

THE DESTINY OF AFRICA BETWEEN SUFISM AND SALAFISM

After the death of Mohamed, Islam made its entry into Africa following military conquests, but without shattering effects. When the prophet passed away in 632, the first Islamic Caliph, Abu Bakr, carried out a series of military operations to spread the new faith across the world. Even though the latter died two years later, his nephew Omar continued the ambitious military expansion program with the conquest of Jerusalem (636), then of Damascus, Antiochia and finally of Persia in 651.

The arrival of Islam on the African continent came about in 646 with the conquest of Egypt. As stated earlier, it is a tolerant and apolitical Islam that initially respects African societies, their customs, traditions and rituals (even the animist and pagan ones), without undermining the structure of societies centuries-old that pre-existed on the continent. It is hence a penetration that did not cause any traumas, but actually found a fertile ground in the exoteric tendencies of those people. African Islam is syncretic, simple and tolerant, miles away from the learned and cultivated Arabic Islam, almost a deformed version of the latter.

Islam's diffusion was then limited with the arising colonialism in Africa and by the competition between civilizations that also involved religion. Today the Muslim religion is distributed across the continent along a political and social itinerary that is spread mainly throughout the North and the Coastal areas of Africa. But African Islam, at least in the beginning, was moderate and spiritual and it easily went along the spirituality and fatalism of Africans, it supported their ritualism and associative will.

SUFI CONFRATERINITIES

The best reply to the moderate needs of Africa came from within its social texture with the development, more than anywhere else, of Sufi Confraternities.

From an historical point of view, they emerge in the Middle East during the 12th century and then spread in Africa. The name "suf" comes from the camel wool clothes the Sufis would wear to show their devotion to a mystic life. The other name given to the members of the confraternities was "dervish", a Persian word meaning someone who gives up earthly issues to dedicate his life to God.

According to several historians, the origins of Sufi mysticism, hence before it was structured into confraternities, dates back to the 8th century. Following the numerous military conquests and growth of the wealth of the Omayyad Dynasty, Islam was at risk losing its original ethical connotation. People like Hassan al Basri (642-728), Rabia al Adawiyah (d. 801), al Hallaj (sentenced to death in 922 after 8 years of imprisonment) dedicated their lives to criticizing Muslim clerics and preached the union with God through the love of God.

In practice, sufism developed a mystical approach to Islam as opposed to a legal/lawful vision of muslim orthodoxy and this favored its development in Africa. They preach the possibility of an emotional nearness to God and an intuitive knowledge of God through faith, far away from the intellectual and legal emphasis of Sunni orthodoxy. In this sense, Sufis interpret the Koran as the key to determine a mystic union between the individual and God. This is why every Order imposes to its followers (known as "mourids", Arabic translation for "he who accepts" or "he who is devoted to a faith") a close personal relationship with God through strict spiritual discipline.

The prayers ("dhikir") involve exercises that are accompanied by movements of the body, including chanting and dancing, according to a formula established by the founder of the Order. By doing so, when the litanies are particularly long, the believers fall into a trance and reach an ecstasy whose aim is to free the body and bring it to the presence of God. How they pray ("tariqa" or "via") varies from one confraternity to another and they are identified by their "tariqa". Each tariqa, besides having its own ritual, also has an internal organization that can be, according to the Orders, more or less hierarchical. And this is a hierarchy that substitutes the clan or the ethnic groups of origin. By doing so it creates a social alternative to African tribalism.

There is a chief responsible for initiating new members and that delegates some responsibilities to the other levels. Joining a confraternity is voluntary even if family traditions and ties from father to son often prevail. The novices take an oath of loyalty to the chief of the confraternity. The chiefs' title is that of Sheykh (doctor of Islam) and they are believed to own the "baraka". The latter is a "supernatural blessing" that implies a spiritual power during the exercise of the religious activity. But there is more to it: it is a set of positive personal characteristics, both moral and intellectual, in possession of only some individuals. This spiritual status can continue even after death, thus generating the status of "holy man" whose worship goes beyond the belonging to a specific confraternity. This is why several tombs become pilgrimage sites. In the same way the earlier chiefs of the confraternity are venerated in order to grant the "baraka" a sense of continuity. Also those who are responsible for the spreading of the religious creed are accredited with the same blessing: the "marabout" in Western Africa and the "wadaddo" in Somalia.

The "marabout" (transliteration of "al morabitoun", namely "those who have built a religious shelter") are the intermediaries between the individual and God and they officiate islamic services. Until today they constitute an errant system for the spreading of Islam. Beyond the teaching of the Koran and the cultural promotion of Islam, the "marabout" favors proselytism, spreads the faith, may involve in politics, officiates rituals and duties to cure people (he is accredited with mystical powers to protect from ailment and evil eye), intervenes in the mediation of conflicts (negotiations, peace treaties between faction in fight), acts as a consultant (also a political one) for tribal chiefs, grants protection and asylum and sells his amulets and talismans.

Earlier on it was a general opinion that the "baraka" could apply only to the descendants of Mohamed. With the advent of Sufism and the creation of the confraternities its application went beyond that and onto anyone who had the right characteristics. Sufism also introduced another crucial concept: the acceptance of an intermediary between us and God. This gave birth to the confraternities and to the recognition of the existence of "holy men". Generally speaking, the members of the confraternities live a secular life within their communities of origin. Seldom they reunite in enclosed communities (known as "jama'a") to undergo indoctrination. Only a few are

celibates. We're dealing with mainly spiritual communities rather than practical ones even if there is a designated territory ("zawiya") where the confraternity operates.

The mystical aspects of Sufism have favored in Africa the fusion between the Islamic belief and the pre-islamic ones. Taking as an origin a combination of Sufi mysticism and Sunni orthodoxy, the Islamic fraternities have constituted a unifying factor between culture and religion outside ethnic and tribal differences. The other role undertaken by these Orders was the contrast of Western customs.

As mentioned earlier, the first Sufi confraternities date back to the 12th century (the "Rifaiyyah" founded in Basra and that spread from Iraq, to Syria and Egypt; the "Suhrawardiyyah", founded by Abu Najib al Suhrawardi (1097-1168), that grew in India; the "Kubrawiyyah", founded by follower of Suhrawardi, Nayim Al Din Kubra (1145-1221) in Iran; the "Qadiriyyah" that developed in North Africa).

