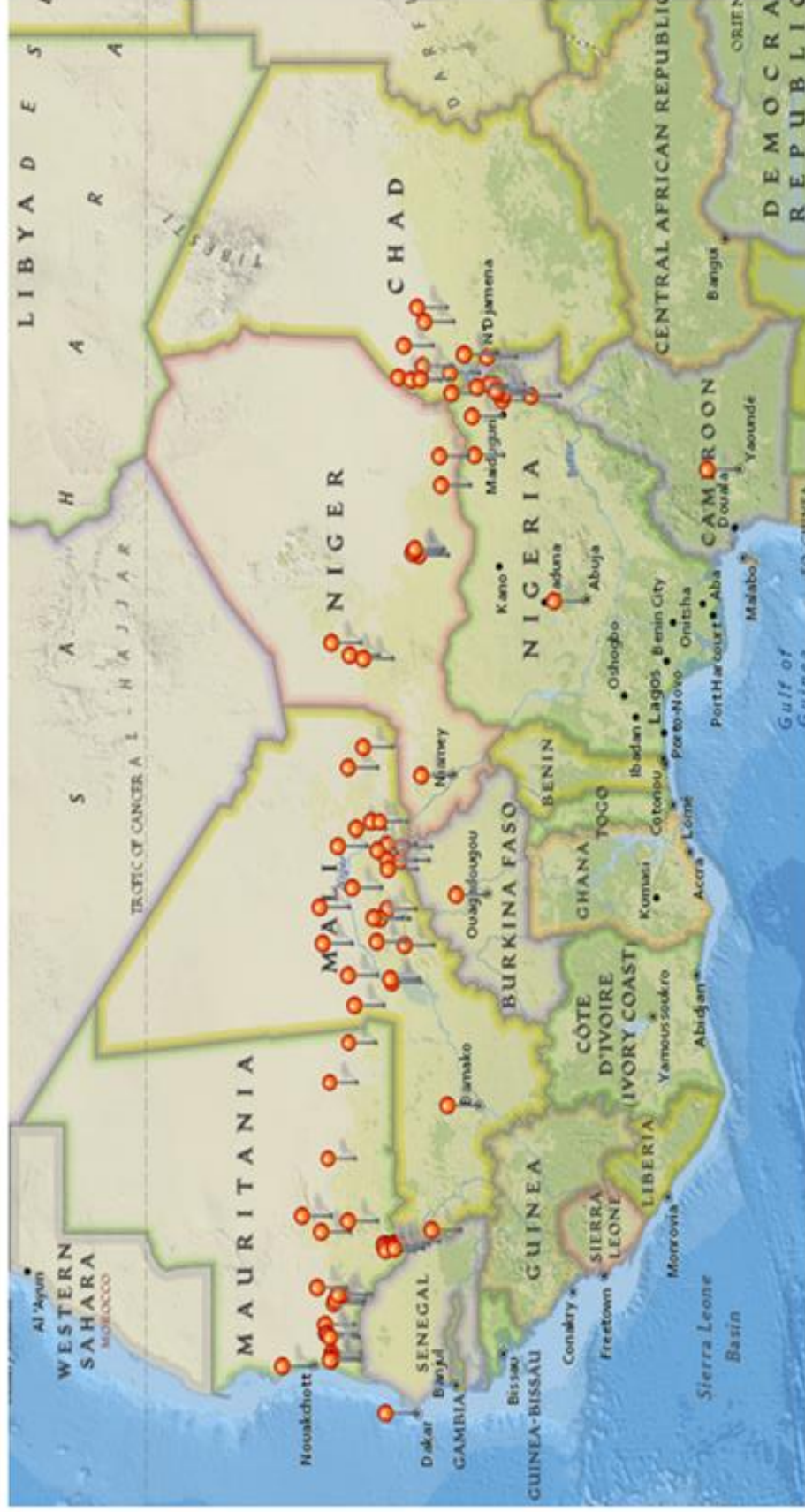
38 interviews  
Villages around 6 towns  
Languages: Mandara, Fulfulde, Chad Arabic, Kotoko, Kanuri, Gamargu, Podoko, Matal, Mafa & Kapsiki

**Mali** - 8 interviews  
8'000 km – 12 days

147 interviews  
Villages around 15 towns  
Languages: Fulfulde, Tamasheq, Hassaniya Arabic

**Mauritania** - 6 interviews  
2'500 km – 7 days

88 interviews  
Villages around 16 towns  
Languages: Pulaar, Hassaniya Arabic, Wolof



**Niger** - 9 interviews  
4'000 km – 6 days  
100 interviews

Villages around 12 towns  
Languages: Hausa, Tamasheq, Fulfulde

**Nigeria** - 9 interviews  
1'600 km – 7 days

120 interviews  
Villages around 8 towns  
Languages: English, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo

**Senegal** - 6 interviews  
2'800 km – 6 days

74 interviews  
20 villages  
Languages: Wolof, French

**Chad** - 9 interviews  
2'000 km – 6 days

71 interviews  
Villages around towns  
Languages: Chad Arabic, Kanembu, Buduma

**8 capital cities**  
8 focus groups

80 community leaders

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### Research managers

#### National report

**Isaïe DOUGNON**, professor of anthropology at the University of Bamako

#### Field survey

**Boukary SANGARÉ**, anthropologist and PhD candidate at Leiden University (Netherlands) and the University of Bamako

*To conduct this study, the team decided to work with the following persons:*

### Interviewers

We would like to specially thank our interviewers for completing their challenging task despite the high level of insecurity and vulnerability of the study areas.

**Lucie BELLO**, assistant at the University of Bamako and researcher at IMRAP [Institut malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix], the Malian institute for research and action for peace

**Nana Alassane TOURE**, fellow at ARGA [Alliance pour refonder la gouvernance en Afrique], a branch of the 'Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa' in Mali

**Alkassoum BARKA**, agricultural engineer at the Regional directorate of agriculture in Sikasso

**Modibo Galy Cissé**, anthropologist and assistant at the University of Bamako

**Ousmane AHIMIDOU**, general secretary of the municipality of Anderamboukane in Ménaka district

**Mohamed M. ABDOULAYE**, fellow at CFOGRAD [Centre de formation de gouvernance et de recherche action pour le développement], a training centre for governance, research and action for development in Timbuktu

**Bala KONÉ**, assistant in the water anthropology programme at the University of Bamako

**Hamidou Tiécoura MARIKO**, economist and professor at Lycée Danzié Koné in Koutiala

We also specially thank respondents and many others who supported interviewers during field work through language translation, village/community leaders, local government and state authorities. Last but not least, we also wish to thank the participants at the group session for their substantial and varied contributions.

### Thematic experts

**Boureima KANSAYE**, associate professor and researcher at the University of Bamako

**Ousmane KORNIO**, consultant and expert in conflict prevention and management

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## SUMMARY

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### Study areas

This study collecting perceptions about insecurity and violent extremism has been conducted in three border areas of Mali where insecurity and religious extremism have dramatically increased over the past decade. In Gao region, interviews were conducted in Gao, Ménaka, Andéramboukane, Ansongo, Ouattagouna and Labbezanga. In Mopti region, interviews were conducted in Mopti, Koro, Mondoro, Boulekessi, Boni and Douentza. And finally, in Timbuktu region, interviews were conducted in Timbuktu, Niafunké, Gourma Rharous and Gossi.

The populations of the three regions name starvation, unemployment, livestock theft, the circulation of small arms, poverty, disease, injustice, the crisis of traditional and state authority, corruption, and the continuing degradation of ecosystems as forms of insecurity which drive the young people who live in border regions to violent radicalism.

### State and citizenship, religion and identity

All of the people surveyed consider themselves to be Malian citizens and some say they have administrative documents (an identity card, a NINA biometric voting card). Islam is considered a local 'tradition.' State laws must reflect the principles of Islam, which is the religion of the majority. It must not defend secularism, which has been imported from outside the country.

### Inter-communal and cross-border dynamics

As for inter-communal and cross-border dynamics, the disadvantages highlighted by the respondents in the study are the following: the deterioration of nomad-sedentary, nomad-nomad and nomad-state relationships; the deterioration of relations between people of both sides of the border; and finally the proliferation of self-defense militias, some of whose members turn into bandits. The three regions share similar features with respect to the first three themes listed above, yet their situation differ with respect to radicalization processes. For cultural and historical reasons, Timbuktu faces less problems of radicalization than Gao and Mopti. The city of Timbuktu is seen as a racially and culturally diverse centre where Islamic scholars are well established and still exert significant moral influence on the youth.

### Radicalization: clues and process

In analyzing the perceptions of respondents, five drivers of radicalization can be identified: the opportunity to settle old accounts; access to weapons to protect oneself and one's property; the opportunity to find a job; a strategy for avoiding sharia (Islamic law); and appeal to young talibés (Quranic students) who want to, or have, become fanatics.

### The role of women and young people

Young people are seen as both the principal actors in, and victims of, the crisis. They are the most attracted to weapons. According to several testimonies, unemployed youth have been recruited by promises of regaining lost dignity, making easy profits or taking revenge. Some have been forced to join jihadist groups by pressure from their peers. Many have been attracted to the rebellion for money or promises of integration into the civil service as soon as the peace agreement is signed with the government in Bamako. As for women, they are seen as both the victims and the solution to violent extremism. The unrest due to rebellion and violent extremism has had the greatest impact on women. They have been raped, forced into marriages and abused in various ways. However, they are very active in the fight against violent extremism. They aim to bring back security and inter-communal cohesion by advising and raising awareness among youth and extremist religious leaders.

