The Root Causes of Violent Extremism in Mali particularly in the northern Timbuktu region of Mali.

I: Overview

Over the past two decades, northern region of Mali has become one of the most challenging regions in the Sahel. The threat posed by violent extremist groups that espouse fundamentalist religious narratives has grown substantially across Africa.

The northern regions of Mali were deeply affected by these challenges. There is a desire to move forward but this desire is stymied by a lack of strong governmental institutions, dysfunctional judicial systems, as well as difficulties in ensuring the rule of law, lack of inclusiveness in political dialogue, social cohesion, and serious human security challenges.

By the 1990s, fundamentalist ideologies had begun to spread to Mali, a country of porous borders, poor security apparatuses, weak governance, and corruption. Under such circumstances violent extremist groups have thrived, aided further by ethnic divisions, and high youth unemployment.

These conditions pushed thousands of nomadic herders and farmers in remote northern villages to follow fundamentalist causes that vaguely promised more financial security guarantee and more respect for their own cultural identities. These communities were vulnerable to fundamentalist rhetoric because most of them found themselves abandoned by government which didn’t assist nomadic remote villages on the edge of the Sahara desert.

The root causes of violent extremism traced back to a larger security crisis involving jihadist movements and separatist groups in the north of the country. The extremist’s
activity in northern Mali regions came in to clear focus in March 2012, when Mali’s president Amadou Toumani Toure was ousted in a military coup. In the ensuing instability, Touareg separatists allied with Ansar Dine and al Qaeda and gained control over cities and territories across northern Mali.

The three great northern regions of Mali, such as Timbuktu, GAO, and Kidal were occupied by separatists and Islamist militants linked to Al-Qaida in the Arabic peninsula.

The fabled desert city of Timbuktu was occupied by Al-Qaida militants lead by some sources said that Moctar bel Moctar, Abou Saaid and Iyag Ag Ghaly, so they frequently hold meetings and instructs militants across the nomad desert villages surroundings Timbuktu.

The fabled desert city of Timbuktu is known as the center of Islamic studies and ancient manuscripts. The city has a legacy that predates the 15th century, when its Islamic universities drew scholars from across the Sahara desert and all of West Africa who wanted to study at the universities and its 180 Koranic schools for Islamic research. Today the legacy and culture of Timbuktu is the subject of much study.

During the occupation of Timbuktu the Islamist militants occupied the city of Timbuktu, along with the rest of northern Mali, and restored a strict sharia law based on fundamentalism ideologies. This brand of Islam was new to natives of Timbuktu who practice a Sunni Maliki rite based on religious tolerance and the acceptance of other religions.

The jihadist militias imposed Sharia law upon local populations, amputating limbs for infractions, as well as flogging women for adultery, and stoning some people to death. They also burned ancient manuscripts and destroyed ancient shrines which represent the soul of local populations of Timbuktu and the soul of the humanity.

They destroyed shrines and burn ancient manuscripts because their ideologies are different from native Muslim of Timbuktu.

The Islamist militants recruit a large number of youth to join their ideologies in the surroundings of nomad villages some even don’t know how to read and write the Islam text and interpretations.

I spent the entire occupation in my homeland Timbuktu and I was reporting through my blog about the suffering of my people and the damage to our cultural heritage. I believe that heritage can be an effective counter to violence. I still continue research to find out and understand the root causes of violent extremism.
II: the Root causes of violent extremism in Mali particularly in northern region of Mali.

Three main cities of Mali, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, are all near the Magrebian countries like Algeria, Mauritania. Algeria’s civil war of the 1990s contributed to instability across the regions and helped foster the rise of Islamist fundamentalist groups. Also, over the past decades the trafficking of arms, drugs, and humans across the Sahara desert has helped fund violent extremism operations in these regions.

The nomadic populations particularly Touareg and Arabic white skin migrated through Libya, and the Saudi Arabia they settled their and their children born there study wahabism rite in the Arabic peninsula, later on they come back to their nomad villages in remote north of Timbuktu, they started build mosques and madrassa for local populations and they start to sensitize them in the Wahhabs sects and its narratives.
Black Muslims have also traveled to Egypt and the Middle East—home to far more conservative Islamic orders—to continue their Koranic studies. Once they return to their nomad villages with new contacts from their travels, they raise money to finance them new mosques and madrassas in order to spread and develop the Wahhabis sects in remote northern nomad villages.

These are the seeds of fundamentalism ideologies in these rural communities. It’s important to add that chronic youth unemployment that has persisted since the independence of Mali has been particularly harsh northern Mali. Without jobs youth will do what they must to survive. These youths are vulnerable to recruitment by Islamist groups, particularly through the madrassa system which also hands out scholarships for further study in the Arab Peninsula.

