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# Youth Between State and Rebel (Dis)Orders: Contesting Legitimacy from Below in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The Sahel has gained attention in international politics as one of the central theatres in the war on terrorism. International actors in this war seek alliances with states in the region, reinforcing the latter's military strength and their legitimacy from outside. At the same time, increasingly-connected young populations question the legitimacy of their states, and contest that legitimacy from within and below. In the absence of states delivering any reasonable form of social contract, young people become torn between different governing orders and find themselves in a liminal space. In this article we present the cases of youth in Mali and Chad, who find themselves in a period of re-definition of their position in society and hence search for legitimate structures representation. In this search they may frame their belonging in terms of ethnicity, religion or political opposition – and increasingly also in adherence to global citizenship. New information flows and connectivity among young people in these regions, and between them and the diaspora, has given a new turn to their search for citizenship/belonging and rightful representation. However, whether their search will be successful in this geopolitical context is questionable.

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## Introduction

In the past five years, West and Central Africa have been the scene of popular sociopolitical movements that have contested the state. Movements such as Y-en-a-marre (Senegal), Filimbi and Luca (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Balai Citoyen (Burkina Faso) were successful to the extent that their actions forced their claims to at least become visible – and in the case of Senegal and Burkina Faso to oust the sitting presidents. These non-violent

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movements have not developed into rebellious activity, but they have become a contesting force in society. The successful movements were able (at least temporarily) to 'restore' the relationship between the state and the population by renewing a social contract in which the population can expect a form of democratic citizenship.<sup>1</sup> In Chad and Mali, youth movements also appeared on the political scene, but they have not yet resulted in concrete social change.

In this article, we analyse the situation in Mali and Chad as a liminal space where the youth is still in between different orders and contributing to 'movements in the making'. They not only contest the legitimacy of the state but also are confronted with alternative 'orders' in their region, to which they need to relate in one way or the other: such as the different orders organized by groups of jihadists in the case of northern Mali, or the global order in the form of military powers as in the case of urban Chad.<sup>2</sup> We attempt to understand how young people come to question and contest what they see as the problematic legitimacy of their current states in relation to these other 'orders', and what kinds of alternatives they envision. With this focus, this article contributes to a description of the process of delegitimation of state authority and the search for alternative 'legitimacy-worthy orders' within a field of different existing orders or emerging new ones. What order means in these contexts can be questioned, however, with regards to the violence produced by the various actors 'establishing a certain order'. The process of delegitimation and the search for alternative legitimate actors – not from an insurgent's point of view but from the perspective of the so-called constituency (the population, and in our case particularly the youth) – have so far received limited attention.<sup>3</sup> This study also contributes to the study of how legitimacy comes about as a non-linear process<sup>4</sup> – that is, how in youth's search for alternative orders, the legitimation of non-state actors comes about in two particular corners of the Sahel, where large youth cohorts, authoritarian leaders, new access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and international (military, political, religious and other) interventions have become driving factors in predominantly youth-led protests and movements.

The article is based on qualitative research and presents two examples: firstly, we present a case focussing on central Mali in which we attempt to understand why and how a group of nomadic Fulani youth came to sympathize with jihadist movements; and secondly, we present a case study of urban youth who are organizing protests in the streets of N'Djaména, the capital of Chad, to contest their government. We will first clarify our position in the youth and protest debate to arrive at an explanation of the factors that influence the contestation of government/state legitimacy by today's youth in Africa – that is, the interrelations between authoritarian leadership, ICTs, international order and claims to citizenship rights. We then examine these factors for how they play out in the two case studies in the Sahel.

## Youth and protest in Africa

Africa is defined as a young continent, since youth (under 25) form more than 60% of the population in countries such as Mali and Chad. Young people are both 'makers' and 'breakers' in African societies,<sup>5</sup> but predominantly they are portrayed as breakers – feared for the disorder their number and their ideological choices might engender.<sup>6</sup> Sommers<sup>7</sup> confirms that the focus of these concerns is predominantly on male youth. The contribution of youth to 'political' protest movements is not new. Branch and Mampilly speak of a third wave of protest, acknowledging that 'today's uprisings build on a history of African protest that stretches back to the anti-colonial struggle.'<sup>8</sup> However, new for the period in which the case studies of this article are situated is the sheer number of youth and the unprecedented access to ICT and social media in the countries concerned. Combined with their experience of marginalization and exclusion, it might not be surprising that it is indeed in particular the younger generations that contest the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes on the continent by means of these technologies and media.<sup>9</sup> While protests movements in the so-called third wave on the continent may indeed seem to share these factors (a high number of youths, increasing access to ICT and social media), at the same time these movements can be understood only in context and with reference to a large array of factors, and they may also develop in very different directions.<sup>10</sup>