In Africa the first Sufi confraternity appeared in Egypt and came from Syria as an expansion of the "Rifaiyyah". The founder was Ahmad al Badawi (1199-1276) who became renown for his miracles. Until today in Tanta, Egypt, every year a festival pays tribute to the "Badawiyyah". In North Africa Sufism spread thanks to the support of the Almohad dynasty (1130-1269) that ruled over Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and part of Spain. In the 13th century in Tunisia a man by the name of Shadhili founded the "Shadhiliyyah" and it can still be found in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

In the 18th century a new twist in the evolution of Sufism came about when it clashed with the rising Wahabism that refused several Sufi traditions, like the worshipping of saints, and favored a strict application of Sharia law. As a consequence, new orders were born like the "Tijaniyah" and the Sanisiyah".

Here is the description of some of the Sufi confraternities that have had a preeminent role in Africa:

The Qadiriyyah

It is the oldest Sufi order and it was founded by Abdel Qadir al Djilani (1077-1166) in Iran and later moved to Baghdad where Djilani ran the Hanbali law school. In the 15th century the order developed in Africa under the guidance of Osman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) who dedicated his efforts to the eradication of tribal practices during islamic rituals. Fodio worked in today's Niger and Nigeria. As many other confraternities, the Qadiriyyah includes both emotional and mystical elements, but also pursues the teaching and knowledge of Islam as a way to find God. Every member of the confraternity has to follow the precepts of humbleness, generosity and respect for thy neighbor regardless of their religious creed or social status. The Qadiriyyah was deeply involved in the Algerian independence struggles against the French.

The Tijaniyyah

It was founded in 1781 by Ahmad Tijani, an Algerian berber who died in 1815. Its ritual (or method of recitation) is more simple and flexible if compared to the Qadiriyyah even though both share the same doctrine and religious obligations. As opposed to the Qadiriyyah, its members don't necessarily have to develop Islamic teaching and, with respect to the other confraternity, it is considered fitter to

accepting a modern way of life. The precepts of the confraternity impose the refusal all falsehood, theft, killing and fraud. Furthermore, promises should be kept, love thy neighbour and obey God. No member should deprive others of freedom without a reason. During prayers one should be mirrored in God. Even though we are all sinners, the Tijaniyah believes that the members of the confraternity will be rewarded after death. As opposed to other confraternities, the Tijaniyah does not allow the simultaneous belonging to other Orders. They impose a religious separatism from the other confraternities. It is unlikely that a member leave the organization in the belief that the betrayer will die as an apostate. The Tijani think of themselves as sort of the aristocracy of the mystic orders and self define themselves as "al tariqa al Mohammediyah" (the path of Mohamed). Ahmad Tijani claimed to receive revelations directly from Mohamed himself and became known as a "qubt al aqtab" (the pole of poles). The Tijaniyah resembles a missionary order that spread across West Africa to the detriment of the Qadiriya. When Tijani died in 1815 several conflicts emerged between the different "zawiya" of the confraternity that caused the fractioning of the order.

The Sanusiyah

Founded in Mecca in 1837 by the Algerian Mohamed Ibn Ali al Sanasi from the Senusi tribe, born in 1787 and who proclaimed being the descendant of Fatima,. Sanasi studied in Mecca and founded several "zawiyas" (communities). While in Libya, he developed his activity mainly in Cyrenaica organizing the beduin tribes in Fezzan and Kufra. Among the different confraternities, it's activity is the most politically oriented. Its "zawiya" was initially in Jaraboub professing a purified Islam that adapted to the lifestyle of the nomadic people of the desert. It preached the respect of the precepts of the Islamic religion (with a certain degree of behavioral fundamentalism like the ban of the use of tobacco) and during its rituals it aims at a mystical union with the Prophet rather than with God. The union is meant to imitate the daily life of Mohamed. The history of the Sanusiyah intertwines with that of Libya. When al Sanasi died his son, Mohamed al Mahdi (born in 1859 and whose rule lasted until his death in 1902), took over and extended the confraternity's influence in the area of Lake Chad. His wealth also grew thanks to his trading across the Sahara. As both the French in Chad and the Italians in Libya advance, the confraternity waged a conflict against the colonial powers. During World War I, Al Mahdi's successor, Ahmad al Sharif, brought forward, without much success, a policy siding with Turkey. When Idris took over the confraternity, a deal was initially struck with the Italians, but it was broken in 1923. When the armed struggles against the occupiers began, the leader of the confraternity are forced to flee in Egypt where they will support the British during World War II. From 1951 to 1969 (before Gaddafi's coup d'etat) the Senusi dynasty ruled over Libya. The Sanusiyah can count on around 350 "zawiya" spread across Africa (mainly in Morocco and Chad) and as far as Indonesia.

the Mouridya

founded by Amadou Bamba (also known as Mohamed ben Habit Allah, 1852-1927), the confraternity has its geographical center in Senegal and Gambia. Ideologically it is half way in-between the Tijaniyah and the Qadiriya. Bamba was considered an innovator. Under the guidance of a Caliph (or Great Marabout) with absolute powers, the Mouridya is structured into regional marabouts. Its economy is linked to the manual labor of its followers and it is self defined as "a way to imitate the Prophet". Streaming out of this confraternity others are born like the Baye Fall of Sheykh Ibrahim Fall.

SALAFISM

In contrast with Sufism's moderate approach, the Islamic world developed – in Africa and elsewhere – a tendency to embrace radical religious behaviors, an orthodox vision and interpretation of the precepts. Salafism, whose origin is the Arabic word "salaf", meaning "forefathers/ancestors", proposes a return to pure Islam, meaning the one immediately following the death of the Prophet and thus considering that what happened throughout the centuries following foreign occupations and contamination with the Western world lead to a loss of the original characteristics of the religion.