### Avenues for reflection

Addressing the immense challenge relating to insecurity in the border areas of Mali requires a new concept of insecurity which focuses on ordinary people; the local population.

For 50 years, security was based on the state and its coercive forces. However, taking into account the popular perceptions collected during this study leads to the following avenues for further reflection:

- Reinforce the intellectual and religious authority of the Imams and scholars of Timbuktu;
- Find a lasting solution to inter-ethnic conflict;
- Restore equality between groups;
- Create jobs for young people and women;
- Empower women as peacemakers;
- Bring the courts and traditional law closer together;
- Bring the security forces closer to the people;
- Strengthen and energize the process of inclusive decentralization.

## INTRODUCTION

From Bamako, eight interviewers travelled for 12 days in an 8,000km round trip conducting 147 interviews in the villages around 15 towns on the Malian borders with Niger (the Gao region), Burkina Faso (the areas of Gao, Timbuktu and Mopti) and Mauritania (the Timbuktu area). Ten of the sources identified during this survey were then invited to Bamako to meet and exchange their perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism in their respective border areas. The analysis of the results presented in this report has been substantiated with information collected in the field and contributions by national experts on the subject.

For economic, political, sociological, religious and health reasons, our three survey areas (Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu) were the best places in Mali to collect perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism.

### *Common points of the survey areas*

Porous borders facilitate all kinds of transactions and interactions between people in the four neighbouring countries in this area, namely, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. Cross-border trade in consumer goods and the weekly markets generate both temporary and permanent migration on both sides of the border (traders, Quranic teachers with their *talibés* [Quranic students], preachers etc.).

These cross-border advantages also have a negative side, which creates many forms of insecurity and violent extremism. For example, excessive speculation in certain commodities (millet, sorghum, meat etc.) may impoverish the majority of producers of one region while enriching a small minority of traders from another region in a neighbouring country. Alternatively, an epidemic (such as outbreaks of meningitis and avian flu coming from Burkina Faso) also affects neighbours across the border. Weak government is characteristic of the three border areas: indeed, some villages see the Prefect or Sub-Prefect only when they come to collect taxes. Banditry and organised crime are the most common forms of insecurity in these three regions: individuals or groups of criminals commit crimes and take refuge on the other side of the border; traders are attacked while in transit and stripped of their property; bandits fleeing across the border rob villages at night.

Finally, poor co-ordination between the border states enables criminals to move from one country to the other with virtual impunity. Local people perceive this mobility as the result of a 'deal' between criminals and law enforcement officers. A dignitary of the Gao region was blunt in his statement: *"A rich villain earns more respect from the police than an honest peasant"*.

### *Characteristics of each survey area*

While there are similarities, insecurity differs in the three regions due to factors which are more important in one area than another. Three main types of factors can be identified:

- Sociological: **Mopti and Gao** are two areas where inter-ethnic violence is frequent.
- Religious: Mopti and Gao have seen significant numbers of young people joining youth jihadist movements (MUJAO, Ansar Dine and AQIM).
- Political: People in Mopti and Gao also claim abuse by public officials, saying that they bear the brunt of injustice from government representatives.

Taken together, these three factors exacerbate insecurity at all levels of society. People in these two regions feel they are victims of state injustice and inter-ethnic conflict, which is also considered unjust. Many have procured weapons, by any means whatsoever, to protect themselves and take justice into their own hands.

In contrast, **Timbuktu** is the most peaceful region which benefits from a respected and influential religious establishment. Despite a surge in religious activity funded by certain Arab states over the past five decades and the presence of nomadic marabout communities radicalized by Wahhabi preachers who have invested in the building of mosques and the training of Imams, young people in Timbuktu have not rushed to join MUJAO, AQIM and Ansar Dine. These movements have had no success with them. The level of religious education in Timbuktu is quite high compared to that in Mopti and Gao. This religious education makes young people more resilient and explains why they have not let themselves be used by radicals. In short, a long history of the stable and flexible practice of Islam has allowed people to reject any form of religious radicalization.

Having said that, the people of Timbuktu know, and live with, insecurity as people do in the other two regions. This insecurity is linked to drug trafficking; the proliferation of weapons; the lack/inadequacy of employment for young people; as well as the lack/absence of security forces and government services in remote areas. These factors force people to engage in criminal activity in order to improve their living conditions.

The analysis of this unprecedented collection of perceptions from the population in the frontier zones of the Sahel who are most vulnerable to, and most concerned with, security is structured around four considerations which are indicative of the complexity of the subject of the study. In this report, the perceptions are first placed in the context of the state and citizenship, religion and identity (Section I), before being examined in relation to inter-communal relations and cross-border issues (Section II). These two initial stages contribute to the understanding of the process of radicalisation and its measurement (Section III), before the report puts into perspective the part played by women and young people (Section IV). The report concludes with avenues for further reflection. While this report is based on the results and observations in the eight national reports within the international study, it is not to be regarded as a substitute for them.

## STATE AND CITIZENSHIP, RELIGION AND IDENTITY

### Points to remember:

- All of the people surveyed consider themselves to be Malian citizens and some say they have administrative documents (an identity card, a NINA biometric voting card).
- All call for the stronger presence of security and government forces. The lack of protection by the military and state, or both, explains the rejection of the state/religious order and the shift to violent extremism.
- Islam is considered a local 'tradition' although our respondents recognise its Arabic origins.
- State laws must reflect the principles of Islam, which is the religion of the majority, and not defend secularism imported from outside the country.

*"Young people join the jihadist movements and other violent groups because they cannot join the Malian army nor pass the civil service entrance examination".*  
(Comment by a respondent, Ansongo)

Among the views of those interviewed in the study, ideas about the state, citizenship, religion and identity are more flexible than they seem at first glance.

### 1. The political context of insecurity

Insecurity in the Malian Sahel looks like 'déjà vu' – an eternal beginning, as in the myth of Sisyphus. Indeed, following the celebration in Timbuktu of the Flame of Peace on 27th March 1996 to end the five-year Tuareg rebellion (1990-1995), Mali embarked on several programmes of institutional reform in the areas of security and development. Between 1996 and 2007, these programmes led – with the help of the UN – to the organisation of several workshops on civil-military relations; arms proliferation; disarmament and the collection of illegal weapons; border control; demobilization and the integration of armed groups; and local and indigenous methods of conflict resolution<sup>1</sup>. All of these political programmes were preceded by numerous studies of the impact of insecurity on development, especially in the border areas of Mali which are regularly affected by rebellions, trafficking in arms and drugs.

Ten years later, during the Presidency of Amadou Toumani Touré, northern Mali went through an intense period of insecurity. Dissatisfied with the patronage system of power, in May 2006 some Tuareg soldiers in the Malian army ignited a new rebellion in the Kidal region. The leaders, Hassan Ag Fagaga and Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, both young officers, denounced discrimination in the military. In July 2006, new agreements (government-sponsored) were signed in Algiers. They contained some of the same promises as those contained in an earlier National Pact, particularly the creation of special units. However, the forming of a new constitution was – like earlier attempts – subject to delays and Ibrahim Ag Bahanga returned to his rebellion. Meanwhile, the Presidency created two militias, one Arab (under the orders of Abderrahmane Ould Meydou), the other Tuareg (controlled by Alhaji Ag Gamou). Designed to drive out the Bahanga insurgency, these two militias followed a common strategy: to raise forces presumed to be loyal to the Malian government forces by relying on loyal

<sup>1</sup> See the report from the Bamako Conference on disarmament, conflict prevention and development in West Africa held in Bamako from the 25th-29th November 1996, and the document *Code de conduite des forces armées du Mali*, October 1997.

subordinate communities in the north who were willing to work with Bamako in order to impact power relationships and temporarily neutralize armed fighters<sup>2</sup>.

In this context of vulnerability, Mali once more plunged into serious unrest in January 2012. This was even more destructive than previous periods mainly because of the involvement of Islamist groups who have roamed the border areas over the past decade. In January 2012, these groups (who had used Mali as their rear base since 1991) joined Tuareg rebels – most of whom had returned from Libya after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi – to occupy these zones and create insecurity on a scale never seen before.

As in previous crises, the international community came to assist Mali (Serval, MINUSMA, Barkhane, AU, ECOWAS etc.) and help find sustainable solutions to insecurity and violent extremism across the national territory. Since late 2012, several meetings and conferences have been held in Bamako and other Malian cities. The government, through its restructuring of the armed forces and security branches, is working to secure all border areas; adapt the policy of decentralization to the security needs of the population; reduce unemployment among young people and women (adding 100,000 jobs per year); and develop rural and urban infrastructure. To achieve these goals, several institutions have been created: the Ministry of National Reconciliation, the Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation, the Ministry of Northern Reconstruction, the Monitoring Committee of the Algiers Agreements etc.

## 2. Secular state – or secular society?

The term *laïcité* (secularism) has become common in French-speaking academic studies of the relationship between religion and politics. Meanwhile, the use of the English terms ‘secularism’ and ‘secular state’ is becoming more common in English-speaking academic studies addressing the same issues<sup>3</sup>. However, the definition of secularism must be separated from its dominant French social representation. There is a convenient formulation of this definition in the Universal Declaration on Secularism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, signed in 2005 by 248 academics from some 30 countries<sup>4</sup>. Its Article 4 defines secularism as “harmonization in various socio-historical circumstances, [with] three principles [...]: respect for freedom of conscience and its individual and group practice; autonomy of political and civil society from any particular religious or philosophical norms; non-discrimination, directly or by approach, towards human beings”<sup>5</sup>. According to this approach, secularism is “the prerogative of no culture, no nation, no continent. It can exist in circumstances where the term has not been traditionally used. Secularization processes have occurred or may occur in various cultures and civilizations, without necessarily being referred to as such” (article 7)<sup>6</sup>.