Acknowledging the importance of historical and regional differences while identifying shared dynamics, in this article we compare two cases, from Mali and Chad. The shared factors that allow for an interesting comparison of the meaning and shape of youth dissent and search for alternative orders in the two countries are the following: first, the global discussions and local realities around security and the war on terrorism that have formed the dominant discourse about the Sahel in the past five years,<sup>11</sup> which are a factor in the international legitimization of African regimes/states and in the de-legitimization of counter-state actors understood as terrorist movements; second, the increasing flows of information and possibilities to connect in the new era of ICT that have played an important role in the more intensive participation of youth in political actions and in developing their political consciousness worldwide<sup>12</sup>; and third, the emerging claims of alternative citizenship often informed by connectivity.<sup>13</sup> These three elements seem to be involved in young people's quest for a new order – as was suggested by Iwilade, who examined the role of youth in recent Nigerian political developments:

[...] the intersection between youth protest, the pressures of a global system in crisis and the opportunities being provided by globalised social media has been critical not only to the deepening of resistance, but also to the ability of youth to appropriate the discourses and channel grievance. [...] youth appropriation of protest discourses surrounding the pressures of the recent global crisis has forced a renegotiation of patterns of authority and control and is deepening stability challenges in different ways.<sup>14</sup>

State apathy<sup>15</sup> and authoritarianism towards the population, a reinforced legitimacy from outside (by international military and donor means) versus new means of information and connectivity form an undeniably potent cocktail for an emerging political consciousness among young people in countries and regions in Africa, leading to a potential crisis of legitimacy and provoking new and vital questions. By delegitimizing their state's authority, what alternative authorities do they recognize? And what do these orders, if available, deliver to their constituents? It is important to take seriously the concerns that underlie young people's entanglement with counter-orders that question existing orders. Understanding their interpretation of state and rebel actors, as Finnström has discussed for young people in northern Uganda sympathizing with some points of the infamous LRA rebel group's agenda, 'can deepen the understanding of contemporary African societies in emerging global realities'.<sup>16</sup>

Looking at the crisis of state legitimacy from the perspective of youth in Chad and Mali, this article asks why these young people do or do not (yet) arrive at the creation of / or participation in a movement with the power to change the political system, such as did their 'colleagues' in Burkina Faso or Senegal. Our assumption is that in the geopolitical terrain that we sketched above, the room for manoeuvre of the youth seems to be limited. They are probably 'crushed' by states that call upon external legitimacy for their regimes.<sup>17</sup> When external legitimacy is the norm, when authoritarian regimes are embraced by the international order, to what extent can youth movements that demand legitimate leadership in an age of increased political consciousness and use of social media be effective in contributing to social change?

## **Case studies**

### ***Methodology***

The case studies and reflections in this article are part of the research project 'Connecting-in-times-of-duress',<sup>18</sup> a project oriented towards conflict-prone and authoritarian-led countries in West and Central Africa. One of our major methodologies was 'following people' in their movements and in their decisions over time, allowing us to reconstruct life histories. These life histories were constructed in context, a context in which connectivity and ICTs were increasingly present and a context that can be defined as one of authoritarian politics, in some cases war, and in all cases circumstances of oppression. The case studies we present are situated in central Mali and in the capital city of Chad, N'Djaména. In both regions, the first author has a long experience of conducting field work even before the most current research project began, allowing her to situate the collected life histories in a deeper time-frame. The second author has a more limited research experience in Chad and the Central African Republic, but more extensive experience with youth research in Uganda (from which case material is not used in this article). With time we saw young people in the region organizing

themselves politically in ways that question the legitimacy of their states. In this article, these developments are analysed in tandem with the growing use of ICT and social media, and in tandem with the increasing presence of the war on terror and of jihadist movements in the region. We bring together two case studies of predominantly male youth, acknowledging that the situations they find themselves in are dissimilar.<sup>19</sup> While an experience of marginalization and exclusion may prevail in both contexts, the historical, political and cultural trajectories that brought these youth to where they are today are quite diverse.