The warrantors and advocates of a pure Islam are those that implicate an ideological recourse to "jihad" as both a defense (of the Islamic nation) and offensive (against an external contagion) tool. This is an evolutionary doctrine that provides the muslim fundamentalists an alibi in the fight against modernization, the decay of customs and globalization and that today, in its most deleterious forms, postulates terrorism.

From an historical point of view, Salafism originates from theologian Ibn Taymiya, follower of the Hanbalist school (founded by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal in the 9th century) that refused the use of rational methodologies in the interpretation of the Koran and of the Sunna: divine elements could not be understood through a rational approach. Based on this assumption, Ibn Taymiya became a supporter of an individual interpretation of the sacred books. An innovative stance at his times because it meant that the spreading of the religion could become more popular and off the reach of the elite in power that until then had taken care of the theological and social aspects of Islam. Yet Ibn Taymiya demanded the obedience to the political chiefs and fought against any theological deviance that his new interpretative approach may have determined.

During the 18th century also Mohamed Ibn Abdel Wahab (the founder of Wahabism) joined Hanbalism to look for pure Islam and, after him, the Iranian Jamal al Din al Afgani (1838-1897), the Egyptian Mohamed Abdul (1849-1905) and the Syrian Rachid Redha (1865-1935). Together they gave birth to a new Salafi current that lead to the defenestration of the clerical structures of Islam. With the creation of the association of the "Muslim Brotherhood" by Hassan al Banna in Egypt in 1928 Salafism took a political twist, that is to say Islam had to be reorganized to take over power. In the 50s another Egyptian and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayed Qutb (1906 and sentenced to death by Nasser in 1966), theorized about the rise to power that would overthrow the impious Arab chiefs and reinstate an Islamic State through armed struggle. Qutb will become the point of reference for several terrorist movements, not least Al Qaeda.

To date there are three main tendencies within the Salafi movements:

- a moderate Salafi approach that refuses political Islam, it is against violence, boycotts elections and considers attacks and "shahid" (martyrs/suicide bombers) as being illegal;
- reformist or modernist Salafism, close to the thesis of the Muslim Brotherhood, that subordinates politics to religion and finds in the Koran the justification of their objective;
- a so called "jihadi" Salafism that refuses preaching and exalts the holy war against both the muslim world and the West; this is an individual struggle that refuses all political approaches.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAM AND ITS EFFECTS IN AFRICA

Overall, Islam is a simple religion, scarcely dogmatic and, as such, easily assimilated by any cultural and social level. This also applies to Africa. There are five pillars to the religion: "shahada" the declaration of faith, "salat" the five daily prayers, "zakat" the yearly handout of charity, "saum" the month of fasting during the Ramadan and "haji" the at least once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca.

On the dogmatic level, there is one God ("tawid") and one Islamic community ("umma"). The soul is immortal and Mohamed is considered the last Prophet (the so called "seal of the prophets") after Adam, Noé, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (the Koran does not abolish Jewish or Christian revelations, but rather completes them putting the final seal). Angels exist (look at the role the Archangel Gabriel has for Mohamed), the Koran is the last holy book and we should all expect a judgment day (similar to the Christian one, but with some peculiar divine pleasures).

The "shura" (verses) of the Koran and the "hadith" (teachings of the Prophet) of the "sunna" (the tradition) are the only elements of theological inspiration that can be subject to interpretation. There is no religious hierarchy in Islam (there is a clergy, but no priesthood or sacrament), but only juridical schools. And it is often in the interpretation of the holy books that both fundamentalism and extremisms find their origin. In fact, concerning the interpretation of the sacred texts and the possibility of their exploitation, there are two main schools of thought in Islam:

- the "taqlid" whereby the interpretation has to fall and be applied within the existing islamic doctrine;
- the "itjihad" whereby the interpretation is dealt with individually.

Mainly the latter often provides the basis to justify the theology of terrorism.

During his earthly life, Mohamed had created a theocratic State in Medina that ruled over the "umma". And it is in the overlapping of secular and spiritual power that Islam finds its root. Unlike Judaism and Christianity, the muslim religion is based on the strict interdependence of politics and religion that increases the social impact of the latter on the affairs of people.

If the Christian God is the one of love, the Jewish God is that of justice, the Muslim one is mainly a social God. That is, Islam introduces a concept of "statehood" that is not that of a theocracy, but it is linked to the interdependence between the preaching and application of Islamic precepts and the legitimacy of power. The lacking of democracy in the African continent makes such a precept easily receivable.

Islam also introduces other specific characteristic as divine decree and predestination. At a popular level, predestination is a widely diffused concept that includes the belief that everything that happens in a lifetime is God sent and that any attempt to change events is useless. It is a dimension of power and/or wisdom and/or mercy of God that postulates a concept of fatalism (even though also Islam adds individual responsibility to the equation).

It is not accidental that both "Islam" and "Muslim" (same consonant root) introduce the concept of submission to God. The prostration of the muslim to God's will, or rather predestination in Sunni orthodoxy, does not have the same philosophical or spiritual characteristics of its Christian

equivalent. Fatalism introduced by Islam is another one of those concepts easily accepted by people in Africa who have lived through centuries of social calamities and hardship.

Furthermore, predestination could also affect the sense of development and modernization of Islamic societies that appears more limited if opposed to the Western approach to progress (and this also complies much more with African societies). This determines a gap between the two worlds and when, as in the current political conjuncture, comes a comparison, it turns into a clash of civilizations, a fight not only between Christians and Muslims, but also between the respective visions. Yet, there is an ongoing and hardly publicized clash between moderates and radicals within the muslim world.

Finally there is one last concept, that of divine justice. God is "good" and what it does is "right". But God is above right and good or evil and is not bound by justice. God is neither obliged nor obligable. There can be no injustice because everything belongs to Him. Hence God can do what he wants. There is no relationship between good behaviour and earthly justice. The divine prize will come in the after life. Africans face a hard, even though not deserved, present but no one enquires whether this is right or wrong. Islam thus becomes a social tool where rights and civil liberties are denied or where poverty claims more justice, though at last the hope in a better future in heaven can bring us to easier terms with the misery in the present.

Another aspect that has made Islam tempting to African people is the tolerance towards some social aspects of indigenous cultures, like multiple marriage (a practice refused by other monotheistic religions).