To understand how the border populations in northern Mali understand the relationship between the state and secularism, this extract from an interview with a respondent from Mopti is useful:

*“Mali is considered to be a secular state. In practice, the reality is quite different. Mali is a Muslim-majority country, but all the laws are designed for the benefit of the Christian minority. For example, if Muslims want to perform jumu’ah<sup>7</sup> in their*

<sup>2</sup> Chena Salim and Antonin Tisseron, “Rupture d’équilibres au Mali: Entre instabilité et recompositions”, *Afrique contemporaine*, 2013/1 n°245, p.77.

<sup>3</sup> G. Holder & M. Sow (dir), *L’Afrique des Laïcités : État, Religion et Pouvoirs au Sud du Sahara*, (Paris & Bamako: IRD & éditions Tombouctou, 2013), p.5.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Isambert (1980), an analysis which has been largely adopted, in particular by Koenig (2010).

<sup>5</sup> G. Holder and M. Sow (dir), 2013, p.5

<sup>6</sup> G. Holder and M. Sow (dir), 2013, p.5

<sup>7</sup> *Jumu’ah*, the Friday congregational prayer. In Mali, not all mosques have permission to celebrate *jumu’ah*.



*mosque, receiving permission to do so can be delayed for at least three years. On the other hand, to build a church, the State promptly grants permission. Secularism is not real in Mali because the laws adopted by Mali have been imposed on the country and they all go against Islam. These laws come to us from the West, which imposes its culture, while Islam comes to us from Arabia. The most striking example is the Family Code, which, in all its parts, is against Islam and its principles. Seven laws out of 10 dictated by the West to Mali contradict the precepts of Islam. The RFI<sup>8</sup> and other media have inflamed the situation by speaking of Islam as an obstacle to the development of women and children in Mali. France makes and unmakes our political system while it is the enemy of the High Islamic Council. The latter, according to the RFI, has taken Mali hostage because of the protests against the Family Code.”*

In this case, it's clear that secularism is perceived as an import, that is, a non-endogenous phenomenon which, therefore, has no sense in the local context. For this respondent, the West imposes its own form of secularism. It is illegitimate because it does not reflect the desire of the Muslim majority who wish to see secularism founded on Islam and ancestral traditions. His perception is that the state's opposition to Islam is not secularism, but Occidentalism. This citizen also sees a similarity between a secular state and a Christian state. He finds the European-inspired laws to be more favourable to the Christian minority than to the Muslim majority.

### 3. On being a citizen of a secure state

Among young people in border areas, wearing a military uniform and carrying a gun is a strong symbol of citizenship and community identity. This perception of being an official, or simply an employee of the state regardless of status, is an important dimension of citizenship. To understand the relationship between the state and citizenship in the three border areas, the chronic need which border people have for protection against all forms of insecurity must be taken into account. The state is seen as protective due to the presence of its armed and security forces on the borders. The sense of citizenship and belonging in Mali is, then, inseparable from the need to see security forces patrolling everywhere and neutralizing bandits whenever necessary. An old farmer from the town of Douentza evokes, in the interview extract below, how the return of the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA) has allowed economic activities to resume and reduced the feeling of fear:

*“The presence of FAMA<sup>9</sup> favours the resumption of activities and the gathering of people. The FAMA are very discreet but very effective! They have taken steps that are strictly adhered to by the people. For example, no motor vehicles can circulate after 19:30 in villages like Boni, Mondoro and Boulekessi. The level of disorder has decreased and the forces of order and security make a lot of effort. Increasingly, activities proceed peacefully. But zero risk does not exist; one must always pay attention. Today, on the security front, there is a lot of improvement. If we are not dead, it is because FAMA are back. It is thanks to FAMA that the weekly markets are busy again.”*

Another man interviewed in Ansongo said that the armed forces have such a positive image that the young people of Gao are joining the army en masse (whereas the opposite was true a few years ago):

*“Before, no one wanted to give his son to the army and the school. Refusal to join the army continued until recently. However, over the last few years, we have seen that*

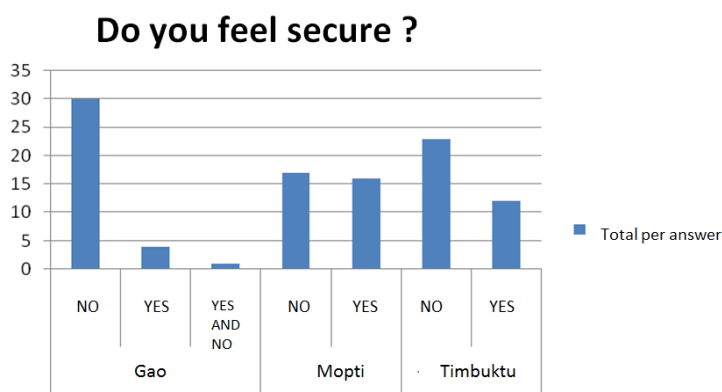
<sup>8</sup> Radio France Internationale.

<sup>9</sup> Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA).

*those who went into the army have become materially richer. So there is an economic reason for young people to join. In the years 1991-1996, many young people were recruited into the army and self-defence militias. In Ansongo, it was said that to be recruited, you had to have a weapon. This perception pushed many young people to get guns. However, the state has not enlisted even one-tenth of the armed youth. In reality, those who are recruited into the militias intend to defend Islam. They want to fight secularism. Many who were not recruited into the army have joined the illegal armed movements. They say that they are among the disappointed."*

Four key points are important in this extract. First, there is a widespread desire among young people to bear arms, whether as a member of the military, an ethnic or Islamic self-defence militia, or as a member of an illegal armed group. The second point concerns the reasons that drive them to pick up arms (as a respectable job, to defend religion, for self-defence, to engage in illegal trade). The third point is the link between the notion of citizenship among young people and the status conveyed by being an employee of the state, especially in the security field. Finally, there is the ambivalence in the notion of identity at the interface between Islam and the political space. Those who become soldiers with the intention of combating secularism are those who perceive their national identity through the prism of radical Islamism.

In this sense, the concept of citizenship is based on the fact that the individual has the feeling of being treated properly by the state. It is the lack of equality which creates the climate of mistrust between the state and its citizens. Indeed, the difficult relationship between the governed and those who govern them is largely due to the poor distribution of justice and the low return on taxation. People perceive the government as predatory: visible only to levy taxes and charges; absent when a rancher who has suffered livestock theft needs help. In short, the authorities have failed to create a climate of equality between the strong and the weak, the poor and the rich.



#### 4. Islam, foundation of social and political identity

Islam, ethnicity and territory are the three components of identity in the three border areas. People define themselves according to their Islamic branch (Sufism, Wahhabism, etc.), their ethnicity (Tuareg, Fulani, Songhai, etc.) and their territory (Gourma, Hausa, Hayre, desert, etc.), but also by their major occupation (people of the river, the land, trade, the Book [Quran]). This complex identity determines the dividing lines between armed groups, community organisations, and other forms of social and political grouping.

It can be said that the Malian state is the central point around which religion, citizenship and identity revolve. Whenever the central government is in crisis, there is a redefinition of identity and

citizenship: Who is Malian? Who is Azawadian? Who is Tuareg? Who is Arab? Who is Songhai? Who is slave, or noble? Who owns the land, and who does not? The current crisis has raised the problem of the division between the state's official secularism and the influence of Muslim organisations in the country's political management. That was the case during the 2012 elections when influential activists on the High Islamic Council and the Imams of the major mosques gave voting instructions to their followers.

By chance, it should be noted that all of the people interviewed in the study (35 in Gao, 32 in Mopti and 36 in Timbuktu – 103 people in total) are Muslim. This is not surprising, since national statistics say that the population of Mali is over 95% Muslim.

The influence of Islamic-based organisations is inseparable from the history of co-operation between cities in Mali and the Arab countries. Indeed, the development model in the three border areas is entirely shaped by Arab and international aid: agricultural infrastructure; roads; mosques; madrasas and schools; administrative buildings and hospitals. The installation of Salafist groups in these areas in the early 1990s, the intensity of their proselytization in the early 2000s and radicalization in 2012, are inseparable from the massive aid from Arab countries to the region following the droughts in the early 1970s. A teacher in Douentza said that aid is one of the roots of violent radicalism:

*“Currently, Mali is undergoing the consequences of this aid. Arab aid helps to convey the Wahhabi ideology. The Arabs build mosques, install salaried Imams and their deputies. The latter are commissioned to preach a hard line, intolerant Islam. They promptly dismiss the former Maliki system to implement a radical doctrine. It is with the help of the Arabs that we have seen a citizen – who once praised his house – build several villas after making his pilgrimage to Mecca. Arab aid is a real poison, a way to install an extremist network and radicalize the people. Arab henchmen are no closer to God than we are. The state must control how these people get rich overnight.”*

This perception of the impact of the way Wahhabi organisations use aid does not differ from analysis by local observers of the influence of Gaddafi's Libya on both Malian democratic regimes (those of Konaré and Amadou Toumani Touré). One consequence of the subordination of these two regimes to Gaddafi was the crumbling of security in Mali.