### ***Introduction of the case studies***

Mali witnessed the outburst of violent conflict in 2012 after a period of relative democracy (from 1990 onwards). The northern and central part of Mali were occupied by the Tuareg, an ethnic group associated with nomadic pastoralism, who claim their own space in the northern part of Mali extending to Algeria and Niger, the so-called Azawad. It was not the first time the Tuareg laid claim to Azawad.<sup>20</sup> This time their fight for autonomy was triggered by the fall of the Gadaffi regime in Libya, which created a power vacuum and led to an increase in the flows of arms and people into the Sahelian region. The rebellion was subsequently taken over by jihadists.<sup>21</sup> After the 'liberation' of the region in January 2013 by a France-led operation (Operation Barkhane), the nomads had become aware of their power and the struggle to re-find a balance is ongoing up until the present.<sup>22</sup> In this situation, new groups are aiming to claim new positions, and youth in particular play a crucial role. The case study below concentrates on nomadic youth in Mali through this turmoil and shows how their parents' struggle with the state in the past, and in the current disruption, led them to contest the legitimacy of the Malian state and the international order supporting it.

The Chadian case concerns urban youth who feel increasingly sidelined by the present-day regime of President Déby, who came to power through a rebellion movement in 1990 that overthrew the authoritarian and dictatorial regime of Hissène Habré. Since then, democratic elections have been introduced, but they have never materialized into a transparent political system – and hence President Déby is still in power and reigns over the country in an authoritarian manner, using repression as one of the ruling tools.<sup>23</sup> The elections of 10 April 2016 and their aftermath were clearly another example of this reign. Although common sense dictated that the sitting president could not win the elections, Déby proclaimed himself the winner and was installed on 8 August. This felt like a defeat for the youth who were hoping for change in their country, which has been ruled over by dictators and experienced conflict since its independence. In urban N'Djaména, we followed the disenfranchised youth, who, instead of resigning themselves to their lot, increasingly protest against the regime despite its repressive measures.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, Chad became involved in the war on

terrorism as a military force, ousting Boko Haram from the region and becoming one of the principal forces in northern Mali.

### ***Case study 1: Fulani youth (central Mali)<sup>25</sup>***

In 2013 the Fulani nomads in central Mali (in Hayre-Seeno) separated themselves from their leaders, a unique gesture in a long history of domination. These elites, occupying leading positions in the Fulani chiefdoms, had always been the intermediaries between the nomads and the state. In 2012, during turmoil in northern Mali, this started to change when the Fulani nomads realized that neither their elites nor the state had ever really done anything for them. This positioning was certainly influenced by the presence of jihadist movements in their region. These movements preached about marginalization and, at the same time, provided protection where the state had fled the region. The nomads organized themselves (with the help of mobile phones) and united into a social movement (first meeting in November 2014), leading to a movement that re-defined their position vis-à-vis the Malian state and their own elites and voiced their feelings of marginalization. At first, they made an appeal to the state and international organizations to listen to their grievances, but the discussions they had in Bamako were not followed up with concrete measures to increase security in their region or to improve their living conditions. Subsequently, some members of the movement changed their tactics from peaceful negotiations to more violent protest. Especially, the youth became part of the jihadist groups which subsequently entered the region to fight for their cause. Today, these young men are seen as a threat, but neither their opinions nor their reasoning are heard – let alone understood. Can we decipher this development as a new claim to citizenship by the Fulani nomads?

Our research<sup>26</sup> among the Fulani began in 1990 when the nomads who had just recovered from the droughts of the 1980s were again confronted with droughts. The development projects that entered their region never reached them but were appropriated by their elites<sup>27</sup> (see De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005). Until then, the Muslim scholars that taught them knowledge of Islam were also from the elite groups of Fulani society. At the same time, influences of the modern world began to penetrate into the area. Vaccination of cattle became accepted among most of the nomads, they participated in cattle markets and they were incorporated into national politics (though always through their elites). The nomads were not united but rather operated individually along the lines of the lineages and hierarchies of their society.

In the 1990s this changed. Gradually, the nomads started to send their children to school and some children entered into Muslim learning. Some of those children are now educated Muslim scholars. In addition, the nomads who had lost their cattle and were subsequently forced to make a living in towns opened the way for their fellow herdsman who still owned cattle. Some nomads invested

