# THE WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES : A HERITAGE IN SURSIS? LESSONS OF THE PAST
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Djingareyber Grand Mosque of Timbuktu, Mali, built between 1325 and 1327

Legacy of Arab-Muslim, Judeo-Christian, and Subsaharan African civilizations, the cultural heritage of West Africa is witness and vestige of flourishing civilizations. But alas, it is also the object of religious instrumentalization, political and ideological stakes.
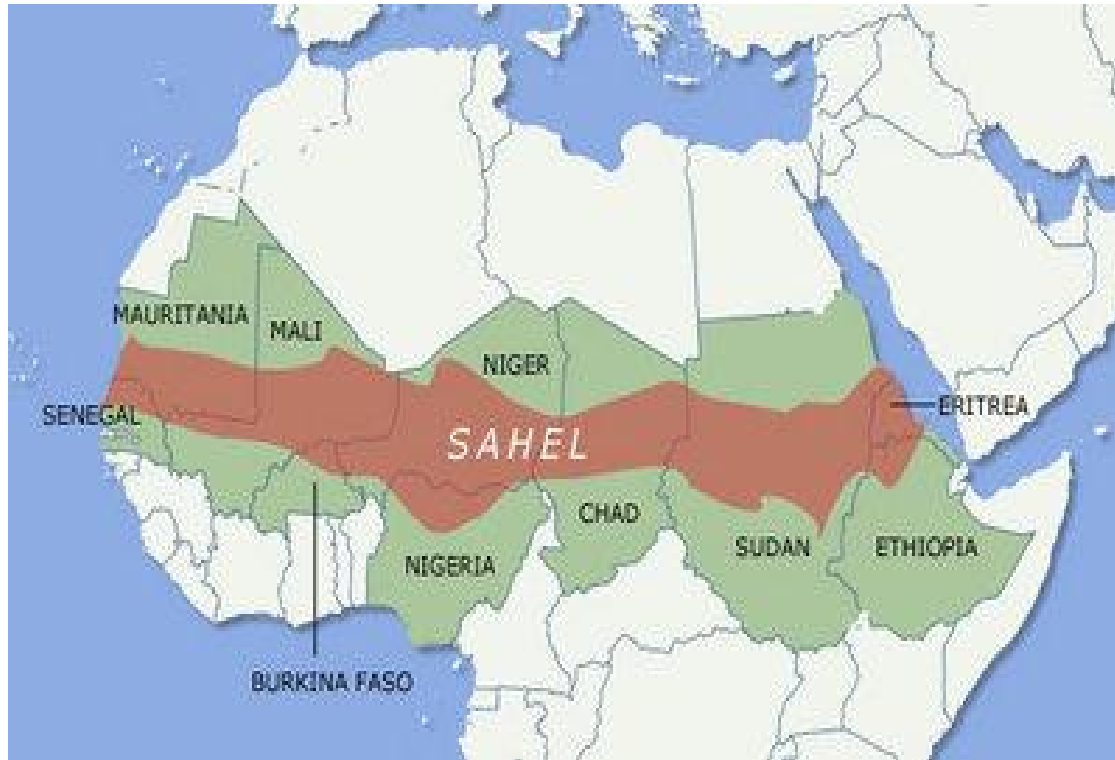
Saharo-sahelian band
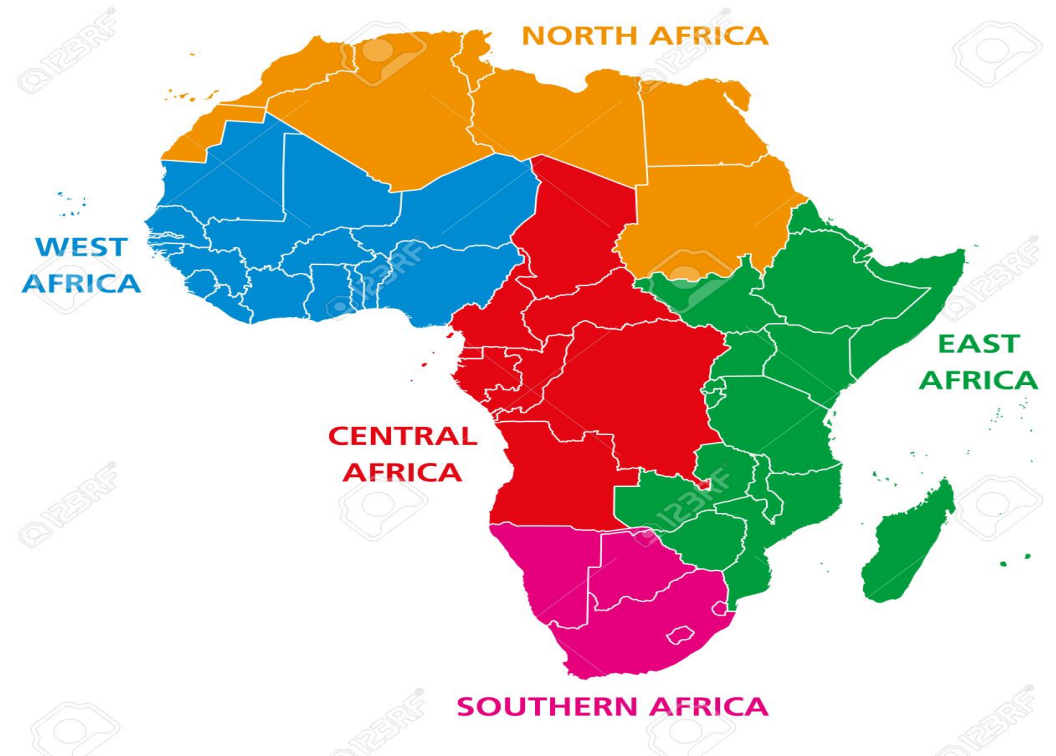
A very unstable region

