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The role of Islam in the entrenchment of Salafism in sub- Saharan Africa

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Abstract:

Over the past years, jihadism has dramatically expanded, leading governments and security forces to analyze the contributing factors to its proliferation in order to counter and prevent such threat. At the same time, the Muslim population has been victimized, prevailing a lack of knowledge in society related to the actual links between Islam and terrorism. However, the importance of the context and the geographical environment of countries in the entrenchment and expansion of terrorism relegates Islam to a circumstantial factor instrumentalized by jihadi groups. The analysis of this phenomenon in non-majoritarian Muslim African countries – such as Nigeria, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – offers a pragmatic approach to the causes of the establishment and consolidation of Salafism, as well as an understanding of the real nexus among Islam and terrorism.

Keywords:

Salafism, jihadist terrorism, takfirism, Islam, Africa

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El papel del islam en el arraigo del salafismo en África subsahariana

Resumen:

En los últimos años, el yihadismo se ha expandido de manera inconmensurable, llevando a los gobiernos y a las fuerzas de seguridad a analizar los factores que contribuyen a su proliferación con el fin de contrarrestar y prevenir la amenaza. Al mismo tiempo, se ha producido una victimización de la población musulmana, existiendo un desconocimiento por parte de la sociedad acerca de los vínculos reales entre el islam y el terrorismo. Sin embargo, la importancia del contexto y del entorno geográfico de los países en el arraigo del salafismo y la expansión del terrorismo, relega al islam a un factor circunstancial instrumentalizado por los grupos yihadistas. El análisis del fenómeno terrorista en países africanos donde no existe una mayoría musulmana – en este caso Nigeria, Mozambique y República Democrática del Congo – ofrece una visión pragmática sobre las causas del establecimiento y consolidación de la ideología salafista y de las organizaciones yihadistas, así como del nexo existente entre islam y terrorismo.

Palabras clave:

Salafismo, terrorismo yihadista, takfirismo, islam, África.

Introduction

With the aim of breaking the nexus in western public imagination between Islam and terrorism, and in order to understand the jihadist phenomenon to prevent future conflict scenarios and address the already existing ones, the present study intends to evaluate the underlying factors to the consolidation of the Salafi ideology. Hereafter, three non-majoritarian Muslim African countries which have been severely affected by jihadist terrorism will be studied.

The purpose of using Nigeria, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as a basis for this investigation is the need of emphasizing the interdependence of factors contributing to the existence and entrenchment of Salafism in African societies, regardless of the role that Islam may have in them. In this way, the importance of the socio-structural and psycho-social context in the expansion of jihadism to new territories and the need of tackling related problems in order to restrain the spread of Salafism will be highlighted. Rather than performing an in-depth study of the history and reality of terrorism in each country, the common factors and the differences between the three countries will be analyzed in order to understand their importance in relation to the entrenchment and expansion of Salafism.

Religious terrorism

Among the four waves of modern terrorism established by Rapoport¹, the fourth wave is characterised by its religious motivations and aspirations. Indeed, different organizations unrelated to Islam have risen during this period but, undoubtedly, Islam has become one of its main exponents. The advent of this phase was fostered by a series of events which eventually brightened the spirits of Islamic societies against the secularization process promoted during the colonial era². At first, different violent

¹ RAPOPORT, David. Las cuatro oleadas del terror insurgente y el 11 de septiembre. En Reinares, F. y Elorza, A. (Eds). "El nuevo terrorismo islamista. Del 11-S al 11-M", Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 2004, pp.45-74.

² These events are the Irani revolution headed by Ayatollah Homeini and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both in 1979, despite the different branches of Islam advocated in each event (Shiism and Sunnism respectively).

insurgent organizations shaped what we know today as jihadist terrorism, along with a shift in the idea of jihad³ towards an offensive and violent one.

Even though Sunni jihadism, to which this paper will refer, originated in the context of the Soviet-Afghan war, it rapidly acquired international connotations. Thus, local governments ceased to be the main threat to Al-Qaida, which started targeting foreign troops and interests, particularly those of the United States, not only at a local but at an international level. After the decentralization process of jihadist terrorism, which counts with numerous cells and operative networks around the world, and in the past decade, with the lone wolf figure thanks to the propaganda in public media, social networks and the organizations' own media, jihadism has become one of the major threats to national security.