in the towns and bought houses. A little later, in the beginning of the 2000s, the arrival of mobile telephony also touched the nomads, who became aware of this means of connectivity and linked up to their kin far away. For nomads who did not live in a town, this development began a few years later, but today they are all connected, and information and communication has changed their views.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in 2012, when the Tuareg resistance re-emerged, followed by jihadist movements' hijacking of their agenda, the nomads were already engaged on an itinerary to change. The state retreated, the nomads were left on their own, and they developed into self-defence groups – partly at the request of the state, which could no longer maintain security in the region.<sup>29</sup> One of the nomads' major concerns was security. Especially, under the Tuareg rule that lasted until August 2012, security was inadequate. The jihadist groups managed to re-establish security and hence won the confidence of some of the Fulani nomads, who started to listen to the preaching of radical Islam – and especially to the narrative about nomads and marginalization – on their mobile phones and transferred files of sermons and videos to each other. They accessed a discourse that informed their disappointment in their elites and the state, who were the cause of their insecurity. Young Fulani men went to the camps of jihadist groups (which controlled the region from August 2012 to January 2013) to learn how to fight.<sup>30</sup>

Although the elders of the Fulani movement assured us that they were especially interested in better services from the state, the youth developed their own ideas into other directions. Today many of the youth are organized (based both on the organization of the self-defence groups and on the training they received in the camps) into counter-groups, who operate as small armed groups attacking the state in the person of police, military and political leaders. Some of these young men have embraced the sermons of a Fulani Muslim scholar, Hamadoun Koufa, reinforcing their discourse on marginalization.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, the Fulani nomads from the region have found a way to express their discontent with the state and with their elites (who are seen as part of the state) as the nomads' legitimate representative, which in its turn feeds into a discourse of belonging and contestation that leads the youth into violent acts to achieve their goal. At present, central Mali is one of Mali's most insecure regions. The Malian state accuses the Fulani of terrorist acts, but by framing their actions as such, the state ignores all grievances.<sup>32</sup> We argue that the nomads' acts contested the legitimacy of the state from below. This is happening now because in the turmoil of the past five years the Fulani have appropriated a new position in society and have seen the examples of the Tuareg and jihadist movements. Their awareness – emancipation, if you wish – is developing in a triangle of factors: Fulani society and a long history of marginalization; access to new ICT; and the presence of war-on-terror dynamics in the region. This has proven to be a conjuncture in which 'contestation of legitimacy from below' has become a real force in society.



### **Case study 2: Urban youth in N'Djaména (Chad)<sup>33</sup>**

Is the situation of urban youth in N'Djaména, Chad, different from that of the Fulani youth in Mali? Chadian urban youth are confronted with multiple problems: high youth unemployment, low quality of education, continual strikes, oppressive government, very expensive and erratic Internet connectivity, general economic crisis, etc. 'Their' Chad is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world.<sup>34</sup> These are conditions of life that they no longer accept, which makes their case indeed comparable to that of the Fulani youth, who also realize that the state does not really take care of them.

In 2016,<sup>35</sup> President Déby of Chad and his regime faced serious protests by civilians. In October 2016, students were in the streets, burning a *fonctionnaire's* car a day, a protest in reaction to the measures taken by the Déby regime, which no longer paid the students' monthly allowances or the salaries (including the bonuses) of civil servants.<sup>36</sup> The reason given was that there is no money in the state's treasury because of the declining oil prices. The bankruptcy of the state was (and still is) extensively discussed in social media, and also by people in N'Djaména who suffer from the cuts made by the government to deal with the crisis. The situation rouses the anger of citizens who see how, on the other hand, the elites 'eat' their money, build huge houses and line their personal pockets. These sentiments, based on real observations, feed into the youth's anger. This was especially so as this shortage in the state treasury was announced after the fraudulent re-election of the president in April 2016. According to the 'angry' youth, Déby had stolen the victory from their own opposition candidates. The four previous elections that Déby won (1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011) were equally criticized for 'massive electoral irregularities,'<sup>37</sup> but events leading up to the 2016 elections, especially roused public anger and youth protests, which continued into 2017.<sup>38</sup> One of the reactions of the government was to cut off access to the Internet and block the websites of bloggers, action groups, and so on. The Internet was made accessible again only in December 2016. Despite these measures, the youth managed to continue to connect online, and protests were also organized using SMS and simple voice technologies.

Nevertheless, Chad is hailed publicly for its involvement in the war on terror. It is seen as the only country with an army that is capable of fighting against Boko Haram in Nigeria and Cameroon, and against al-Qaeda in Mali. In June and July 2015, attacks in N'Djaména were ascribed to Boko Haram and were interpreted as being a consequence of the involvement of Chad in the fight against terrorism. Although many of the youth doubted this interpretation, it allowed the government to introduce harsh measures to fight against the perceived terrorist groups. The state launched razzias and arrested some young presumed jihadists.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, these measures and the explanation of the facts were countervailed by young social media users from Chad and the diaspora. At the end of January 2016, President Déby was nevertheless nominated chair of the African Union, reaffirming his legitimacy as a president from a regional (i.e. an external) perspective.