## INTER-COMMUNAL AND CROSS-BORDER DYNAMICS

### Points to remember:

- The advantages offered by the border, as highlighted by the respondents in the study, include:
  - Easy trade at a good price, including the trafficking of subsistence goods;
  - Easy circulation of individuals;
  - The win-win co-operation between villages and cities in the border area.
- The disadvantages are the following:
  - The deterioration of nomad-sedentary, nomad-nomad and nomad-state relationships;
  - The deterioration of relations between people of both sides of the border;
  - The proliferation of self-defence militias, some of whose members turn into bandits.
- Solutions should be sought to:
  - The challenge of managing access to resources, and especially grazing resources, and the response to cattle theft;
  - The inability to find justice whether through traditional law or positive law;
  - The challenge of effectively managing the border area in order to fight cronyism.

### 1. The border zones as spaces of human and material mobility

In Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu regions, farmers first focus on the advantages that proximity to the border gives, before describing its disadvantages. According to the people of Mopti, the benefits include fruitful exchange with neighbouring Burkina Faso. According to these same respondents, it is difficult for the inhabitants of the municipalities of Koro, Haïré (Boni) and Mondoro to trade with southern Mali, for they are too remote to make such trade profitable. Most products (flour, milk, fruits, vegetables, gasoline, etc.) come from Burkina Faso and Algeria. For example, it is the Burkinabé livestock traders who drive the cattle market in Boni. According to several respondents, it is the neighbouring countries which sustain the people of Boni. The borders between Mali and Burkina Faso are fully open and people circulate quietly. Merchants and herdsman (Fulani) make temporary stays on one side of the border or the other, according to the season<sup>10</sup>. The importance of cross-border trade has favoured the establishment of large numbers of Mossi people in Koro.

According to populations in Koro and Boni, the proximity of Burkina Faso is an advantage in that trade is successful between the two populations. They pay a good price in this country for what they do not have at home. For example, vegetables and fruits come from Burkina Faso at competitive prices. On the other hand, it is the Malian Seno (a sandy area) which supplies grain to Burkina Faso, specifically millet. It is also from Mali that the Burkinabé procure products such as milk powder and flour which Malians import from Algeria. This means there is a relation of interdependence between the two populations. Trade as it occurs during the weekly markets has promoted the mixing of Malian and Burkinabé people.

Since the end of the last war between the two countries (1985), they consider themselves as 'two lungs of the same body'. Thus, tensions between the two countries seem to have been definitively resolved. There are cross-border development projects financed by the European Union. Officials

<sup>10</sup> B. Sangaré & M. De Bruijn, 2015, *Rapport d'étude sur la prévention et la gestion des conflits dans les communautés pastorales du Sahel, Mali, Niger et Burkina Faso*, a study commissioned by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's pastoral project in the Sahel, p.95.

from both countries say that Mali and Burkina Faso are one country. During the recent crisis in Mali, Burkina Faso hosted many Malians. The border people of Mali benefit from the Burkina Faso social services, especially healthcare. Pregnant women go there for prenatal consultations and even delivery.

In the region of Timbuktu, one of the advantages of the proximity of the border relates to the importance of smuggling from Mauritania and Algeria. This smuggling enables people to access food products (oil, milk, tea, canned food etc.). In addition to food products, other products available at low prices include carpets, bed covers, veils, etc. According to a respondent working as an NGO officer in Timbuktu, smuggling means a shortfall for the state, but a real boon for the people's survival. He acknowledged that the crisis has been a blow for subsistence traffic. Another respondent, a resident of Rharous, said that smuggling has not decreased but that the type of trafficked goods has changed:

*"The smuggling of food products is stagnant while that of weapons, tobacco and drugs is rising. Traffickers are responsible for insecurity on certain routes and areas of the region."*

All respondents said that the 2012 crisis has caused a food shortage in the region of Timbuktu. According to them, the people receive very few necessities from southern Mali and the capital (Bamako). If the benefits from the proximity of the borders are enticing, there are also destabilizing disadvantages in terms of politics and security.

## **2. Borders as areas of competition and inter-ethnic disputes**

*"Rebellion and jihadism have found fertile ground. At the base are disputes between chiefdoms, the division between ethnic groups, and political problems like the coup".*  
(Comment by a dignitary of Timbuktu)

The stories extracted from the survey show that insecurity is inseparable from the geographic conditions in the border regions: the low rainfall, recurrent famine, and rising temperatures. These natural factors have disrupted the economy and relations between nomads and sedentary people, and made traditional law less effective. Ethnic violence has become chronic. This investigation shows that ethnic violence grows precipitously in times of rebellion. Added to this is the misinterpretation of decentralization by local elected officials. Some people perceive community management as a matter for the clans. They feel that elected officials are likely to exclude people who did not vote for them from any plans for development projects. Another significant element is the distrust people have towards public authorities, especially the courts.

Today, the sense of insecurity in the three study areas comes more frequently from concerns about everyday life than from fear of Islamist groups or illegal trade. Insecurity about employment for the young, livestock theft, the state justice system, the weakness of the administration, and the environment – these are the forms that insecurity take today among the border populations. People know instinctively what security means in their areas: they want to be protected from constant fear, abuse of public administration, famine, disease, livestock theft and destruction of their fields, organised crime and bloody reprisals. They want to be protected against sudden rebellions which upset social relations in the village, the city, the workplace, the ethnic community, and even on the national scale.

## 2.1 Intra-border conflicts between pastoralists and the sedentary

Intra-border conflicts are generally inter-ethnic conflicts between different communities within a given boundary. This is the case in relation to the sedentary Dogon and the Fulani herders; the sedentary Songhai and the Tuareg nomads. The head of the village of Grimari in Mopti area recounts the (often bloody) causes of these conflicts:

*“To speak of inter-communal relations, I’ll start with the history of conflict between the Fulani and the Dogon, between the villages of Linkaïna and Mondoro. When the MNLA occupied the area in 2012, there was a Dogon attack on the Fulani village of Sari. It was a slaughter. The Fulani traditional Chiefs asked the nomadic Fulani community to take their destiny in their own hands. The solution was to buy weapons from the MNLA. The survivors fled to seek help from the people of the village of Boni, who collected 200,000 CFA francs to get involved. Their conclusion was that the conflict was not ethnic, but between villages. A few months later, MUJAO took control of the area. When the government returned, after the operation to reconquer the areas occupied led by Serval and the Malian army, the Malian armed forces disarmed the young Fulani. More than 266 people have been disarmed. The method was violent. Some people were ransomed. The Dogon were less armed.”*

This extract highlights the difference that border people make between inter-ethnic conflict and inter-village conflict. This important nuance, made by the Fulani wisemen of Boni, excluded the revenge requested by survivors from the village of Sari (located on the border of Burkina Faso). Taking account of this difference avoided inter-ethnic conflict in the area, the consequences of which could have been extremely serious.

The head of the village of Boulekessi is much more explicit in his account of inter-communal conflict:

*“Inter-ethnic relations are determined by the problem of access to pastoral resources. Water projects invest in the sedentary villages. When the Fulani want to water their animals, the Dogon set hard conditions. They ask them to wait until night to water. When the Fulani want to dig their own wells, they are prevented by the Dogon, under the pretext that the Fulani have no land nearby.”*

According to an elected Dogon official of the town Mondoro, the Fulani-Dogon conflict comes from the fact that the Fulani do as they please. For them, nothing is more important than their livestock. They do not negotiate with the Dogon about the management of the area. They do not care about violating prohibitions and rules established by the sedentary people. They believe that the rules of the village do not pertain to the herders of the bush.

As between the Fulani and the Dogon, there are conflicts between the Tuareg and the Songhai. There was a recent case between these latter two communities in the village of Tinassamede, south of Gao. A Tuareg group attacked a Songhai camp on the night of 16th-17th August 2015. It is said that there were seven deaths (four Tuareg and three Songhai). According to security sources, the attack on the Songhai camp was in retaliation for alleged livestock theft.

## 2.2 Cross-border conflicts between nomads

Cross-border conflicts are conflicts between communities located on both sides of the border. This is the case in the conflict between the Tuareg of Mali and the Fulani of Niger, and between the Tuareg of Niger and the Fulani of Mali. The main cause of these conflicts is livestock theft, as the village head of Boulekessi explains:



*“The Tuareg of Niger come to steal the cattle of the Fulani of Mali. An owner out looking for his herd recognised his cattle and alerted Mali’s security forces but they did nothing to restore his livestock. In 2011, a Tuareg took away four of my oxen. I took him to the commander of the gendarmerie brigade in Hombori. Arriving at the brigade, the thief began to insult the Brigadier for having convened him and the Brigadier didn’t even react. Faced with a thief who is stronger than the police, I have not been successful. My oxen were never returned to me. The real problem we have with the people from Niger is livestock theft. I think the Malian government does not do its job. There is no justice. This is why theft is common. One day I was threatened by a Tuareg MNLA activist. This man killed my uncle and his son. Then he came to tell me not to cultivate the field that we have always cultivated. I went to Bamako to see a highly-placed Fulani who introduced me to the Minister of Defence. I presented three proposals to the Minister for the security of my village against Tuareg attacks: send a military battalion; authorize the establishment of a self-defence militia; or enable everyone in the village to arm himself. The Minister said that he could not accept any of these three security proposals. I left Bamako and went to San (Segou region) and, from there, I went home to my village. When I arrived, my nephew came to me crying. He said that the Tuaregs had come on motorcycles, tied him up and raped his wife in front of him. The next day, I went to Gossi, a town controlled by MUJAO. I called the leading Fulani in Bamako to tell him that I was joining the MUJAO in order to have the means to defend my village against Tuareg attacks. I went to see a representative of MUJAO, based in Gao, to ask him to protect my village and he sent me to their representative in Hombori. This man asked for 500,000 CFA francs. I immediately gave him the money. He went to my village with only four armed men. In total, he spent only 48 hours in my village. The day of his departure, I received threats. I called the head of MUJAO to inform him of what his men did, despite the amount I had paid. Following my complaint, the head of MUJAO recruited young people from my village. They were taken to Gao. They were to receive training and then come back home to protect my village. They were six young men. While they did the training, I went to buy weapons from the people of the MNLA. Unfortunately, the Serval operation ended our campaign. My nephew was killed in Gao during the Serval bombing. Three of his comrades were able to return to the village.”*

This story shows how inter-communal conflict fuels religious radicalism and rebellion, and leads to the arming of the young, both nomad and sedentary. The crucial point is the government’s minor role in these types of conflicts. The state’s inaction in these times of crisis is the main cause of the proliferation of self-defence militias.