In 1973 there was a drought crisis in northern Mali regions, so youth from Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, mostly Touareg and Arabic ethnic group migrated to Libya and farther east. Many of these were Tuaregs who lost their herds and livelihoods in the drought. During their exile in the Libya, the state provided them with military training. Some stayed on in the Libyan military, while others deserted and traveled further east to the Arab peninsula, where they learned Arabic and were radicalized. That’s why in northern region of Mali fundamentalists are more numerous in the white race. This phenomena took a huge importance in the Sahel regions because it touched Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Algeria, Tunisia and now violent extremism has become a worldwide phenomena that has reached the Asia, Europe, and the united states of America.
III: What drives extremism in northern region of Mali?

When we think about violent extremism it’s easy to think of it growing out of a vacuum, but in fact it’s driven by poverty, unemployment, low social mobility and increasingly scarce resources, made worse by climate change.

Many Islamists groups are presents in northern region of Mali. They are sometimes united and divided by ideology, ethnicity, criminality, etc. but they are all competing for influence in these areas, and each group has different interests, resources. And bases of support.

Nomadic local populations and sedentary are farmers are the most affected by these fundamentalists. It’s important to highlight that Mali is one of the poorest counties in the world—landlocked, arid, poor, isolates, and difficult of access. The northern region’s economy is based on the trading across the different borders. For example, foodstuffs for the cities and regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal come via smuggling from Algeria and Mauritania.

The smuggling culture in northern region of Mali has contributed to lots of activities like terrorism, kidnapping of foreigners. The Sahara desert becomes a crossroads for drug smugglers across the globe.
All these factors contribute largely to the developments of violent extremism and their ideologies in the northern region of Mali.

**VI: Recommendations to counter violent extremism in Mali.**

In the northern region of Mali the simultaneous interaction between various factors such as poverty, social exclusion. Unemployment met economic needs and radical preaching bears the risk of development of extremism. Often extremist Islamic views are based on poor and inaccurate interpretations of the Koran.

The situation in Mali is particularly worrying in terms of risks of radicalization and Recruitment of youth by AQIM—al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

In order to counter violent extremism in Mali the government and its partners must develop these key points in terms of countering fundamentalists attacks and operations in northern region of Mali and even in central capitals of Mali south regions. These recommendations are:

- **Building Military Capacity**: Training and equipping Counter Terrorism forces to monitor and control borders, and identify and react to the presence of terrorist groups in the country.

- **Building Law Enforcement Anti-Terrorism Capacity**: 
Enhancing the investigative abilities of partner nations’ law enforcement agencies and strengthening law enforcement personnel’s ability to protect critical infrastructure and secure borders against illicit trafficking.

- **Building Justice Sector Counterterrorism Capacity:**
  Increasing partner nations' judicial capacity to prosecute and imprison terrorists, improving prison management to counter prison radicalization, and countering transnational organized crime.

- **Building Public Diplomacy, Education, and Communication:**
  Working with partner nations to promote moderation and tolerance, counter violent extremist ideology, and encourage populations to report security threats to partner nation security forces.

- **Community Engagement:**

  Engaging key leaders and civil society organizations in partner nations to mitigate conflict and counter violent extremism, and delivering services to marginalized populations that may be vulnerable to terrorist recruitment.

- **Vocational Training:**

  Offering vocational training to the at risk populations of partner nations, and increasing opportunities for social and economic inclusion in order to mitigate the recruitment of marginalized populations into terrorist organizations.
IV: The Root Causes of Radicalization of youth in the northern Timbuktu region in Mali.

For decades, drought and access to basic nutritional needs has been a constant problem in northern Mali and much of the Sahel. And when the rains do come, they are often so violent that many villages are flooded out. Homes are sometimes lost, as well as livestock and grain harvests.

Additionally, in highly traditional African societies, youth are needed at home in order to support their families take responsibility for their siblings at an early age.

A constant problem for nomad youth is the lack of job opportunities in order to fulfill their full potentials and thrive.

The root causes of the radicalization of youth in remote northern region nomad villages surroundings Timbuktu can be traced back to the lack of unemployment opportunities and the lack of education because most of these radicalized youth never attend any formal school in their entire life, so they spend their whole life following herds and work in farms and fairs in order to support their families so it’s easy for fundamentalists to target these youth with the narratives of violent extremism and recruit them as fighters and brainwashing them.
When you met these radicalized youth and discuss religion with them, you will understand that they don't understand the Islamic texts. Many of their interpretations of the Koran are also made through very poor Arabic. The vast majority of Muslim youth in Sahara and Sahel have difficulty understanding the teachings of Islam because of they do not have the literacy skills to understand the texts.

In some villages in the Sahara fundamentalists commanders and trainers forced youths to join fundamentalist causes. Many forced under threat of losing their lives or their families.