Today it is extremely difficult to be young and ambitious in Chad. There is no work, and the support of the international community is considered an insult by many young people, as this support is seen as uncritically supporting Déby.<sup>40</sup> Strikes by state officials lead to non-functioning hospitals, schools, universities and so on. And this is not the first time that strikes have paralysed the country. What future do the youth have?

These questions are part of discussions among the youth who express themselves in social media. Especially, the urban youth are well-connected online, and despite the ruptures in connectivity they find their ways around it and use VPN and other techniques to access Facebook and other social media in times of state-orchestrated disconnection. They access news and information that show them what possibilities there are in the world. The discrepancy between the possibilities at home and the possibilities 'out there' leads them to choose alternatives. They are clearly disappointed in the state and are moving gradually to other collectivities, such as churches, youth movements and protest movements (which occasionally turn violent).<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, so far all civil society initiatives that have sprung up in recent years (i.e. Trop c'est trop, Iyina, Tournons la Page and le Mouvement l'Eveil Citoyen (MECI)) have seen very limited success and are often heavily repressed.<sup>42</sup>

### **Analysis: the context of contesting legitimacy**

The young people who protest in the streets of N'Djaména or who join armed groups in Mali are considered disruptive by the governments of the territories in which they live. They are thought to create disorder, and hence are arrested, placed under control, and cut off from the Internet. The discourse of anti-terrorism and security measures legitimizes these actions of the governments. Meanwhile, demands from below for a better life and the right to work, to schooling and to access health services are ignored.

Claims to legitimacy, either by the government or by the 'disgruntled' youth creating and joining counter-state movements, must be understood in context. In both cases, and in general in the Sahelian area of West and Central Africa, these claims have become part of a wider context than the nation state. They include the international war on terror, increasing connectivity, and the related interpretation of global citizenship and the right to a decent life. These can be seen not only as context but also as resources from which contestation of legitimacy is formulated.

### ***War on terrorism***

The Sahelian area was seen as the new haven for al-Qaeda-affiliated groups since the early 2000s. It has subsequently become one of the regions for the military attention of the international players in the war against terrorism. Ellis

described how this development led to new forms of rent-seeking behaviour by a number of African governments, 'by claiming that their enemies are radical Islamist' and subsequently receiving 'financial, military and diplomatic support'.<sup>43</sup> In a way this development has jeopardized state sovereignty and established a new power order in the region. For instance, the Malian state has lost control in the north of the country. Although MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali, has no mandate to act without the consent of the Malian state, it is not clear who is really in charge. The state power was of course challenged by the movement of the Tuareg and later jihadist groups when they occupied the north of Mali, although international military force intends to control the area. As we have noted, full order has not yet been re-established, let alone an order considered legitimate by the inhabitants of the region.<sup>44</sup>

The interventions of the jihadist groups initially created a state within the state, since they took over the functions of state services, such as the provision of security and education of youth in camps in the north. Here, they were trained to engage in violent resistance against the state. With these actions, they defined a common order between themselves and the population in this area, as the example of the nomads has shown. The nomads shared both nomadism and religion with the jihadist groups. The later creation of the nomadic movement renewed claims on citizenship.

The Chadian case vis-à-vis the war on terror is different, but the outcome for the youth in the end is probably similar to that of the Fulani youth. The Chadian state has gained international recognition through its involvement in the war on terror and hence gained special legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. The training of its forces in close collaboration with the French army has been ongoing at least since 1986.<sup>45</sup> Since 2008 new investments in military equipment have been Déby's spending priority,<sup>46</sup> and the contribution of the Chadian army to international missions has generally earned them respect in the eyes of their military partners.<sup>47</sup> However, this international legitimacy is highly contested within the country, where the state is losing its legitimacy in the eyes of the youth, who contest election outcomes and the measures taken as a consequence of the financial shortfalls the state is facing. In the eyes of a large part of the population, the state is now seen as the creator of disorder, by creating inequality, co-opting people to become part of the ruling party, plundering state resources and not providing services or salaries for the common man. As noted above, young people seek to challenge the authoritarian order that masks this disorder, through strikes, protest movements in the streets and, more significantly, through sharing information and influencing the public sphere.<sup>48</sup> However, with its increasing military might and the public display thereof that has been built up since 2008,<sup>49</sup> the Chadian state is able to present itself as unconquerable and as ruthlessly repressive towards any serious civil society initiative.