Against this asymmetric threat, which intends to spread fear among the population, a Manichean discourse has been bolstered identifying Islam – a heterogenic movement – with a tendency towards both radicalism and jihadist terrorism, contributing to the criminalization of the Muslim religion. This phenomenon has especially taken place in western societies, albeit it has also occurred in certain African countries where Islam is part of an amalgam of religious minorities.

Jihadism, based on the Salafi ideological doctrine, represents one among the numerous interpretations inside the Islamic movement. It specifically relies on a fundamentalist and literal interpretation of the hadiths or traditions of the Prophet, and of the holy book, the Koran. Nevertheless, such literalism is also arbitrary since the verses by which terrorism is justified are in many cases incomplete or out of context⁴. Considering the above, the religiousness advocated by terrorist groups can be questioned, particularly taking into account the victimization suffered by the Muslim population. The latter has

³ The term jihad means “effort” referring to an internal fight (major jihad) or to the conversion to Islam of non-believers or Muslims who “do not comply with what is stipulated” or the subjective view of what this means (minor jihad).

GONZÁLEZ HERNÁNDEZ, Manuel. Definiendo términos: fundamentalismo, salafismo, sufismo, islamismo, wahabismo. Opinion Paper IEEE 88/2015, p.4. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2015/DIEEEO88-Antiislamismo_MGlezHdez.pdf (accessed: 25.09.2020)

⁴ ALTUNA GALÁN, Sergio. “Literalidad coránica a medida: las aleyas incompletas de al-Qaeda en el Magreb Islámico”, Real Instituto Elcano, no.54, May 2019, available at: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/> (accessed: 25.10.2020)

become one of the main targets of jihadist terrorism, justified by the takfirist idea by which the killing of a Muslim who is considered to be an apostate – that is, someone whose vision of Islam is opposite to that of Salafism or much less rigorous – is an acceptable action.

In the past years, such victimization has increased in Africa while the continent has become the perfect setting for the proliferation of terrorist groups which have strengthened their level of violence and their operational capability. Despite the Sahel region is currently the epicenter of terrorism in Africa⁵, the terrorist threat has exponentially expanded towards other parts of the continent. Therefore, the recent focus of attention on the Sahel appears logical, as it has become a truly adhered border. However, the study of the strategies, *modus operandi* and structures of terrorist groups in different parts of Africa will allow to forecast the future path of the jihadist movement at a regional and even global scope.

Islam and terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa

It is essential to study Islam's theoretical basis in order to understand the reality of terrorism in the chosen societies. As it has been previously stressed, Salafism refers to the ideological base of jihadism. It is the most radical and orthodox doctrine of the Sunni branch of Islam, which is characterized by its intransigence, fundamentalism and by the acceptance and justification of resorting to violence. Drawing from this premise and, ideally, under a caliphate governed under Islamic law or *sharia*, the objective of Salafism is the return to the early days of Islam, erasing any tradition acquired after Prophet Muhammad's demise⁶.

There are four schools of law inside the Sunni branch which interpret Koranic texts: *Hanbaliyya*, *Malikiyya*, *Shafiyya* and *Hanafiyya*. The prevalence of a particular school of law can serve as an indicator of the possibilities of the Salafi ideology to permeate

⁵ The enclaves of Liptako-Gourma, which is the Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso border triangle, and of Lake Chad, also a border zone between Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon, are severely affected by terrorism.

⁶ GONZÁLEZ HERNÁNDEZ, Manuel. Definiendo términos: fundamentalismo, salafismo, sufismo, islamismo, wahabismo. Opinion paper IEEE 88/2015, p.6. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2015/DIEEEO88-Antiislamismo_MGlezHdez.pdf (accessed: 25.09.2020)

societies, albeit it is not always decisive. This is because other important factors may contribute both to the process of adherence to radical ideas of certain groups and to the establishment of terrorist organisations in a given area.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the influence exerted by the *Hanbaliyya* school of law, “from which Salafism would descend”⁷, while at the same time the threat posed by jihadism has expanded towards many parts of Africa. Salafi jihadist terrorism affects, to a greater or lesser extent, 23 countries around the continent according to the map created by the American Enterprise Institute⁸. This has been enabled by proselytism activities translated into the investment by jihadi groups in the creation of schools and mosques, and the placement of imams and religious leaders who uphold their rigorous vision. Thus, a radical and violent in nature vision of Islam has spread, especially among young people, who constitute a large proportion of the total population of these countries.