Since 2012, taking advantage of weak states and in political-security crisis following the dislocation of Libya, terrorist groups of Salafist jihadist ideology (notably AQMI, MUJAO, ANSAR DINE, BOKO HARAM) place the entire Saharo-Sahelian band from West Africa (Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria) to Lake Chad in a cycle of violence and insecurity from which it is still struggling to escape.

destruction of mausoleum in Timbuktu

Armed conflicts and intercommunity violence

This new environment of chaos fuels community conflicts. Some ethnic groups blame each other for bias against belligerents (terrorist groups, MINUSMA, national armed forces, G5 Sahel, Barkhane ...) which often causes violent reprisals between communities.

Access to natural ressources, sources of inter - community conflict

« A cultural war »

These armed movements are engaged in a veritable "cultural war" by the destruction of the cultural heritage of West African Islam, which is essentially Sufi: manuscripts, historical and architectural monuments (mausoleums of Timbuktu in Mali and the cultural landscape of Sukur in Nigeria classified as heritage world of humanity) in the areas under their control.

Timbuktu manuscripts dating from the 17th to the 19th century

Causes of relentlessness

- 1.This cultural heritage is perceived by Islamic fundamentalists as the object of fetishistic worship and not in conformity with Salafist doctrine. So destroying it is equivalent to ritual killing. Without this act, defeat would not be complete.

- 2. There is also the recurrence of political disputes, social protests and community demands in states that are still struggling to recover from the chaos of civil wars (local and heritage sites have sometimes been used for military purposes) and seek new democratic or constitutional ways.

Rock painting, Niger

Advent of a new phenomenon: the "civil looting"

This political instability (usually during the electoral period) generates riots characterized by acts of vandalism, theft (economic interest), destruction or fire of public buildings symbols of the disputed State as well as their documentary resources (sometimes classified World Heritage or the Memory of the World Register).

Central Library, University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar, Senegal

Consequences : endangered communities

The chain of transmission of the knowledge and the know-how which are carried out in these societies by the culture is broken.

The security crisis engenders :

- The loss of identity values and cultural references, especially for the intangible cultural heritage.

- The systematic destruction of the material heritage: manuscripts, historical and architectural monuments (mausoleums) and the cultural landscape.

cultural landscape of Sukur, Nigeria

Preventive strategies and lessons from the past

Dance show and camel parades, International festival of saharan cultures, Chad

- For regular armies or peacekeeping forces : The first lesson is to preserve the "neutral" character of heritage in case of conflict, **avoiding as much as possible, to make it an issue of war**;

- The 1954 Hague Convention and its additional protocols; the ECOWAS conventions and protocols; the UN peacekeeping missions; and the International Criminal Court; remain **assets, levels of action and deterrence**.

- For local communities: organize sensitization and cultural heritage preservation **training sessions in emergency** or security crisis situations.