### ***Connectivity and information***

These realities are no longer observed only from below but have become filled with 'facts' that come through the Internet, social media and increasingly dense communication networks. The examples of sermons and videos that are sent through Bluetooth and reach also the illiterate nomad are numerous. The effect of these media messages is clear. They feed feelings of marginality and reinvigorate histories of duress among these people, who through the new contacts with nomadic leaders, political opposition and jihadist thinkers learn to interpret their situation as being marginalized and as one of victimhood, which resonates with their experiences under an oppressive state. In the case of Mali, the nomads experienced this state, especially through the measures of the police and forest services. On the other hand, they were and are also confronted with the state's absence: the failure to provide schools, to enforce regulations, to maintain security and so on. And under the conditions of the 2012 conflict and after, the nomads were not even heard by the international organizations who are in Mali for the re-creation of order. The feeling of deceit and neglect is deep. All these factors combine to cause information exchange to lead to new forms of identification and the realization of a shared fate.

The urban (relatively educated and literate) youth in N'Djaména feel that the state does not take their claims seriously; they even feel completely neglected. This feeling is reinforced by exchanges they have on the Internet, and also in the citizen journalism that they practise with posts in which they report on the misbehaviour of the state vis-à-vis the youth. It is important to consider here also the role of the Chadian diaspora. The diaspora and youth within Chad meet each other through online social media. Furthermore, the educated youth use the Internet to search for possibilities to develop; and in this search, they also come across alternative models for citizenship and can compare themselves to students in other parts of the world. That their world in N'Djaména is one of hopelessness is dawning upon them. What are their alternatives? Connectivity helps some to get out and to realize that inside the state there is not much hope.

In both cases, then, information and connectivity offer a double-edged new dimension to young people's experiences and practices. On the one hand, they are fuelling political consciousness and empowering them to become organized, to voice their thoughts in the public sphere.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the information passed through the same channels is also increasing awareness of youth's situation, informing their marginality and adding to their frustration.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Claims to alternative citizenship: New sociopolitical movements?***

A consequence of these two factors is the search for other forms of belonging, for frames of reference that give meaning to one's life and for a re-definition of what is 'desirable, proper, appropriate' (Suchman 1995: 574) within an alternative

construction of norms, values and beliefs – that is, for an order that is legitimate in one's own eyes. The young nomads have opted to join armed groups, which for some resonate with the proud history of the Fulani and for others give meaning to their acquired status as learned Muslim men. Both the pastoral nomadic existence and the lineage structure of the Fulani to which these youth belong(ed) are no longer a satisfying environment. Is their alternative a strict Muslim belief coupled with feelings of power as jihadist youth and fighters against the state? For them this has become a more legitimate claim and one of the ways of identification. Overall, the case of the Fulani nomads shows that the crisis of legitimacy is not restricted to the state or to the international actors active in the war on terror, but that traditional authority structures,<sup>52</sup> for example, are also being contested. The latter adds to the layering of problems of legitimacy and potentially increases the room for alternative orders to fill the existing void.

The urban youth in N'Djaména seek their own ways. Although many have distanced themselves from the state, few alternatives are available.<sup>53</sup> Where can they go in such a contested urban environment, full as it is of contradictions? These young people have not yet found a real alternative: their protests are still a dialogue with the contested and detested state, with which they still engage with their expectations of decent citizenship: opportunities to study, freedom of speech, right to basic services, etc. They join discussions on Facebook that in some instances also lead to action on the ground; they protest in the streets at the risk of being injured or killed. What their future construction of belonging will be, however, is unclear. In their exchanges on the Internet and also among themselves, there is reference to a certain world style, to being part of a global youth. Indeed, this may be their future dream. Some of the protest singers, for instance, express their connection to this global youth and with their posts feed into this idea of belonging to an urban youth. However, it is unclear whether this can unite them into a coherent struggle for a better future within the boundaries of the Chadian state. Can an alternative order be achieved, or is becoming a member of the diaspora the only way forward? If the latter is the case, they probably rely on an understanding of their plight by the external states that invest heavily in the military might of the Chadian Government. This leads to an awkward paradox for young people seeking alternative legitimate structures, in that they become caught up in deferring to actors who reinforce the Chadian state's legitimacy.

## Discussion

Ellis already warned that the Pan-Sahel Initiative and follow-up programmes to fight the war on terror in the Sahel could have an undesirable effect by reinforcing 'failed states' with poor human rights records.<sup>54</sup> Today powerful actors in the war on terror such as Chad are seen as an ideal ally of the US and France.