A dignitary of Ménaka thinks that the state and the international community must speak truth to criminals in these conflicts. According to him, it is the Toleebé Fulani of Niger who create many of the inter-ethnic conflicts in Ménaka. In essence, he says:

*“I want the Fulani of Mali to know that it is the Toleebé Fulani of Niger who create all the problems between the two sides of the Niger-Mali border. These Toleebé come to Mali, work their way into villages, families and clans, and create a wedge between the people of these sites. To solve these inter-ethnic conflicts, we must focus on endogenous solutions. If we continue having meetings without the populations concerned, nothing will work. These problems have deep roots. We could talk for a month without exhausting the subject. All the border communities say they experience these problems. We must work to restore confidence. Mali needs justice!”*

*True justice. What happened recently in the north is too serious. The Whites<sup>11</sup> finance conferences and distribute per diems, but that is not the solution. This money is useless. The Whites must support justice, try the criminals and compensate the victims. Without justice, the millions distributed in conferences will not build peace among the peoples of the two borders.”*

From this story, it is clear that the border populations are intermingled. Otherwise, how could the Toleebé Fulani of Niger be involved in inter-ethnic relations in Mali? Another key point of this story is the need for justice in the management of inter-communal conflict. This respondent identifies the fact that donors and international stakeholders propose reconciliation without justice. Conferences, he says, cannot buy peace.

Another Ménaka dignitary says that, despite climate change, the Fulani of Niger do not want to change their way of moving about Malian territory and that this is the real cause of the deadly clashes. In essence, he says:

*“Ménaka is a pastoral area where Malian Tuaregs live with the M’Bororos Fulani of Niger. Before semi-sedentarization in 1984, Niger was an important area for agriculture. When the farmers of Niger sow their crops, the Fulani can no longer graze their cattle across the border area of Niger. So, they are expelled from Niger and even Nigeria. After the 1984 drought, all of the villages around Ménaka also began to grow grains. You know, no one can handle a Nigerien Fulani herder: what interests him, what he defends, is the path his cow wants to take. For their part, the Tuareg herders no longer want the Fulani of Niger to graze in the Ménaka. The State of Niger armed its Fulani so they can defend the routes of their herds on Malian territory. I think Niger has a policy to occupy the grazing land between the two borders. Often, we pursue the Fulani of Niger to the border. And there, the Nigerien army stops us and treats us like armed bandits. So far, there is no peaceful coexistence between the Tuareg of Mali and the Fulani of Niger. Since 1984, there have been several cases of inter-ethnic bloodshed. It was the 2012 rebellion that ousted the Fulani who had taken refuge in Niger.”*

Another dignitary of Gao shares the same perception of the role of the Nigerien Fulani in the exacerbation of cross-border conflicts:

*“In the Gao region, insecurity is one of our problems. Even before the crisis of 2012, this was the most insecure region of Mali, with livestock theft and armed robbery. Conflicts between different communities have made many victims. One cause is unemployment that drives young people to indulge in livestock theft. The weapons purchased to create vigilante militias turn against the people themselves. Other communities from Niger who come to pasture in the Gao region have taken up arms against us. Then, they accuse other groups of being responsible for crimes that they themselves have committed. There are many allegations of this kind. The entire Gao border strip with Niger is the most insecure area of Mali.”*

These stories show the complexity of inter-ethnic relations on both sides of the border. The violence and death these conflicts cause makes their resolution difficult at the community level. It requires a more effective policy of border management. It is not possible to simply say the borders are inventions of colonialism and, so, the people who have always been there are right to ignore them.

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<sup>11</sup> Western stakeholders.

In this case it is clear that, although economic systems have changed since 1984, the old ways of life persist. The clash between the nomadic and agricultural systems has begun again.

Cross-border conflicts continue between Mauritania and Timbuktu region, between the Sahel region of Burkina Faso and Mopti region. According to a dignitary of Timbuktu, conflict between Malian and Mauritanian people is linked to the control of trafficking routes and grazing areas. According to him, the circle of Léré experiences inter-ethnic violence because Mauritanian nomads overuse the pastures in Mali. These Mauritanians are also good at illegal trade and thrive in it, although they are hounded by the Malian customs officers. Despite numerous meetings between the border villages to find lasting solutions, the answers are elusive, for the real responsibilities are not attributed.

### 3. Internal and external solutions to inter-ethnic conflicts

For the people of Gao and Mopti, the most urgent problem is that of pastoral resources, and the solution implies equality between sedentary and nomadic people in relation to access to resources. Another solution is to implement a common policy addressing all the components of society on an equal footing. According to the farmers, local elected officials discriminate against villages and hamlets which have not voted for them. In inter-ethnic conflicts, the state, justice system and Mayors take sides in relation to a village or community. It is the political and non-judicial management of the conflicts that aggravates tensions between communities.

Another problem is brokering in conflicts. Some people make conflict management a very lucrative business and consequently escalate conflict in order to derive the maximum profit from both sides. The role of these brokers must be limited. Mayors defend projects in which they have a personal interest and neglect projects in the interests of communities with which they have political disputes. Local people must be involved in the implementation of development projects. For now, the Mayors do as they wish and they defend the programmes which relate to their constituents.

The majority of the people interviewed in the border areas say that solutions must be found to the crisis in the state's authority. The state must imperatively stop leaving its people exposed to the dangers of the borders.

Finally, there is the critical issue of justice. Given the ineffectiveness of traditional law, groups in conflict turn to positive law. But positive law is, ultimately, more corrupt than traditional law. That is why challenging judicial decisions, and clashes resulting from this, exacerbate unrest. During the occupation of jihadist groups in 2012, some people who were frustrated by traditional and positive law called on Islamic law. Many ethnic conflicts supposed to have been mismanaged by state justice were the subject of an appeal to the MUJAO in 2012, in the regions of Mopti and Gao. The inefficiency of the two types of law in these regions creates clashes. Indeed, traditional law is ineffective in coping with the new economic challenges and complexity associated with violent conflict. On the other hand, positive law, inherited from colonization, is seen as favouring the wealthy or those who are politically stronger. The situation is not sustainable.

## RADICALIZATION: CLUES AND PROCESS

### Points to remember:

- In analyzing the perceptions of respondents, five drivers of radicalization can be identified:
  - The opportunity to settle old accounts;
  - Access to weapons to protect oneself and one's property;
  - The opportunity to find a job;
  - A strategy for avoiding *sharia* (Islamic law);
  - Appeal to young *talibés* (Quranic students) who want to, or have, become fanatics.
- According to these five reasons, people distinguish two types of radicals: the 'jihadists of God' and the 'jihadists of money'.
- Timbuktu is distinguished by its population's resistance to the jihadists, thanks to its level of Islamic instruction; the authority of the great Imams; the openness of its young people; and its urbanity and racial/cultural cosmopolitanism.

*"Gao is the most radicalized border region because it shelters the dormant Wahhabi cells. This is the opposite of Timbuktu, the cradle of a racial and cultural mix. Here, the great Islamic scholars are listened to. Therefore, the young people of Timbuktu have not developed jihadist culture". (Comment by the Mayor of Gossi)*

### 1. The 'jihadists of God'

The following testimony (collected in a village in Mopti region) offers some insight into why people make a distinction between the 'jihadists of God', who are considered 'good' jihadists, and the 'jihadists of money', who are considered to be 'bad':

*"The jihadists did not force the people of our community. They left us without hurting anyone. It was bandits who took advantage of their presence to cause harm to innocents. These jihadists are of different nationalities: Pakistani, Algerian, Saharawi, etc. We didn't notice any difference between them and the other Muslim leaders. They took care of people in danger, assisted the needy and preached Islam as it should be. Everything in their behaviour showed that they were good Muslims."*

The 'jihadists of God' are those who are perceived as applying Islamic law to the letter, while the 'jihadists of money' are those who use jihadism to enrich themselves and settle scores with their supposed, or actual, enemies. The testimony of a respondent from Gao illustrates the distinction between the 'good' and 'bad' very well:

*"In 2012, the rebellion and jihadism came to us. Long before that, there were Wahhabi sleeper cells, there were preachers of all stripes that roamed the villages. They asked young people to spend 30 or 40 days to follow them preaching (Dawa). They set up militias. They asked people to contribute to the maintenance of these fanatical militias. When the MNLA occupied the area, its fighters destroyed everything that symbolized the state. They then attacked the property of families by removing everything: cars, bikes, silver, doors, and windows. We formed a crisis committee to go see the leaders of the MNLA in Gao so that they would stop plundering the population. When MUJAO chased the MNLA from the main cities of the region, people welcomed them with joy and gladness. I know a village that gave*

40 youth to MUJAO. MUJAO immediately established an Islamic court to try criminals and those who did not comply with Islamic law. It was at Ansongo that the first hand was amputated by MUJAO. Some thieves joined MUJAO to avoid the Islamic court. The Saharawis were the leaders of MUJAO. They are married to Arabs from Gao and Timbuktu. The children born of such unions were extremely violent. They lay mines everywhere. Everywhere, you see car wrecks. Women have been abused and raped."