However, the predominant Muslim school of law in Africa is *Malikiyya*⁹, whose interpretations of Islamic verses and laws are more moderate and liberal than those of other schools. In addition, Sufism predominates in west Africa, defined as “a popular form of Islam which incorporates local practices in the places where it has settled”, fostering a climate of syncretism, understanding and empathy between the different traditions, religions and branches of Islam – as both Sunnis and Shia Muslims can be Sufis – promoting a peaceful coexistence between them¹⁰. The practice of interiorization, meditation and spirituality characteristic of the *umma* or Muslim community in Africa makes it “scarcely prone to the use of armed force to increase its wide community”¹¹. Nevertheless, despite the existence of a Sufi Islam in many parts of

⁷ ALBARES BUENO, José Manuel. Impacto y transformaciones del islam en África Occidental. Cuaderno de Estrategia no. 163, 2013, p. 254. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4473780> (accessed: 3.10.2020) ISSN: 1697-6924

⁸ ESTELLE, Emily. “The US is unprepared for Africa’s growing terror threat”, American Enterprise Institute, September 2020, available at <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/the-us-is-unprepared-for-africas-growing-terror-threat/> (accessed: 28.09.20)

⁹ BRAMON, Dolors. “Una introducción al islam: religión, historia y cultura”, Editorial Crítica, Barcelona, 2002, p.174. ISBN: 84-8432-358-7.

¹⁰ ALBARES BUENO, José Manuel. Impacto y transformaciones del islam en África Occidental. Cuaderno de Estrategia no. 163, 2013, p. 254. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4473780> (accessed: 3.10.2020) ISSN: 1697-6924

¹¹ INIESTA, Ferrán. “El islam del África Negra”, Edicions Bellaterra, Barcelona, 2009, p.18. ISBN: 978-84-

the continent, in these countries there are traditions, whether they are Islamic or not, that can be violent. Such traditions “are not a cure against jihadism, but rather a condition of its possibility”¹², for they could contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to violent radicalization and, ultimately, to the social acceptance of such violence.

Geographical analysis of jihadist activity

Trends in jihadist terrorism in the three countries under study prove the large capacity and expandability available to terrorist groups, who have managed to establish in many countries despite the differences in the percentage of Muslim population. Below is a geographical analysis of the relationship between jihadist activity and the Muslim population in each country, specifically studying the organizations’ *modus operandi* and the location of attacks.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is a Muslim minority based in the northeast of the country¹³ that, together with the minority living in the capital, Kinshasa, would make up between 10 and 15% of the total population. After analyzing data collected by the International Observatory for Terrorism Studies (OIET in Spanish), between January and September 2020, the latter month included, 5 attacks were perpetrated in Ituri and 9 in North Kivu, most of them in the town of Beni, which are bordering provinces located in the northeast of the country¹⁴. While there are numerous militias and armed groups, the active jihadi groups in the area are the Allied Democratic Forces and the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ADF and ISCAP). The ADF, of

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¹² ALBARES BUENO, José Manuel. Impacto y transformaciones del islam en África Occidental. Cuaderno de Estrategia no. 163, 2013, p. 255. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4473780> (accessed: 3.10.2020) ISSN: 1697-6924

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEC), “Ficha País República Democrática del Congo”, Office of Diplomatic Information, July 2020, available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Documents/FichasPais/CONGOKINSHASA_FICHA%20PAIS.pdf (accessed: 1.10.2020)

¹⁴ International Observatory for Terrorism Studies (OIET). “Atentados Yihadistas 2020”, October 2020, available at: <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/category/atentados-yihadistas-2020/> (accessed: 1.10.2020)

Ugandan origin, is known to have settled in the mountainous DRC-Uganda border¹⁵, mostly Muslim.

In the case of Nigeria, while about half of the population professes Christianity, the other 50% is believed to be Muslim¹⁶, inhabiting the country's northern provinces. Out of the 140 attacks committed by the various terrorist groups, mainly Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), 99 were committed in Borno State, in the northeast of the country, and the rest were perpetrated in other northern locations. In addition, in the Lake Chad area, a border enclave between Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, Boko Haram has established its training camps and sanctuaries because of the difficulty of access for security forces. Furthermore, the Sambisa forest in northeastern Nigeria, near the border with Cameroon, is a strategic point of its operational activity due to border porosity and vast land space, which also limits the performance capability of security forces.