CONSEQUENCES OF RADICAL ISLAM

Sufism and Salafism have been the ingredients that, in different doses and ways, have influenced events in Africa in those countries with a majority or strong presence of muslims. Over the last few years, Salafism and its religious radicalism – which then turned into extremism – have taken the upper hand over moderate islamic stances. Social injustice, totalitarian regimes, widespread poverty are constant in the African political landscape and have all helped the rise of radicalism.

Salafism has inspired several terrorist movements across Africa: the Jihad Islamiyah e la Jamaa Islamiyah in Egypt, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in Algeria, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb along the sub-Saharan Sahel, the Islamic Combat Group in Libya, the "talebans" and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Ittihad al Islami, the Islamic Courts and the Shabaab in Somalia, Al Qaeda cells in the Comoros, the "Allied Democratic Front" (infiltrated by Al Tabligh extremists) in Uganda, the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group in Morocco, the Tunisian Islamic Front (and the Ennadha party ran by Rachid Gannouchi during the fight against Ben Ali) in Tunisia, the (subversive) activity of the Haramain Islamic Foundation in Kenya and Tanzania, the PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drug) and the Qibla (of Shiite inspiration) in South Africa. And the listing could continue.

According to statistics, in 2011 the world has witnessed 1974 terrorist attacks by Islamic radicals that have caused over 9000 deaths and 17000 wounded. The trend is growing and Africa is more and more present. Muslims in Africa are 370 million, as opposed to 305 million Christians and 137 million following indigenous religions. Hence, they are now the majority in the continent. Yet, from

an historical point of view, the spreading of Islam in Africa would not be an element of interest hadn't it been for the improper use of religion in international affairs and in the contemporary history of several countries across the continent.

We're talking about the rise of the so called Islamic fundamentalism, that in the worst cases turns into extremism and then terrorism. In Africa, limited to certain areas or countries, this negative social phenomena is both an endogenous (if we look at what happens in individual countries) and exogenous (the afore mentioned clash of civilizations) factor. With respect to other parts of the world, Islamic extremism in Africa is potentially more dangerous, not for what it is today, but for what it could turn into tomorrow.

Such an evaluation is tied to a series of objective circumstances such as:

- the condition of poverty of the majority of African people could potentially witness the use of Islam as a tool for social change;
- the lack of fair regimes and/or democratic ones could pave the use way for the use of Islam as a tool for political change (see what the Muslim Brotherhood is doing);
- the strong spirituality of African people could see the use of Islam as a social placebo;
- the search for a common cultural identity capable of unifying ethnic groups or tribes across the borders could witness the use of Islam as a tool for ethnic identification;
- the need of a de facto fatalism to face negative living conditions due to famine, poverty or malady could see the use of Islam as theological placebo.

All of the above fall into a continent where weapons are widespread, corruption is rampant, where there are plenty of wide spaces where to move undisturbed and without control, with little or fable technological support. These are all factors that can amplify the devastating effects of terrorism.

What worries the most is the prospect that African Islam could become more and more associated to social instability along the afore mentioned factors. Not merely linked to events in North Africa, as has happened during the "Arab Spring", but geographically extended to other sub-Saharan areas. Another element of concern is the currently ongoing welding between the different African Islamic fundamentalist groups whose negative influence is moving from a country level to a regional one and, maybe in the future, to a continental level. In other words, we could be in a phase where Islamic terrorism seizes a local social issue (and it wouldn't be hard to find one) to legitimize its operations to then moves onto wider issues and geographical contexts. Today we face a territorial contiguity between Somalia, the groups operating in the Sahel and those in North Africa. And it is probably not by chance that Al Qaeda, since the Osama Bin Laden days, has addressed its geo-strategic aims onto Africa (Bin Laden lived in Sudan in the 1990s, where he had made important investments, and transited in Somalia before moving to Afghanistan).

HOW A SOURCE IS RECRUITED

Information gathering is essential for an intelligence service during its institutional activity for the safeguard of national security. Every mean is substantially allowed within, of course, the legal boundaries attributed to the agency by laws or government mandates. The wider the spectrum of operative independence allowed the agency, the less red tape and controls are exerted (as a guarantee of secrecy) upon it, the more efficient its service and operative results become.

HUMINT

The traditional form of information gathering is called by the intelligence community "Humint", meaning "Human Intelligence", thus the acquisition of information through the use of informers (on the inside level) or spies (as they are tagged in literature) in case we are operating abroad. Outside of the literary context they are better known as informative collaborators.

Humint used to be the predominant activity of an intelligence service, especially when there did not exist more sophisticated means of information gathering. A traditional job old as the world itself, espionage has then encompassed more technological aspects: it became "sigint" ("signal intelligence", aka intercepting communications), "elint" ("electronic intelligence", aka intercepting electronic signals). "Imint" ("image intelligence", aka the acquisition of info through satellite photos), decryption of cyphered messages (with the massive use of computers to read the content of encrypted messages), up to the gathering and selection – through a filer – of all the news coming from the media across the world ("open sources").

But as we mentioned above, humint remains the principal activity of an intelligence agency, the oldest but also the most important of all. One must find interesting information objectives and those individuals that could help in supplying the news. It is after homing in on such subjects that the specific recruiting activity begins (it is this activity that is often characterized by difficulty and dangerousness).

THE HUMINT TECHNIQUE

The difficulty derives from the fact that the so-called potential "source" must be approached, studied, convinced and finally recruited. This often happens within a hostile context like that of a foreign country where counter-espionage activity is exercised in order to prevent the unveiling of that country's secrets.

The recruiter must have high communicative qualities and must be able to pinpoint and understand the weaknesses of individuals, to study psychologically his/her behavior and relations, to understand why the person's collaboration (thus the motives for treason that can vary: money, revenge, rancor, patriotism...). Must importantly the recruiter must evaluate the cost of the collaboration (the following being an incontrovertible truth: each person has a price – not necessarily in cash).