From this story, the difference between the 'jihadists of God' and the 'jihadists of money' is clear. The first are those who have installed a tribunal to prosecute thieves and rapists. The latter are those who use jihad to steal and rape. The MNLA, which is the armed political wing of the rebellion, is seen as a criminal movement. The MUJAO<sup>12</sup>, however, is seen as the liberator of the people from the control of the MNLA. The main point is the presence, before the rebellion, of organised fanatical militias roaming the whole area. Nearly 80% of the people interviewed in the study believe that violent extremism is a phenomenon which comes from outside, as shown in the table below:

Perception of the internal or external origins of violent extremism		
Town	Does the phenomenon of violent extremism come from outside or does it develop inside the country?	Total by answer
Gao	Comes from inside	13
	Comes from outside	22
Mopti	Comes from inside	5
	Comes from outside	27
Timbuktu	Comes from inside	3
	Comes from outside	33
Total		103

In the story below, another respondent explains how he perceives the 'good' and 'bad' jihadists:

"They say that all those who have integrated the jihadist groups are northerners. This is because they have been left to themselves. It is very easy to solve the problem of radicalism: with development. Projects come and go without solving any problem. They say that there are major projects in the north, but this is a smokescreen. Those running the projects are in Bamako and, with each project, they say, 'Structure! Structure!' So, all the money goes to the structures created by the state to manage the projects. As soon as there is work for our children who have been to school, radicalism will decline. For now, every job recruitment is subject to discrimination. Given this injustice, young people in Gao region are vulnerable to Wahhabi fundamentalism. They feel like outcasts. For some, jihad is an opportunity to take revenge on society. Therefore, some go into it so as to loot people and steal cattle. Another reason for the spread of fundamentalism is the loss of authority of the elders in Gao region. Hierarchies have been overturned. The wealthy families work with drug and weapons dealers. It is in this situation of generalised injustice that MUJAO installed its Islamic court. It gave more satisfaction than 50 years of Malian justice! When a citizen has problems, the Malian gendarmes ask him for money to take care of his problem. Many people who have joined radical groups have done so because they are unhappy with Malian justice. The jihadist leaders have taken advantage of

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note here that the perceptions of radicalism, in general, and of MUJAO, in particular, are diametrically opposed. The objective of this study is not to decide who is wrong or right.

*the social, economic and legal conditions in which people live to recruit massively. They have exploited the Fulani by saying that they are victims of the Tuaregs and the Malian state, etc. They set people against each other.”*

In this story, several reasons – economic, cultural and social – are given to explain why young people rush into religious fundamentalism. While many young people are unemployed, others get rich with impunity from the sale of drugs and arms. While the MUJAO renders its justice, government representatives sell justice, both to the victims and their tormentors. It should be noted that the story clearly shows the two categories of jihadists: the ‘good’ ones who implement the justice of MUJAO, and the ‘bad’ ones who seek revenge on society or to enrich themselves illegally.

Several of the respondents in the study perceive injustice as the main cause of the new radicalism, as shown by this testimony collected in Boni, Mopti region:

*“For the young people of Boni, unemployment is an invitation to jihadism. But it cannot be the reason everyone joins. Jihadism has supporters who live around Boni. They are uneducated youth. These young people imitate each other. Jihadism is for them a kind of fashion, where the young man must demonstrate his bravery, his courage. This explains why shepherds carry weapons and shoot indiscriminately. Nepotism and cronyism make it so that the most deserving are not recruited, and they become potential recruits for jihadism. To be heard, the unemployed person seeks justice through religious radicalism. Young people without diplomas are recruited and inserted into public service because they have a ‘long arm’ as we say, and those who do not, are left to themselves. This is a destabilizing factor, for the victims of injustice may be drawn to the armed bandits. Myself, I will turn to radicalism if my unemployed situation persists. From the beginning of the crisis to now, only one child of Boni has joined jihadism but, around Boni, they are dozens. On the other hand, the supporters are in the hundreds or even thousands.”*

This story shows that, in addition to carrying a weapon being a new lifestyle for young Fulani herdsmen, radicalism is seen as the logical consequence of state injustice and the difficulty of finding one’s place through employment. This quote also shows the limits of the ‘jihadism of God’.

## 2. The ‘jihadists of money’ and social success

Many of the respondents in the study think that some jihadists are greedy for money and use violence to line their pockets. Some of the jihadists have looted services and banks to give themselves the means. A member of the crisis committee of the town of Douentza is straightforward on this point:

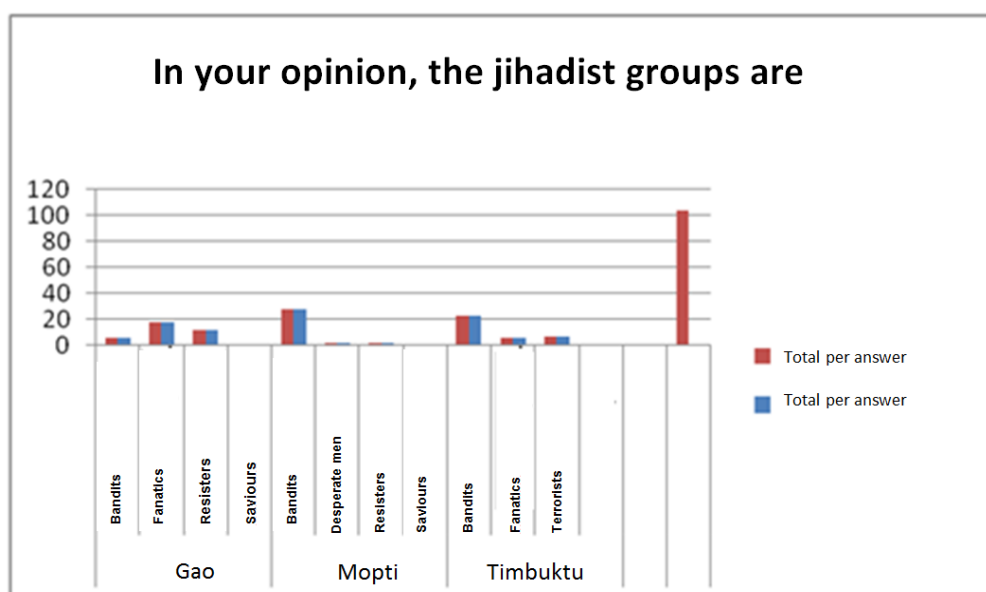
*“There is no difference between MNLA and MUJAO. Only the name changes. Otherwise, they have the same behaviour. Both have promoted the rise of Arab and Tuareg traders in our city, sometimes even non-Malian traders. Islam has never allowed violence against another Muslim. However, they call themselves Muslims; but all have raped, killed and even slaughtered men like animals. A Muslim cannot bleed the blood of another Muslim, let alone kill him. They are bandits, criminals, not Muslims. At the height of jihadist domination, they banned women from meeting with men, and beat many people because of it. In fact, it is the endless rebellion that has favoured the spread of such banditry.”*

Another resident of Douentza agrees that jihadists are bad people:



*“The jihadist occupation was characterized by violence against citizens and the rape of our girls and women. We never saw the jihadis pray or fast. They were violent occupants and rapists. They flog people for false accusations and do not respect parents or the elderly. They do not even respect the dead, they are all crazy, these people. They forced us to dress differently, not to listen to music. In fact, they teach nothing new to people because most of them do not know much about Islam. They taught nothing to anyone. They adopted radical ideas from somewhere else because they thought they could benefit.”*

As this story and others show, the ‘jihadists of money’ are armed people who rape, loot and settle personal accounts in the name of Islam (see chart below). They like to apply the rules of *sharia* to others, but do everything possible to avoid having it applied to themselves.