In Mozambique, with 18% of Muslim population, jihadist terrorism has exponentially increased in recent years. Both the Ansar al-Sunna group and the aforementioned Daesh subsidiary, ISCAP, focus their activity on the province of Cabo Delgado, in the northernmost region, where Islam is a majority¹⁷. According to data collected, 23 out of the 24 attacks between January and September 2020 took place in Cabo Delgado, while the only remaining one occurred in the town of Manica, in the west of the country. It is known that terrorist groups, including Ansar al-Sunna, have established in Tanzania's Great Lakes region to carry out training activities¹⁸. Moreover, due to the coastal and strategic location of Cabo Delgado, terrorist groups obtain financing from

¹⁵ UN Security Council. "Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)", December 2016, available at: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1533/materials/summaries/entity/allied-democratic-forces-%28adf%29> (accessed 9.11.2020)

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEC) "Ficha País Nigeria", Office of Diplomatic Information, March 2019, available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/nigeria_ficha%20pais.pdf (accessed 1.10.2020)

¹⁷ European Parliament. "Situación humanitaria en Mozambique - Resolución del Parlamento Europeo", September 2020, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0235_ES.pdf (accessed 2.11.2020)

¹⁸ BUKARTI, Bulama y MUNASINGHE, Sandun. "The Mozambique conflict and deteriorating security situation", Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, June 2020, p.6, available at: <https://institute.global/policy/mozambique-conflict-and-deteriorating-security-situation> (accessed 25.10.2020)

the smuggling of raw materials such as timber or ivory to Africa and Asia through the port.

Based on the correlation explained above, the Muslim population in these countries is victimized by jihadi groups, since the Muslim-majoritarian areas have become the main target against which attacks are perpetrated. In addition, these areas have also become the main setting where they have established their logistical and operational basis as well as their proselytizing activities. This victimization is not only perceived by the fact that terrorist attacks are committed in areas where the Muslim population is settled, but by the frequency of attacks on civilians. As shown in the graph below, village raids are the predominant type of attack in the DRC and Mozambique, while in Nigeria it is a common type of attack although not the most popular one.

Civilian victimization in Muslim-majoritarian areas in figures (January-September 2020)

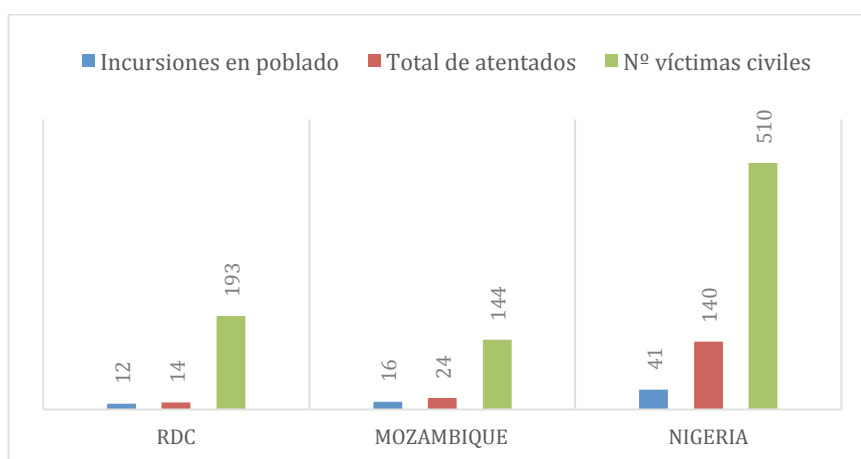


Figure 1. Source: compilation based on data collected by the OIET¹⁹.

It is also worth noting the large number of civilian casualties in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique compared to the number of members of the security forces killed, which may respond to the fact that these groups are at an early stage compared to those operating in Nigeria. That is, organizations that were created not long ago or those with less operational capacity than Boko Haram, for instance – such as Ansar al-Sunna in Mozambique, which emerged in 2017, and the

¹⁹ International Observatory for Terrorism Studies (OIET). “Atentados Yihadistas 2020”, October 2020, available at: <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/category/atentados-yihadistas-2020/> (accessed 1.10.2020)

Allied Democratic Forces in DRC, which emerged in 1995 but was traditionally engaged in other types of collective violence²⁰ – focus their limited resources on targeting civilians with three main objectives. These objectives include the recruitment of new members, which may be achieved using violence; the funding of their activities through the looting of villages; and enabling a response by security forces. In this way, the tactic of attrition against security forces and the ensuing repression in response to terrorist violence, which ends up affecting the Muslim population established in the areas, delegitimize state power.