Whereas, throughout its post-independence history Chadian presidents have often benefited from essential support to stay in power, despite their questionable legitimacy,<sup>55</sup> the current military means of Chad are unprecedented. At the same time, factors such as ICT and social media (as new and intensified information flows and mobilizing tools) make it increasingly possible to voice and organize dissent. It is at this juncture in contemporary West and Central Africa that we analyse the power play between African states reinforced by the war on terror, and the large cohorts of increasingly connected and marginalized youth in Mali and Chad.

As suggested, order, disorder, and (il)legitimacy are subjective constructs and need to be questioned in the context in which they are used by specific groups. If indeed the order of repression that has been the norm in some states for decades becomes increasingly and publicly questioned – due to the changes in access to ICT and social media that we have observed in our areas of study – then the ‘normal’ order no longer fits, and alternatives will be demanded. It is the youth groups that most actively challenge the existing frames of legitimacy and order related to their contexts in their own terms and with their own aspirations in mind. At the other end of the power spectrum, we find countries and international bodies such as the UN, who attempt to (re)establish order.<sup>56</sup> They often employ a narrow definition of the state – as an entity that is characterized predominantly by its ability to control and maintain order through the use of violence.<sup>57</sup> For these players in the field, ‘state institutions [...] are more accountable to international standards than to their own population.’<sup>58</sup> Jackson and Rosberg frame the opposition that emerges here as a conflict between internal legitimacy and international legitimacy.<sup>59</sup> As we argue, the youth challenge the internal legitimacy of the states in which they live, while their efforts may be constrained by factors enforcing international legitimacy.

In their increasing awareness of their marginalization and social–economic exclusion, youth are ‘aiming to make political sense out of what is going on as they aspire to adulthood and citizenship.’<sup>60</sup> Young people in sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly claiming influence in the public sphere through their use of social media,<sup>61</sup> finding their own voice, criticizing authoritarian regimes and mobilizing themselves. Herrera and Iwilade see this as a generational characteristic.<sup>62</sup> They indicate that access to and familiarity with ICT and social media are able to steer youth’s political agency in new directions. However, based on experience in Egypt, Herrera is sceptical about the enduring impact of these new forms of political agency among youth.<sup>63</sup>

The quest for alternative citizenship and belonging is ironically more resolved for the Fulani youth in the Sahel than it is for the urban youth in N’Djaména. Those in N’Djaména find the means to protest and to express their deep collective indignation, but at the same time they have no strong alternatives in a country with such a tightly controlling and internationally supported authoritarian regime. In this sense, the international and national ‘order’ are much

stronger here than in Mali; therefore, the quest for citizenship and legitimate representation seems to position these youth in a tight deadlock and with limited space for alternatives. A warning note by Sommers (below), though taken from a more generalized context, highlights the larger dynamics behind what created this deadlock and the problem of terror in the Sahel in the first place: unintended reinforcement by outside actors of exclusive forms of governance.<sup>64</sup> This warning confronts us with a potentially cyclical problem of externally reinforced legitimacy and protest that involves not only the state machinery in these countries and their youthful populations, but increasingly lays bare the role of the outside world:

A starting point for donor nations is not to make unstable governance intentionally worse. While such a result is not intentional, supporting government policies and programs that make the lives of profoundly marginalized youth majorities even more marginal creates the risk of undermining government institutions and increasing frustration and despair within youthful populations. *Such situations can threaten the credibility of states and foment instability.* (Sommers 2011: 300, emphasis added)

In other words, we ask ourselves, can this vicious cycle be broken and what will be the role of young people in areas deeply affected by these dynamics, such as the Sahel? There is no doubt that young people in the Sahel are divided and do not form an easily comparable category across countries or the region, or, for example, across educational background, ethnicity or gender. In theory, however, they form a large constituency for parties looking to reinforce their support base and legitimacy; furthermore, the level of frustration and despair of these youth cohorts is high and seems to be increasingly on the rise in the region.

## Conclusion

Legitimacy claims are defined in social and political communities that have an historical experience that feeds into the present. The youth we portrayed in this article, young men of nomadic origin in Mali and urban educated youth in N'Djaména, have the potential to form a community which shares similar contesting legitimacy claims. They do not feel protected or provided for by their states and hence search for other forms of belonging, contesting the state's legitimacy from below, a process reinforced by their connectivity through ICT.