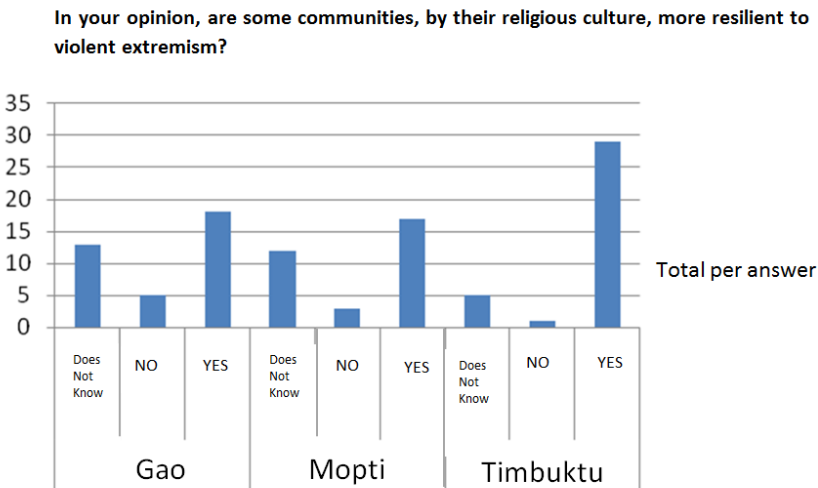
### 3. Timbuktu’s cultural resistance to Islamic extremism

In comparison with the other two regions, Timbuktu is an exception in relation to the radicalization process. A local resident explains the city’s resistance to violent extremism:

*“The young people of our region are better educated. They are more knowledgeable about the Quran. They travel and are more mobile. They form economic networks inside and outside of Mali. The great Imams and scholars have convinced young people not to join the radical groups who roam the north. Only a few young people from the circles of Léré and Niafunké have been seduced into radicalism. In addition to the rural youth, there are Tuareg Marabout tribes that have followed the jihadists. Urban youth do not follow the radical movements. Another reason for Timbuktu’s resistance is the fact that before the jihadists took control of the region, many householders evacuated their families to neighbouring countries or southern Mali.”*

It is clear here that the factors of resistance to violent extremism in the Timbuktu region are: (1) the population’s high level of Islamic education; (2) the authority of the great Imams; (3) the open-mindedness of the young; (4) the urbanity and racial/cultural cosmopolitanism which characterizes the region. According to some testimonies, some Imams of the town of Niafunké joined the MNLA,

but they could not convince traditional leaders and young people to follow them. The majority of the respondents think the main motivation of those who engage in violent extremism is material. They consider that they are people who practice Islam wrongly and are motivated by the mercantilist and lucrative aspects of religious radicalism. The radicals encourage the young by promising them heaven and earth. In Timbuktu region, it is mostly the nomad communities – uneducated in Muslim doctrines – who have taken up the ideologies of violent radicalism.



Overall, the people of Timbuktu perceive certain religious groups and sects as indications of violent fundamentalism. It is Wahhabism that is often seen as an example of radicalization leaning towards violent fundamentalism.

The people in Timbuktu region are predominantly Maliki. They consider the Maliki rite to be more flexible and open to outside ideas. They make a difference between the Maliki rite and others, specifically Wahhabism – which follows the Hanbali rite – known for its rigour. The Wahhabis are perceived as people who want to turn poor countries into a laboratory for violent Islam. Others stress the difference between Malekism and the other rites of Islam. According to them, the difference is of historical origin, since the Maliki practices are Quranic while most of the other rites are linked to cultural expressions heavily influenced by ideologies and special interests.

Beyond the areas of study

This study relates to perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism in the border areas, but this focus should not prevent an examination of other areas of Mali where the situation is comparable.

Around Gao, for example, in the valley of the River Niger, a dozen villages have adhered since the 1970s to a Saudi-born Islamic sect, the *waharidji*, which has greatly contributed to the installation of jihadist groups like MUJAO, Ansar Dine or even AQIM. The local population followed these groups when they fled Operation Serval in 2013. These communities have taken *sharia* as a method for social management, despite repression from the central state, and form a conducive environment for possible sleeper cells.

As this study shows, since the 1990s Islam in Gao and Kidal has been influenced by a Wahhabi sect, also of Saudi origin. This sect was imported by Imams from the region who studied in Medina and Mecca. Elsewhere in the region, many mosques and madrasas have been built with funding from the Gulf States, thus contributing to the expansion of this orthodox Islam. The most famous mosque in Gao, known as the ‘Kuwait’ mosque, is exemplary in this respect. It has moulded its community to a new form of Islam, which some like to call Wahhabism, and which is different from that which was well known in the region since time immemorial. This

new form of Islam has a lot of influence on moral and societal behavior. According to respondents, this community is well prepared for potential radicalization.

On the other hand, the Jamaat Tabligh (referred to as “Dawa” in Mali) movement of Pakistani origin, which is close to Salafism, has also evolved during its several decades in Mali. There was a particular boom in the early 2000s, especially in the region of Gao and Kidal.

Beyond Gao, other regions in the interior of Mali are subject to these orthodox streams of Islam, such as the cities of Mopti and Sikasso, and, particularly, the capital Bamako. The same popularity for Wahhabism – a label that the sect’s supporters have denied in favour of Sunnism – can be observed: the attraction this sect has on the younger generation is real and widespread, with the potential that this orthodoxy may be recovered by violent extremist groups that thrive on young graduates with neither jobs nor prospects.

The only region that has remained on the sidelines of these new religious streams in Mali is Timbuktu, which has been the historic capital of the Islamic Brotherhood (Tijaniya and Qadiriya) since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Islamic Brotherhood in Gao thus differs from that in Timbuktu. Yet, a good number of inhabitants from Timbuktu region have joined violent extremist groups. This proves that the problem does not only lie with this form of Islam rapidly described as ‘Wahhabi’.

Finally, it is appropriate to highlight the investigation which took place in the Ménaka district, because the Fulani and Tuareg communities there are neither strongly Islamic nor especially devout. Their nomadic way of life does not allow them to live their faith in a very ‘orthodox’ manner.

This increase in radical movements, which prevails over most of the territory and not solely at the borders, is likely to destabilize relations between the Muslim brotherhoods in Mali. In face of such increase, there is a need for the regulation of various aspects of religious life and the assistance to faith-based organisations in the creation of mosques or madrasas. Sermons in relation to the state should also be regulated, provided the state remains secular. However, the results of the study reveal that there is a gap between the concept of secularism and the broad depths that Islam covers socially in Mali. It seems necessary to prevent the potential impact of this nursery of young preachers who are ready for radical engagement, whether for economic gain or for revenge against other ethnic groups, as described in this study.

**Abdelkader Sidibé, head of mission for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) in Bamako**

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### **Points to remember:**

- Women and young people are the two groups of people most affected by insecurity and violent radicalism. They are also seen as the sociological foundation on which to build local missions for peace and security.
- The role of women as effective counsellors for children and husbands has been stressed. This role can be structured through consultation. Some also publicly preach for a tolerant form of Islam.
- Youth unemployment, and the injustice young people feel because of this, can lead them to join armed groups. In addition, inter-generational tensions and/or misunderstandings must be defused.

### **1. Women as victims and solutions**

The unrest due to rebellion and violent extremism has had the greatest impact on women. They have been raped, forced into marriages and abused in various ways. They have lost their freedom under the jihadist occupation. This dire situation has forced them to move to urban centres in Mali and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The family responsibilities of women have become even greater since widespread unrest began. Many of these women have lost their husbands and children. A woman from Mopti described the role of women in times of crisis in these terms:

*“During the occupation, the men were no longer working. It is we, the women, who took care of our families with the little we found.”*

Violent extremism has had economic and psychological effects on women, as described by a respondent from Boni. She said there have been miscarriages due to fear: a pregnant woman lost her baby after hearing gunshots during an attack on a nearby village. Female traders in Douentza have suffered the consequences of the crisis. They have been forced to stop going to the markets in surrounding villages. Even when they would keep going to the markets, their products would not sell because customers had stopped coming. It was mainly small trade that stopped. Women can spend a whole day walking to the markets without anyone asking them what they have to sell. She adds that, before the crisis, women's associations benefited from projects in the area of cattle fattening, small ruminant breeding, market gardening, etc. With the unrest, this aid disappeared as development workers left and, finally, projects were suspended. Another source of suffering is the enrollment of their children in radicalism. According to her, many of their children have joined MUJAO. Some of them have since become bandits. This is how she describes her own experience:

*“During the crisis, at the market in Boni, the rebels stopped my child and wanted to take him. I opposed and asked them to kill me instead of my child. The population of Boni came running and they released him.”*

It is in this situation of terror that a woman in Boni died in childbirth. Women have also suffered from rumours about attacks, crimes and other forms of insecurity. Wild rumours abound everywhere and women are the most affected by these rumours.

However, women are not only victims. With their status as mothers, wives and sisters, they have a mission to bring peace. As such, they can advise and raise awareness among men to encourage them to disarm. A respondent from Timbuktu described the role of women in the fight against violent extremism. According to her, in the search for peace, women actively educate all social strata:

*“Women are the beginning and the end of every social process in the north. In our society, women enjoy much respect. The only disadvantage women have in the social process is that they are slow in action and reaction.”*

A female preacher in Timbuktu explains how women’s organisations can raise awareness for peace better than men:

*“After the armed groups left, we created an organisation of Muslim women in the town of Timbuktu. We conduct sermons in every neighbourhood to convey the message of tolerant Islam to women. We also mediate between women who left their husbands during the crisis to take refuge in other countries out of fear.”*

In the village of Boni (Mopti), on the 8th March and 25th May 2015 (days dedicated to women), the women got together, with their refugee sisters and local authorities. They organized a cultural event in order to learn more about each other and to give advice about living together. For this event, 34 villages of the township were represented, each by at least two women. The women’s President gave a speech about social cohesion and other events were held. According to the women who attended these meetings, there was peace in their country before the jihadists came and imposed *sharia* and deprived them of their hard-won freedom.

The women who attended these meetings urged all women who have children and relatives in the armed groups to do everything possible to bring them back home and to reason. They asked the government to give women more opportunities to act to promote security; and to be represented at all meetings concerning radicalism and insecurity in general. According to these same women, the family belongs to the woman because it is she who takes care of the children and domestic work. They urged every woman in the country to convince their husband, son, brother, uncle, father etc. to surrender, if they are armed. They believe that women can play that role with the utmost discretion. The night is perceived by women as the most appropriate time to persuade men.