In Nigeria, however, despite the number of civilian casualties caused by terrorist attacks is much higher than in Mozambique and DRC, village raids, even though they are still frequent, are fewer in number than attacks perpetrated against security forces. The causes for this may involve the increased operational, financial and logistical capacity to carry out attacks against security forces, or the growing loss of social support due to the indiscriminate and brutality employed by groups, such as Boko Haram²¹, coupled with the fact that “the Muslim population not only does not adhere to this radicalization of religion, but rejects it”²². It is precisely this characteristic indiscriminate in the *modus operandi* that is linked to the takfirist vision which considers moderate Muslims as infidels, causing divisions within the organization. In contrast, ISWAP’s most recurrent *modus operandi* in Nigeria – which presents a lower level of activity compared to Boko Haram – is the fight against security forces²³, as is the case of Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in DRC and Mozambique. Indeed, the fact that they can continue to expand also has to do with cooperation between various organizations linked both to terrorism and organized crime.

The establishment of terrorist organizations in these areas responds to several factors that will be analyzed below, but the geographical environment also provides

²⁰ NANTULYA, Paul. “The Ever-Adaptive Allied Democratic Forces Insurgency”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, February 2019, available at: <https://www.africacenter.org/spotlight/the-ever-adaptive-allied-democratic-forces-insurgency/> (accessed 29.11.2020)

²¹ BOHM, Vera. “Boko Haram in 2020”, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, August 2020, p. 16, available at: <https://www.ict.org.il/images/Boko%20Haram%20in%202020.pdf> (accessed 4.11.2020)

²² ALBARES BUENO, José Manuel. Impacto y transformaciones del islam en África Occidental. Cuaderno de Estrategia no.163, 2013, p. 255, available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4473780> (accessed 2.10.2020) ISSN: 1697-6924

²³ BOHM, Vera. “Boko Haram in 2020”, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, August 2020, p. 6, available at: <https://www.ict.org.il/images/Boko%20Haram%20in%202020.pdf> (accessed 4.11.2020)

opportunities for this as well as for increasing their operability and funding. Borders, especially in the case of geographically adverse areas for police surveillance such as natural parks, deserts, jungles or lakes, are an opportunity for terrorist and organized crime groups. These places allow the creation of training camps or simply serve as a sanctuary and refuge for terrorist groups.

The sociopolitical context as an opportunity

According to the United Nations Development Programme, regarding the Human Development Index, Nigeria is ranked 158th, DRC is ranked 179th and Mozambique 180th out of the 189 countries under review²⁴. Paradoxically, these three countries are rich in natural resources. Nigeria has vast hydrocarbon reserves; Mozambique, and in particular the province of Cabo Delgado, has one of the largest natural gas reserves in the world; and the DRC is rich in gold, coltan and diamond mining areas, specifically located in North and South Kivu²⁵. However, despite all this wealth, the population in the areas of study experiences serious economic difficulties, paving the way for terrorist groups to recruit new members in exchange for economic incentives, coupled with high levels of population density, as is the case of Nigeria and DRC. Therefore, there are socio-structural factors, i.e., related to demography, economy, politics and society, which provide opportunities for the establishment and consolidation of terrorist groups in the three case studies.

In Mozambique, Ansar al-Sunna “exploits Islam and local grievances”, taking into account that Cabo Delgado is one of the poorest provinces in the country, for recruitment and indoctrination purposes²⁶. The pauperization and marginalization

²⁴ CONCEIÇÃO, Pedro. “Panorama General - Informe sobre desarrollo humano 2019”, United Nations Development Programme, 2019, pp.27-28, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2019_overview_-_spanish.pdf (accessed 10.11.2020)

²⁵ LÁZARO, Bustince. “El actual saqueo sistemático de los recursos africanos delata la más cruel esclavitud jamás impuesta sobre los pueblos de África”, África Fundación Sur, January 2019, available at: www.africafundacion.org/IMG/pdf/el_actual_saqueo_sistemico_de_los_recursos_africanos.pdf (accessed 15.11.2020)