If the recruiter does not gather all of this data he/she cannot objectively proceed with the recruiting because the perils along the path are greater than the hypothetical gain made from the collaboration. The recruited could belong to the local intelligence, he/she could be an agent provocateur, or a

braggart, a double-crosser (those that betray once could betray again even in the opposite direction). What if the person were an alcoholic or a drug user, making his/her personality feint and talkative? Does he/she spend money on gambling or women? All of these questions need a punctual answer. Thus prudence and sagaciousness are a must.

It is true that the recruiter, before proceeding and approaching the subject, transfers all of the data gathered on him/her to the Central office that checks the files for known contraindications, although it is often just a routine precaution. This is especially helpful when attempting to recruit a national. Yet if it is a foreigner in a foreign country – as is often the case – most of the evaluation is carried out by the recruiter him/herself, the same person at risk on the field.

Once the recruiting has taken place and a congruous balance – both psychological and financial – between the motivation for treason and the relative price have been found, only then does the recruiter assume the new configuration of administrator of that source. This role also requests psychological endowment on the part of the recruiter: one must gain the trust of the source, establish a familial relationship with him/her, overcome worries and fears. A form of contact, as casual as possible, must be agreed upon. One must choose an encrypted language for communications and create a social context that can render the contact between the two individuals plausible. At this stage every request that is made on the source must be dosed on the accessibility of the informative objective and on the dangerousness of the information gathering involved. All of it must happen very gradually.

Yet this stage is still, on the part of the recruiter/administrator, a time for verifying. The source is asked to provide informative details (even on known data) to verify whether the source says the truth or boasts, or even sends one on the wrong track.

If the source clears these verifications, then the common path of the recruited and of his administrator will proceed in time. It is a matter of making the financial or psychological expectations of the source into an irreplaceable element in the collaboration.

Otherwise, if the source does not clear the verifications, one must find a method to disengage that could easily turn into a dangerous task for the Intelligence operative that recruited and administered the individual.

Yet if the source has given positive signs, if its information potential satisfies the expectations that postulated his/her recruitment, if the collaboration continues in time and no perplexities arise out of his/her behavior, at this point the source becomes part of the operative wealth of the agency that recruited the individual. The relationship that is built in time between the source and its administrator becomes more institutional and must do without the bilateral and personal relations that were initially established. If the administrator is moved to another office or goes back home, another administrator will relieve his/her functions. In such case two activities - parallel as far as initiatives and converging as far as the final objectives - are created. It is the passage from a bilateral relationship of trust to another bilateral relationship of trust: the old administrator must convince the source, the new administrator must reassure and gain the source's trust once again.

THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND THEIR INCLINATION TOWARDS HUMINT ACTIVITIES

There is no intelligence agency that does not give adequate room to humint activity. The problem is the incisiveness of such information gathering activity with respect to others.

In the past years the C.I.A. had given priority to other, alternative forms of information gathering born from the consideration – or perhaps the presumption – that the technological advantage of the USA could be sufficient to replace the classical info gathering activity. Truth be told, the USA confronted themselves with a hostile stance in many operative theaters and had to make a virtue out of necessity. The disastrous results in Iraq and Afghanistan later demonstrated that this new operative approach was wrong. In Baghdad, during the times of the pro-consul Bremer and later of Negroponte, Langley's men could not move freely within the Iraqi capital without running high risks for moderate results because of the lack of indigenous communities (Kurds, Shiites, Sunni) that could feel a liking for the American army. Informations were almost exclusively of the technological kind (the systematic intercepting of all telephone and radio conversations, satellite vision and an ample use of drones for surveillance) but nothing could prevent the terrorist attacks that continuously struck the international contingent. Such an enormous amount of information and the difficulty of selecting it fast enough to use it on the field (despite the "key words" that give priority to one communication instead of another). What they didn't have was a man on the field, a person that knows ahead of time what is going to happen and that knows men and facts. There was no perception of the population's stance that could help the government prevent discontent or unwelcome initiatives. There were no elements to allow the use of an efficient psychological warfare apparatus. The continuous attacks that happen even now in Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan on a daily basis demonstrate without the shadow of a doubt that humint activity is still lacking.

The English intelligence – or rather the English-speaking intelligence (thus the MI-6 and the intelligence agencies of New Zealand and Australia) – have always contributed in and made use of information technology research with the United States. During the war in Iraq the military and intelligence communities mentioned above had access to a separate information system where news of interest circulated and were not shared with the rest of the international contingent.

The British, French and German have developed their humint activity to a reasonable level, but their most efficient networks are concentrated mostly in their former colonies, where in most cases they have contributed in the training of the local intelligence agencies.

The Italian intelligence (and the Spanish in some respects), have a tendency to give room to humint activity even if at times they cannot set guidelines for true recruiting of sources. The innate latin communicability, the friendly personal approach, the fact that they represent nations that don't have distinct negative historical legacies makes it easier to approach individuals and gives easier access to interesting information (thus not through true "sources" but rather those that are commonly called "useful persons"). The Americans lack just that (as they settle in a foreign country they export their social model and isolate themselves from the local context). The British and the French are also lacking (they sometimes tend to establish uneven interpersonal relationships that are conditioned by elitist – if not ex-colonial – approaches). The Germans because the well-known teutonic behavioral rigidity is not always helpful in making friends.

There are, however, other intelligence agencies that have a pronounced and prevalent human activity that makes use of ethnic or religious circumstances.

One such intelligence agency is the Mossad, that can count on the Jewish community scattered around the globe as an active element for any informational need of the Israeli state. If this favorable circumstance is paired with the necessity of giving a strong intelligence contribution to the security of one's nation, with an ample availability of men and financial means, a *modus operandi* that knows no limitations to the pursuit of one's objectives (including the physical elimination of the enemy), the direct access to other important intelligence services (especially American and British). All of these elements tend to accredit the efficiency that the collective opinion attributes to the Mossad.

There is another intelligence service, the Armenian National Security Service, that has analogous intelligence opportunities because of the Armenian diaspora around the globe (not just ethnic, but religious too). Although less well-known, partly due to its affiliation to the Russian SVR, the Armenian intelligence is highly regarded by the world of spies.