In addition to raising the awareness of men and encourage them to leave radical groups, women must handle the issue of stolen goods that their children bring home. They must convince young people that not all means are appropriate to acquire material goods. A woman in Douentza explains why this is necessary:

*“Women must stop consuming whatever their children bring home. They must always ask where these things come from, because they are often stolen. Otherwise, their children will do it again, thinking that any means is acceptable for getting rich. If a young person has robbed one day, another day he will hurt the owner and, the third time, he will kill him to steal his property.”*

Women have a clear role to play in the fight against livestock theft and banditry, for it is their own children who do these things. They must take a moral approach to the goods their children bring home. This role is relatively new in the range of peacekeeping missions which women have set for themselves.

## 2. Young people – actors in, and victims of, violent radicalism

Young people are seen as both the principal actors in, and victims of, the crisis. They are the most attracted to weapons. According to several testimonies, unemployed young people have been recruited by promises of regaining lost dignity, making easy profits or taking revenge. Some have been forced by pressure from their peers or joined as a result of ignorance. Many have been attracted to the rebellion for money or promises of integration into the civil service as soon as the peace agreement is signed with the government in Bamako. Indeed, for the young Tuaregs who engage in rebellion, post-conflict dividends are the greatest incentives among the spoils.

In addition, young people are seen as the main victims of underdevelopment, chronic unemployment and injustices in the labour market. A young unemployed man in Boni made no secret of the fact that he may well engage in radicalism if his unemployed situation persists:

*“Nepotism and cronyism mean that the most deserving are not hired by the civil service and development projects. People excluded from this system become potential recruits for the jihadist movements and rebellion. To be heard, the unemployed person seeks justice by radicalizing. Individuals without diplomas are recruited and incorporated into the state system because they are well connected in the government. This injustice is a cause of radicalization and unrest because victims are potentially attracted to and then recruited by armed gangs. Myself, I will join radical groups if I stay unemployed much longer.”*

It is clear that young people, which are victims of the injustice of the system of recruitment and of prolonged unemployment, are easy prey for gangs (these involved in rebellion and jihadism, networks of livestock thieves, etc.). They also become the most significant actors in trafficking. A respondent supports this view:

*“Economically, they lived by farming, but since the drought, they have converted to trafficking.”*

This conversion is a security threat because of the flow of arms, as shown in this testimony collected in Boni:

*“Until the 2012 crisis, people saw nothing wrong in trafficking. Now we understand that not everyone should have weapons. The number of gun owners and the reported number of arms manufacturers are so high that it is frightening. In the long run, arms trafficking will make the country collapse. Some have taken up arms to protect themselves from the chaos created by unrest, while others take advantage of the situation to rob people of their property. This is why so many young people have engaged in trafficking. The situation is very complex because complicities are two-fold. Some inform the army; others, the bandits. We are afraid to denounce the bandits because of possible reprisals.”*

Several people in Mopti region believe that trafficking is part of everyday life for anyone living on the border, and that it can be both for good or evil. The deteriorating security situation has meant that many people wonder about its true nature. The trafficking of arms, drugs, basic necessities and other products (such as medicine) has always taken place in the border areas, and took place long before the crisis.



Among the Jelgooji Fulani of Burkina Faso, cattle theft was, until recently, a rite of passage that every boy had to perform to attain manhood and have the right to marry. A respondent from Ansongo describes this ancient rite:

*“When the Fulani wants to marry, he must go into the bush and kill four large oxen he has chosen from the herd of another. The meat thus obtained will feed the guests at his wedding. This ritual theft is a sign of bravery and courage, proof that the ‘fiancé-thief’ has reached the status of a mature man. Once the young man has undergone this rite of passage, he is allowed to wear a turban and trousers. From what was a ritual practice, cattle rustling has become in recent years an illegal means for personal enrichment. It has taken a criminal nature and become the profession of many young people in the border areas who have formed networks. When some members of the network are caught red-handed and imprisoned, the others steal other animals to pay the judge and get their release.”*

This story reveals how a single social layer can transform ancestral customs to accumulate material goods, thus creating fear and insecurity in society. Overall, public opinion says that young people are responsible for the theft of camels, cattle and sheep, and also for the residual banditry rampant in all the border areas. They carry out trafficking of all kinds, on one side of the border or the other.

Young people have not only transformed ritual theft into criminal theft, but they also challenge other customs, such as birthright, by becoming radical militants. Generational conflicts are important factors which encourage young people to take up the ideals of violent radicalism. For young people, birthright is archaic in a rapidly modernizing society and economy. According to them, the elders want too many rights over the young, without assuming their own duties towards them. Young people no longer accept their seniors imposing social values and practices on them which serve to defend the selfish interests of seniors at the expense of the young. This modernist position – young people in opposition to the prerogatives of their elders – is certainly strongly influenced by the international media, as a respondent from Timbuktu explains:

*“The influence of the media on societal values has been clearly recognised by our youth. Indeed, the media are listened to and watched by a large number of people, especially the young. The media, inevitably, have an impact on local practices and reflections. Because these media influence societal values, they can also be used to prevent violence and encourage peace and forgiveness.”*

The dual role of the media is clearly stated. They convey values that disrupt society; but they can, simultaneously, be used to cultivate a culture of peace, especially among young people. The generation gap is also mentioned by a woman from the village of Douentza (Mopti):

*“Nowadays, children do not respect customs. Social values are trampled by many young people. In general, young people today do not respect their elders. Those born after independence do not respect anyone. These are children of the new generation. Western education has taken over from traditions.”*

Others focus on the role of young people in the protection of villages in times of insecurity, in self-defence militias and other surveillance groups. An inhabitant of the village of Boni had this to say about the role of young people in reducing insecurity:

*“Young people are considered as the country’s future. They must get organised to secure the villages and protect their elders. They should report any behaviour harmful to the development and the interests of their communities. Young people can also*

*give the right information to people. They are the hope of tomorrow; they have to take over from the old. In the villages of Dinangourou, Mondoro, Boni and even Douentza, young people have organised themselves into brigades for night patrols.”*

From the discussions on the role of women and young people, it is clear that any solution to unrest and violent extremism cannot be found without them.

## AVENUES FOR REFLECTION

### *Towards new governance of borders to increase security*

*“The fight against bad governance, corruption, nepotism and injustice is part of the fight against jihadism”. (Comment by a respondent, Gao)*

As this report shows, addressing the immense challenge relating to insecurity in the border areas of Mali requires a new concept of insecurity which could focus on ordinary people; the local population. For 50 years, security was based on the state and its coercive forces. Since 2012, it has focused on border management between the countries of the G5 and the neutralization of extremists. Despite all of these regional policies, the disappointing results speak for themselves.

The populations of the three regions name starvation, unemployment, livestock theft, the circulation of small arms, poverty, disease, injustice, the crisis of traditional and state authority, corruption, and the continuing degradation of ecosystems as forms of insecurity which drive young people to violent radicalism. Most of the radicals and their supporters also name these forms of human insecurity in explaining the radicalization process in the border regions.

Based on the perceptions collected from the people interviewed and observations in the field, supported by analysis and discussions with various relevant stakeholders, the following avenues for further reflection emerge:

#### **Avenue for reflection 1: Reinforce the intellectual and religious authority of the Imams and scholars of Timbuktu**

Their skills and experience could be spread to all of the border regions of Mali.

#### **Avenue for reflection 2: Find a lasting solution to inter-ethnic conflict**

Restore ecosystems and the joint management of resources, including pastoral resources.

#### **Avenue for reflection 3: Restore equality between groups**

This work could be conducted within communities and between the generations and sexes. Surveys show that too many layers of society fail to make the most of their potential, due to social and cultural constraints. Equality could defuse active and latent tensions in the border areas.

#### **Avenue for reflection 4: Create jobs for young people**

This mainly concerns economic opportunities for young people and for women.

#### **Avenue for reflection 5: Empower women as peacemakers**

Women feel that the hardships they have experienced during the jihadist and MNLA occupation give them legitimacy in the campaign to promote peace.

#### **Avenue for reflection 6: Bring the courts and traditional law closer together**

Popular perceptions reveal that the malfunction of traditional law does not mean it has disappeared, nor that it is without appeal. Notwithstanding the primacy of positive law in the management of conflicts, judges could also take into account some features of traditional law. Several communities still refer to traditional law in conflicts relating to land and chiefdoms. In their view, the fact that the judges cling exclusively to positive law in these cases is a way to harm communities and hide the corruption of the courts.

#### **Avenue for reflection 7: Bring the security forces closer to the people**

The security forces need to react with speed and efficiency when coming to the rescue of endangered populations (for example, in cases of livestock theft or murder).

#### **Avenue for reflection 8: Strengthen and energize the process of inclusive decentralization**

Decentralisation was designed to be the backbone of Malian democracy. Its main purpose is to bring people closer to their leaders, to dispel misunderstandings and prejudices through local management by the people themselves through their local representatives. The first municipal elections were held in 1999 in all 703 rural and urban municipalities. However, nearly 20 years after its launch, decentralization continues to be perceived by people as a policy which allows some elected officials to abuse their power, discriminating against and excluding village communities who did not vote for them. This new form of discriminatory management of municipal affairs is a source of insecurity in the towns of Mopti and Gao.

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