²⁶ BUKARTI, Bulama. y MUNASINGHE, Sandun. “The Mozambique conflict and deteriorating security situation”, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, June 2020, p.5, available at: <https://institute.global/policy/mozambique-conflict-and-deteriorating-security-situation> (accessed 25.10.2020)

suffered by the Muslim population in this province caused by the country's central government are the main points in the recruitment narratives of jihadi groups. In this way, they not only instrumentalize Islam but the predominant form of African Islam, Sufism, tilting against its mysticism in a clear takfirist approach, while questioning the inaction of Sufi leaders when facing the local and state governments.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the isolation of public and political life of the Muslim community by the central government dates back to the colonial period, although it has been perpetuated over time²⁷. Nowadays, there is still a lack of representation of the Muslim minority, marginalized for all purposes, as it is not even officially recognized as a minority in the country. However, it is precisely the prevailing "religious effervescence" that allows for many confessions to choose from²⁸, as well as inter-ethnic and religious tensions between Muslims themselves, what promotes the dichotomy between Sufism and Salafism in the DRC, tending to pit those older, more traditional generations against younger groups²⁹.

The marginalization of the Muslim community by governments and the recruitment of young people due, on the one hand, to the high levels of unemployment and the lack of opportunities and, on the other hand, because they may be willing to accept radical ideologies, also happens in Nigeria. The north, mostly inhabited by Muslims, has traditionally been isolated by the state, which favored the Christian population in the south. Based on this, Boko Haram, for instance, instrumentalizes Islam by exploiting the frustration of believers, especially among the younger groups, caused by "high rates of youth unemployment, extreme poverty, government corruption, lack of education and a sense of religious and ethnic exclusion" while combining in its narrative the historical, social and political context of the Kanuri ethnic group present in the Lake Chad area³⁰.

²⁷ YILDRIM, Emre. "Muslims of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", INSAMER, IHH Humanitarian and Social Research Center, Muslim Minorities, n.d., available at: https://insamer.com/en/muslims-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc_1090.html (accessed 10.11.2020)

²⁸ INIESTA, Ferrán. "El islam del África Negra". Edicions Bellaterra, Barcelona, 2009, p.65. ISBN: 978-84-7290-458-3

²⁹ YILDRIM, Emre. "Muslims of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", INSAMER, IHH Humanitarian and Social Research Center, Muslim Minorities, n.d., available at: https://insamer.com/en/muslims-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc_1090.html (accessed 10.11.2020)

³⁰ BOHM, Vera. "Boko Haram in 2020", International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, August 2020, p.6, available at: <https://www.ict.org.il/images/Boko%20Haram%20in%202020.pdf> (accessed 9.11.2020)

To these socio-structural factors we must add the easy access to weapons due to the flow of ammunition following the end of regional and local conflicts and thanks to the existence of arms traffickers. The latter has materialized the already existing social unrest in these areas, riddled with self-defense militias, ethnic militias, separatist armed groups, organized crime and terrorist groups. A paradigmatic case is that of the DRC, where inter-ethnic tensions, the proliferation of militias and the struggles over natural resources, which resulted in the Congo Wars, are still at the center of the violence perpetrated by armed groups.

The terrorist phenomenon relies upon multiple factors, for it would be incorrect to determine only one of the above characteristics as the sole cause of the emergence of terrorism in the examined areas, especially since socio-structural deficiencies occur in many different parts of the continent. Therefore, the entrenchment of Salafism and the proliferation of jihadism must be understood as a miscellany of elements that not only have to do with the socio-political and economic context but also with the so-called psychosocial factors. It appears obvious that the radicalization process of an individual – as a social being – is conditioned by such context, but it is also intimately linked to the individual psychological condition.

However, "neither individual psychology", "nor the attributes of social environments" are sufficient to understand the terrorist phenomenon, so it seems necessary to analyze it from the perspective of social psychology³¹. Some psychosocial factors which cause Salafi jihadist terrorism, highlighted by De la Corte *et al.*, can be distinguished among the countries under study. In this regard, the most obvious feature of terrorist groups is the "activation of feelings and moral outrage", taking advantage of the political, social and economic marginalization suffered by the Muslim population. Moreover, terrorist groups seek to exert social influence over the Muslim minority through violence to achieve their objectives, which is evidenced by the numerous attacks on civilians. In addition, primary "socialization environments", such as radical schools and mosques of the *hanbaliyya* law school, which have spread throughout the continent, and secondary

³¹ DE LA CORTE IBÁÑEZ, Luis, KRUGLANSKI, Arie, DE MIGUEL, Jesús. SABUCEDO, José Manuel, DÍAZ, Darío. "Siete principios psicosociales para explicar el terrorismo", *Psicothema*, 2007, vol. 19, no. 3, pp.36-374, available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=72719302> (accessed 2.10.2020)

ones, that is, indoctrination centers of terrorist organizations, also contribute to a greater consolidation of Salafism as they are at the core of the social interaction process of individuals. This is especially important when it comes to young people and children, as is the case in Nigeria and the DRC with the recruitment of children from an early age.