Poverty in nomad village is a challenge for the future of these youth living in the middle of the sahara desert. Generations of generations migrated to neighboring countries in rural exude for the only goal to find a better future for their families, their communities and sometimes contribute to the country. So in their exile mostly nomadic youth migrated in the Arabic peninsula meet a lot of islam rites and sometimes once they decided to settled back to their own homeland they bring back with them fundamentalists ideology and most of the time they change the rites of their communities.

One of the most important factor that attract generally these nomadic communities is that the infrastructures they finance to build in remote areas just like the construction of new mosques, the construction of madrassa and also the large amount of funds they give to their preacher to preach their ideology.

In Mali, bad governance, corruption, the lack of government transparency pushed thousands of disaffected youth from nomad communities to reject the government. The government gave them little assistance and in some cases appeared to reject their culture. This was particularly true for the Tuareg and Fulani communities. As a result, many youth in remote rural and nomad villages became radicalized.

V: Recommendations to counter the Radicalizations of youth in violent extremism activities in Mali.

- Initiate a global conversation on how best to prevent young people from becoming radicalized and how to de-radicalize others.

- Sensitize through positive change behavior, forgiveness and compassion in their communities and to the west world.

- The preponderance of hate speech which is growing today on social medias
- For certain youth lost in their communities’ violent extremism will bring meaning to their life.

- They generally brainwashed by empty promises, adventure, jihad, and the fulfillment of their destiny.

- Promote interfaith dialogue between youth from different religions.

- Build youth capacities for conflict mitigation, alternative dispute resolution, early warning and response.

- Global interaction of the cross ethnic line

- Create online platforms on social Media’s tools about gathering youth across the globe to accept each other and show each youth how to be proud of its identity.

- Global citizen initiative like the organization of cultural activities such as festival in order to give voices to youth to talk about their differences and how to accept each other even though they don’t speak the same language or the same religious belief but as a global citizen.

- Since the basic level at schools we must educate our children about religious tolerance and explain them the good narrative of islam.

- Creation of job opportunities for youth

- Intensified the dialogue between Islamic rite in the same religion and the dialogue between the religions.

- The fight against violent extremism must be subjects in all the schools worldwide.

- Youth have the power to connect to each other across border, across nation; they have ICT tools to counter violent extremism recruitment on line and the narratives.

- Creation of center f training about religions and rites of religion in order to give a better understanding to youth a better understanding about their own religion.

- Creation of job opportunities for youth in remote rural areas an alternative for them to thrive in their own communities and find an identity not losing hope in the middle of nowhere.

- Creation of local radios in remote rural areas on the edge of the Sahara desert and even the urban cities where there is always explanation of the religion and sensibilisation programs to counter the narratives of fundamentalists.
- Upgrade education in remote nomad villages and leadership capacity building programs.

- Empower communities to counter to protect their families, neighbors, youths against terrorism recruitments.

- Explaining and make understanding the youth that the west are not in war against Islam.

- Create new digital software to work with religious leaders in order to counter hateful ideologies of fundamentalist’s natives online.

- Promote interfaith dialogue between youth from the west and others cities across the globe.

- Building capacities for conflict mitigation

- Creation of youth center for early warning and response about countering violent extremism.

- Creation of online platform managed by youth across the globe to counter the preponderance of hate speech which is growing today on social media.

VI: CONCLUSION

Violent extremism is one of the most challenging issues of our time. Countries, nations, leaders, youth leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, political leaders include organizations must work hand and use all the means at their disposal in order to eradicate this phenomena. The entire world is shaken by violent extremism activities across the globe but when we analyze the collateral damage, youth are the most affected by this phenomena. Corrupt and incompetent governance, bribery, the nepotism, the favoritism, and religious delinquency are the root causes of violent extremism, rebellion, and sectarian conflict in the Sahel and Sahara regions.

In the 21st century internet communication technologies, which are used by 80 percent of youth, is one of the biggest platforms for recruitment and radicalization. In order to counter violent extremism and protect our communities youth leaders across the globe must be the actors not only to counter these fundamentalists but to make a positive change in the life of other
youth across the globe. In the city of Timbuktu, ancient manuscripts were burned and shrines destroyed by youth fundamentalists, many of whom were illiterate.

This struggle against violent extremism and the radicalization of youth must be a challenge for youth leaders across the globe. Our cities our nations, our countries our friends of different religions must promote interfaith dialogue so that everybody can communicate, even those who speak different languages...

In the digital age youth across the globe must develop positive social media platforms to connect youth around the globe to preach the message of peace tolerance of other religion and not hatred. They must counter online extremist narratives and prevent the new generations from falling victim to this calamity.

About the author:

El Hadj Djitteye is a Peace Building activist, journalist, international consultant, analyst, international NGO representatives, President of the Timbuktu Land of Peace and Culture Association and blogger based in Timbuktu. He writes and reports on issues pertaining to Islamist conflict, violent extremism, politics, cultural heritage and ethnic conflict in Mali.

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