The Vatican, with its network of priests, nuns, convents and religious communities scattered in every corner of the world, is also a very well-informed State. It doesn't use an intelligence structure but the Secretariat for Foreign Relations, or rather the Secretariat of State (aka Foreign Ministry) has a complex network of apostolic Nuncios that represent the Holy See. The Nuncio is the ambassador of the Vatican and as such has the need to access all of the news that are of interest to his country (which coincides with his Institution). He doesn't need sources, the churches suffice in that respect. The parishes, the episcopates and arch-episcopates, the religious communities, the followers...

THE LIMITS ON THE ITALIAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AS ESTABLISHED BY THE LAW: AN ANOMALY...

Law 801 of October 24, 1977 created the SISMI (Service for Military Information and Security), SISDE (Service for Democratic Information and Security) and CESIS (Executive Committee for the Services of Information and Security) after the suppression of the SID (Service for Defense Informations). Article 7 of the law said: "The Intelligence Service can in no instance have among its personnel, whether it be full-time or part-time, members of the Parliament, Regional, Provincial and Municipal counsellors, Magistrates, Ministers of the Church or professional journalists". This was a specific limitation that the law opposed to the recruiting of sources that has had exceptions (see the case of journalist Renato Farina, aka "Betulla").

The new law n.124 of August 2007 that once again re-designed that intelligence structures in Italy (this time the SISMI became AISE - Agency for External Informations and Security; the SISDE became AISI - Agency for Internal Informations and Security; and the CESIS became DIS - Department of Informations for Security) maintains and even broadens specific limitations for recruiting. Article 21, comma 11 says: "The DIS and the Information Services can in no instance, not even on a part-time basis, employ or use as collaborators or consultants members of the the European or national Parliament, Regional, Provincial and Municipal counsellors or members of the city councils, employees of the constitutional agencies, Magistrates, Ministers of religious organizations and journalists".

This is an anomaly that occurs only in Italy, which could be partially justified by the past deviations from democracy that have taken place within the Italian intelligence agencies (this is perhaps the predominant reason because every reform of the intelligence structure aims at empowering control mechanisms, such as parliamentary verifications and at scattering functions rather than concentrating them). Yet this anomaly finds no justification under the operative point of view. It limits mostly the activity on the internal level rather than the espionage functions abroad.

Nevertheless, and this is perhaps the most controversial aspect of it all, the comma stems from the presumption that any co-operation between the State and representatives of the State or of the mass media or the Church is nota – as it should be – a due act but rather a circumstance to be avoided. In other countries this does not happen and, most importantly, is not part of the legislation.

THE WORLD OF SPIES

The Information Collaborator (the term "spy" implies a negative, sometimes pejorative judgment, sometimes with no foundation) is just a small pawn in a game that is played every day in every part of the world. In this subterranean world there plays out a challenge among States and ideas that knows no rules, where one wins or loses and sometimes dies. It is a fight between those who want to know and those who want to hide, where the distinction between good and evil is vague, opaque and crossed.

It is a hidden world and the constant object of curiosity, conjectures and diffidence. Yet as history shows, espionage can be a dirty job – and as such should be carried out by gentlemen – but it can guarantee security.

The regular person doesn't notice because everything happens out of the spotlight and away from the mass media. An Arab proverb says: "The fruit of peace hangs from the tree of silence". And espionage is a silent world that contributes in avoiding war.

TUAREG: LEGITIMATE CLAIMS OR TERRORISM?

On February 4 1998 the Community of the Saharan Sahel States, better known with its acronym CEN-SAD, was created. Sponsored by Khadafi, the initiative initially saw the membership of 6 countries (Libya, Niger, Mali, Sudan, Chad and Burkina Faso). Its declared aim was the creation of a free trade zone that could favor economic integration. Something similar to the COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) in Eastern and Southern Africa or the ECOWAS (Economic Community for West Africa States) in Western Africa or the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) in Southern Africa.

Its true aim though was to create, to the benefit of Libyans, an area of influence in favor of its geo-strategic interests. Headquartered in Tripoli, the financing of the economically stricken and thus easily influenceable neighboring countries mainly came from Libya. With time CEN-SAD expanded to 28 countries, well beyond the geographical boundaries of the sub-Saharan belt (more countries joined in with the ill concealed aim of obtaining Libyan investments and money). But basically, besides Khadafi's megalomania (he used this organization to obtain the necessary consensus to yearly lead the African Union), CEN-SAD's main objective remained Libya's will to control the politics and finances of the countries in the sub-Saharan region.

CEN-SAD allowed Libya to interfere – within a legal institutional framework – in the internal affairs of its neighbors, to maintain relationships with the Tuareg communities in the area sometimes employing them or fostering their claims for autonomy and then mediating between the Tuareg and their respective central governments. By doing so Tripoli controlled what was happening in its Southern borders, benefited from a certain security and, at the same time, kept its neighbors under pressure. The problems with another Tuareg ethnic group, the Toubou, from the Tchadian Tibesti and who often clashed with the people in Kufra were also addressed.

Libyan incursions in Tuareg affairs also provided the regime with low cost manpower that could be used for internal security, like the massive employment of sub-Saharan mercenaries, mainly Tuareg, that fought alongside the loyalists during the last uprising. Algeria did not appreciate Libya's meddling in Northern Mali (thus South of Algeria), where the collusion between Tuareg groups and AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) formations created huge security problems. Regardless of its interference, Tripoli also feared this welding because several Libyan former Libyan Islamic Combat Group members had joined ranks in AQIM's katibahs (battalions).

Such was Libya's worry in this field that CEN-SAD's General Secretariat also included a Peace and Security Department, an office whose purpose was none other than the coordination among the Secret Services of member countries. But this was yet not enough for Tripoli who launched, around 2005, the idea of building in Bamako an Operational Coordination Central where all the information regarding regional terrorism would flow into and to build a rapid deployment force together with other sub-Saharan countries. To build this structure Western aid (training, financing and equipment) was asked for. The Americans adhered in principle but were distrustful, the British followed, the French were reluctant to witness other countries interfere in a French speaking former colony as Mali, Italians and Spanish were in favor of the initiative if it were well detailed. The person running all the contacts was Musa Kusa, at first in his role of director of the External Security Service and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the details never came in and the project was never followed up especially since Libyan affairs have taken a different twist.