Furthermore, there is another contributing factor to the entrenchment and expansion of Salafism. In general, Muslim minorities suffer from a double victimization: the aforementioned one, by terrorist groups who make them their main targets of attack and recruitment, and also by security forces. This takes place, for instance, in the DRC, where they are under state scrutiny due to accusations of public collaboration with the terrorist group ADF, as its members come from the Muslim minority located in the northeast of the country³². Moreover, according to the European Union, "the Mozambican Government's security forces have responded with disproportionate violence" to the terrorist threat, incurring human rights violations³³. Indeed, the criminalization of the Muslim population by the state and security forces can prompt the radicalization of those who feel attracted by the most extremist narratives that characterize Salafism.

Final considerations

It can be deduced from the previous analysis that the role of Islam in relation to terrorism in non-majoritarian Muslim African countries becomes circumstantial, as it is used by jihadi groups who benefit from the context and the geographical environment in a clearly opportunistic trend. The strategic approach of terrorist organizations is based on exploiting social vulnerabilities to perform disruptive actions that cause chaos and destabilize both governments, which already are fragile and corrupt, and fragmented societies. Thus, the marginalization and neglect suffered by the Muslim population by the state or local government in the three case studies becomes an opportunity for

³² YILDRIM, Emre. "Muslims of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", INSAMER, IHH Humanitarian and Social Research Center, Muslim Minorities, n.d., available at: https://insamer.com/en/muslims-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc_1090.html (accessed 10.11.2020)

³³ European Parliament. "Situación humanitaria en Mozambique - Resolución del Parlamento Europeo", September 2020, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0235_ES.pdf (accessed 2.11.2020)

terrorist groups, as it lays the foundation for radicalization and allows the entrenchment of extremist narratives and ideologies.

The case of Nigeria, DRC and Mozambique reveals how terrorist organizations prefer to focus their sphere of activity on Muslim-majority areas. The victimization of the population can also be observed through the frequency of village raids and the large number of civilian casualties caused. In this way, the Muslim population becomes the recruitment target of jihadi groups, for which they make use of violence or narratives – usually rejected by the population – through which they instrumentalize widespread discontent towards the government.

Certainly, the Muslim population's disengagement at the social and institutional levels, economic precariousness and the lack of opportunities can foster an environment of loyalty and collusion among the most radical sectors with jihadi groups, sometimes perceived as an authority capable of honoring the social contract – which the government is unable to do – thus serving as a vector for Salafism. However, attacks take place in Muslim-majority areas due to the general reluctance to incorporate Salafism into its religious vision in favor of the traditional, generally non-violent Sufi practices of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. The predominant Sufism is questioned and degraded by terrorist groups, emphasizing its impurity and the inability of its leaders to help the Muslim population as a way of enhancing social unrest and, ultimately, of increasing their recruits.

The confluence of many other factors has enabled the implementation of Salafism in society and of jihadism at an operational level in Mozambique, Nigeria and DRC. The geographical environment, the existence of areas where other criminal activities, such as illicit trafficking, take place, and border porosity, often contribute to the spread of jihadism. In addition, the environment of social interaction of individuals, highlighting mosques and schools, and considering the proliferation of imams and radical centers, as well as the already existing conflicts and social tensions in these areas promise higher levels of radicalism. On top of this, the criminalization of the Muslim population by governments and security forces in response to terrorism can trigger emotions such as frustration that can lead to increased social support for terrorist groups and promote radicalization.

Disassociating Islam from terrorism is about accepting that the existence of such a religion becomes necessary for the entrenchment of Salafism in society as it represents an opportunity for terrorist groups, who make a strategic use of Islam. Therefore, what fosters jihadism in non-majoritarian Muslim African countries is not Islam itself, but the instrumentalization and manipulation of multiple factors that can contribute to the creation of a radicalism-prone environment.

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