In synthesis, Libyan interference in the region swung between two contrasting aims: on one side the unscrupulous use of the Tuareg communities to destabilize and politically subjugate countries in the Sahel, on the other to avoid that the growing instability would lead to an expansion of terrorism in the area.

Before the so called Arab Spring, the Tuareg/terrorism issue stood in these terms: Libya and Algeria developed their contrast and repression of any form of terrorism with some good results, Mali and Niger (and to some extent Mauritania) obtained the necessary support and the only worrisome aspect was the welding/cohabitation that emerged in the kidnapping of foreigners, arms and drug trafficking and banditry.

KHADAFI'S FALL

Khadafi's fall has modified the terms of the issue. The presence of Malian Tuareg mercenaries alongside the regime's loyalists (around 600 men) meant that after Khadafi's killing this heavily armed mass of people fled Libya and returned to their countries of origin in the Sahel. Along the Tuareg were also all those illegal immigrants who had come to Tripoli looking for a job or to buy a ride to Italy (only the Malians were around 2000 people) and who fled Libya. Libyan rebels that took over power associated any black person to a mercenary that could be prosecuted or executed.

Moving South, this mass of people irreversibly exacerbated the social and security problems of the countries in the area. The Tuareg (now better armed than ever before) began to use their strength to bring forth their secessionist claims (and joined forces with the AQIM groups that roamed freely in destabilized areas), while the illegal migrants who returned home worsened social conditions. On top of this, countries like Mali and Niger ran short of the financing from the dethroned Rais.

Another element has to be added to this socially explosive picture: the escape South of Khadafi's men who tried to use the Tuareg against the new Libyan government and the fascination and power of their money.

THE MILITARY COUP

It is through this glass that we have to look at events that came about in Mali. At the beginning of 2012 a new wave of Tuareg protests came about. The central government in Bamako had proved incapable of dealing with the new military emergency. On the night between March 21 and 22 2012 a military coup in Mali: 2 military contingents in the capital uprising, especially the Kati garrison, in the outskirts of Bamako, the biggest in the country. Lieutenant Amadou Haya Sanogo leads the rebellion, suspends the Constitution, imposes a curfew and shuts down borders and airports. President Amadou Toumani Touré, an old friend of Khadafi's (ATT had led the African Union mediation between the Supreme Leader and the rebels), is deposed. ATT is accused of being incapable in contrasting and eliminating the Tuareg rebellion in the country's North.

But it was only half a coup d'etat since not all garrisons adhered to the overthrow of the President elect. The deadlock weakened the army even more, paving the way for the Tuareg take over in the North. The irony of it all is that Sanogo's actions instead of overcoming the rebellion, boosted it. After a mere month Amadou Haya Sanogo was forced to quit power. He had tried asking for military aid and for a mediation lead by Nigeria and ECOWAS. Sanogo negotiated his exit with

impunity. Power was transferred back to civilians. A national unity government led by Sheikh Modibo Diarra was formed and an interim president, Dioncounda Traoré, nominated. Chaos reigned in Bamako.

A failed counter-coup led by the “red berets” parachutists (as opposed to Sanogo's “green berets”) was attempted by former president Touré. Amadou Haya Sanogo's victory allowed the army to hold to three key roles in the new civilian government. A report by Amnesty International has detailed the heavy price of this blood feud. Former president Amadou Toumani Touré was wounded by an angry crowd, fleeing to Paris to be cured.

Today we're not facing a fight between the Bambara, sedentary ethnic group representing more than 50% of the population of Mali and strongly present in the army, and its historic enemies: the nomadic Tuareg. It is an internal power struggle in Mali.

THE TUAREG ADVANCE

On January 17 2012 the Tuareg advance led by the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) conquered Gao, Kidal, Ansongo. Anderamboukane, Ménaka, Tinzawaten and Tessalit soon followed. After two days of siege and profiting from the chaos in Bamako following the coup, on April 1 also Timbuktu fell. The front line is now in Douentza (Bandiagara region), a city 150 km from Mopti and around 600 km from Bamako. Competing for an area three times the size of Italy are several armed groups with different aims.

The MNLA is a secular organization, with a force of 7-8000 men (including child soldiers), well armed and equipped, formed mainly by mercenaries who fled Libya, led by a former Libyan army colonel (until July 2011) named Mohamed Najem. The movement aims at independence for the Azawad, an area North of the Niger river (800,000 square km, around 1 million inhabitants) where Tuaregs are the majority. Following the take over of Timbuktu, on April 6 2012 the MNLA declared independence and the birth of a new country (whom nobody recognized). This is where Abdallah Senussi, Khadafi's brother-in-law found refuge before being arrested in Mauritania and extradited to Libya.

But MNLA's political claim is not shared by the other armed factions active in Northern Mali. Not by Ansar Dine (“defenders of the faith”), led by Iyad ag Ghali, aka Abu al Fadl, a man involved in the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s (when he struggled for the secession of the Azawad) and whose deputy is Omar Oukd Hamaha. Hamaha is a fanatic who had been chased out of Saudi Arabia for his extremist ideas. Ansar Dine's aim is to conquer the whole of Mali and to found an Islamic state. Sharia law has been imposed on the conquered territory, tombs and mausoleums of Sufi marabouts in Timbuktu (all UNESCO world heritage sites since 1998) have been destroyed, amputations have been carried out in Timbuktu and Gao, a stoning took place in Aguelhok, alcohol has been banned, women veiled and promiscuity, use of television and listening to music have all been prohibited. Iyad ag Ghali, who comes from Kidal, can rely on a force of 3/400 armed men from the Ifoghas Tuareg tribe (one of the most important ones) and has strong links to AQIM with whom he shares the same Salafist vision of Islam.

While in Gao ag Ghali appeared alongside three AQIM commanders:

- Mokhtar Benmokhtar, one eyed commander from Ghardaia, with experience from the madrassas in Pakistan and married to a Malian
- Abdulhamid abu Zied (and his “Tarek bin Zayad” katiba) alias Mohamed Ghadir (according to Algerian Secret Services) alias Abdulhamid al Sufi alias Abid Hamadou (according to an Interpol arrest warrant issued in 2006)
- Yahya abu Hammam (nominated head of the Saharan region by AQIM's emir Droukdal after the death of Makhoulouf) and head of the “Al Furqan” katiba

All three formations (all lead by Algerians) do not follow AQIM's supposed chief, Abdulmalek Droukdal, anymore accusing him of not being charismatic enough. This means that in a Mali overridden by chaos, there is not a unique AQIM front in the North, but several self ruling factions. Another fundamentalist group has also appeared: the Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), yet another AQIM splinter faction formed in December 2011 and lead by Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou.

While the MNLA attempts to secession from Bamako, Ansar Dine wants an Islamic state, while all the AQIM groups simply look for a territory where they can roam undisturbed and export their Islamic revolution. These divisions have lead the MNLA out of Gao and Timbuktu, chased out by Ansar Dine. As we talk, it is difficult to understand who rules and where and whether, among such an heterogeneous bunch, there exists any cooperation at all.

The Tuareg advance has also caused an exodus of people South and in neighboring counties. International organizations have estimated the refugees in 250 thousand people.

THE MEDIATIONS

Several attempts have been made to try to resolve the stand off between the Tuareg and the authorities in Bamako. The president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, has tried on ECOWAS' behalf, the Algerian Minister for Maghreb and African affairs Messahel has taken a tour in the Sahel to propose a dialogue (even though he specifies that no “terrorists” will be part of that). The main problem is that it is not clear with whom one should negotiate and what to negotiate about since the issue is not between the Tuareg and Mali, but also sees the presence of other actors.

Based on a French proposal, on October 10 2012 the UN Security Council has given ECOWAS and the African Union 45 days to draft a military intervention plan in Northern Mali that will deploy an African contingent. The UN resolution also talks about negotiations between rebels and government that will preserve Mali's territorial integrity. In the mean time, former Italian PM Romano Prodi has been nominated by Ban Ki Moon as the UN's Special Envoy in the Sahel. France is extremely susceptible to events in Mali, has a significant military presence in the area (Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Mali, Center African Republic, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Djibouti for a total of around 6000 men), claims a pre-emption right over its former colonies in the region, has 8 citizens in the hands of AQIM and exploits – through AREVA – the uranium mines in Niger that supply its nuclear plants (it not by chance that these mines are located in the Ayr region dominated by the Tuareg).

FUTURE SCENARIOS

There is a high risk that the Sahel issue will become an international problem. On one side this is what Mali wants to receive more foreign aid. Bamako will try to link its concerns about its territorial integrity with the menace – whose impact is definitely more effective – of the spread of Islamic terrorism in the region.

Another major issue following the downfall of the different regimes in the area caused by the Arab Spring is the decay of the intelligence collaboration that existed both in the Sahel and in North Africa against Islamic terrorism.

In prospect, the most worrisome scenario is the so called “Somalization” of the region (a lawless area without any governmental rule), a no man's land in the hands of terrorists and crooks. The convergence of separatist claims, terrorism and banditry determines a dangerous social mix that can go beyond Mali's border and export instability elsewhere. People linked to Nigeria's Boko Haram (who participated in the attack against the Algerian consulate in Gao) have surfaced in Northern Mali and so have men associated with deposed Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo. As often happens, chaos calls for more chaos and the transhumance to Mali of men and groups whose lifestyle is based on rebellion and subversion from the Middle East and Afghanistan has already started.

Tuaregs have made of nomadism a self-ruling characteristic that has led them to ignore boundaries or central authorities. They are attached to their freedom of movement and customs, but not to the idea of a properly structured State. Neglected and economically marginalized, they have found a source of revenue in banditry and in the kidnapping of foreigners alongside terrorist groups. This is where their connivance with terrorism comes in. Tuareg Islam was definitely not Salafist (as the massive presence of Sufi mausoleums testifies), but converging interests have brought them down that path.

There are no reliable statistics on how many Tuaregs live in the Sahel. Around 1 million in Mali (over a total population of 15 million), 1,5 million in Niger, 800 thousand in Algeria for a total of around 4 to 5 million (if we add Mauritania and Chad). The very same countries that host them avoid a proper count to deny further space for their claims.

But, as stated before, the issue is not only the Tuareg claim for a country they have never had. The main problem is Islamic terrorism that could infect a continent where a series of elements favoring subversive movements like poverty, instability, social inequality, evanescent borders, lack of effective central authorities are widespread. The first issue is hence the danger of a geographical welding between the North of Mali and other areas of instability: the North of Nigeria and Somalia. Basically, events in Mali are the worrisome and evident signal of what could happen elsewhere.

If under UN aegis an international military contingent is created to return the North of Mali to Bamako's control and to crush down the different terrorist groups, this will only happen through the direct support (not direct participation) of Western countries that will have to provide money, intelligence, training and logistical assistance. The mere thought that such a political and military crisis could be resolved by Mali or by an African force means underestimating the menace and, at the same time, implying that African peace missions have proved an effectiveness they have never

shown before.

The African contingent will act under Chapter VII of the UN and will go from “peace keeping” to “peace enforcement”. In other words, the use of weapons will be a recurrent priority. The UN rapid response force should be made up of 6000 men, half of whom from Mali and the rest from the ECOWAS or AU countries. The main problem is the timeframe for setting up such a military force (Nigeria and South Africa are willing to contribute). Mali does not have adequate infrastructure, the countries participating don't have adequate equipment, thus someone will have to finance them. If this were to take too long, Tuareg rebels and the different AQIM factions would have plenty of time to settle in and consolidate.

Italy has adhered in principle and is ready to provide its assistance. So has Spain. France and the US are already training the Malian army. But the true dissuasion forces (and imposition ones if case be) will be the French garrisons in the region, the AFRICOM base in Djibouti and the drones taking off from Burkina Faso and who are already monitoring the area.

But besides from the issue of terrorism, it is worth remembering that in Northern Mali and in neighboring Algeria and Mauritania oil fields have recently been discovered. Mali is the world's third exporter of gold. So there are definitely security issues, but also economic interests at stake. And these are elements that can surely attract international attention.