The state in turn has another reference for its legitimacy claims. In both cases, the state as an entity that controls violence is defined in relation to the international order in which the war on terror has become a guiding principle. This 'new' order has placed new tools (or enforced earlier ones) in the hands of the state, to control its population and intimidate it by its newly acquired military means and security apparatus. It has also given an importance to these states that makes it impossible for the international order to deny their existence or

to protest against their ways of doing (external legitimacy). Hence, the police in Mali arrest Fulani young men, accusing them of being jihadists, and the police in N'Djaména shoot at protesters at will, under the pretext of targeting terrorists.

The triangular relation between ICT, the experience of repression and the appearance of alternative models of citizenship explains the search by these youths for a new positioning. However, the outcome of this process remains difficult to predict in the midst of these developments, and the overall picture does not look promising.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Fredericks, 2013, 214.
2. The jihadist movements are also likely to have networks within the Chadian capital, and the Fulani youth in Mali in our case study below are equally confronted with international military and 'developmental' actors.
3. Augusteijn, Review, *Mobilizing the faithful*.
4. Duyvesteyn this issue; Schoon, "The Paradox Of Legitimacy."
5. De Boeck and Honwana, *Makers & Breakers*.
6. Sommers, "Governance, Security and Culture"; Abbink, *Vanguard or Vandals*, 3–4.
7. Sommers, "Governance, Security and Culture," 2011.
8. Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*, 3.
9. Herrera, "Youth and Citizenship"; Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity".
10. Branch and Mampilly; Herrera and Sakr, *Wired Citizenship*.
11. While the war on terror in the Sahel goes back further in time (see, for example, Ellis: Briefing: The Pan-Sahel Initiative), here we are particularly interested in developments that took place since the crisis in Mali broke out in 2012, which also affected Chad and amplified the war on terror in that country. Chad became deeply involved militarily in fighting in Mali and later on its own borders and in neighbouring countries against Boko Haram.
12. See for example Vromen et al., "Young People, Social Media"; Herrera, "Youth and Citizenship."
13. Herrera and Sakr, *Wired Citizenship*; Englund and Nyamnjoh, *Rights and the politics of*.
14. Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity," 1057.
15. Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*, 126.
16. Finnström, "Meaningful Rebels?," 224.
17. For the distinction between internal and external legitimacy, we build on Jackson and Rosberg, Popular legitimacy.
18. [www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl](http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl).
19. A perspective on female youth's roles in the processes we describe here remains open to investigation.
20. Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*.
21. Lecocq et al., "One Hippopotamus."
22. For an overview of what has happened, see Lecocq et al., "One Hippopotamus." See also reports of the International Crisis Group (ICG), e.g. Briefing 115 (December 2015) (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/mali-peace-below>) and ICG (July 2016) (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>).



23. It is interesting to note here that the past few years have seen a flow of literature and films that criticize the regime of former Chadian president Habré. The critiques on the Déby regime are still not very open except for the 'testimony literature' of several opponents of the regime (see, for example, Yorongar, *Tchad: démocratie, crimes, torture*). To read more on the history of the period of 'democratization' after 1990, see Buijtenhuis, *Transitions et élections au Tchad*.
24. See de Bruijn, 2016a, 2016b.
25. A case study composed from the research of Boukary Sangaré and Mirjam de Bruijn. We cannot relate the whole rather complex situation here. See also De Bruijn et al., "Communicating War"; De Bruijn, 2015; Sangaré, 2016 (GRIP). See also the report of ICG 2016 (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>).
26. Research conducted by Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk; see De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*; De Bruijn and van Dijk, "Moving People."
27. De Bruijn and van Dijk, "Moving People."
28. Lecocq et al.; Keita et al. *Téléphonie et Mobilité Au Mali*.
29. See the short video made by Boukary Sangaré on <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/ganda-izo-the-fulbe-self-defense-group-in-northern-mali/> [accessed 15 March 2017].
30. Here, we refer to interviews which Boukary Sangaré, a member of our research team, conducted with the leaders of the Fulani in 2012, 2013 (with the presence of Mirjam de Bruijn), 2014 and 2015, and to various information provided to both Boukary Sangaré and Mirjam de Bruijn by telephone.
31. Cissé, (fc), "Biographie de Hamadoun Koufa."
32. See Wing, "French Intervention in Mali," for a similar stance with regards to the French framing of the need for intervention in the region.
33. Based on the research of Mirjam de Bruijn in 2014–2016 into youth protest and the development of the music protest scene in N'Djaména.
34. In the 2015 Human Development Index published by the UNDP, Chad held position 185 out of 188; only Eritrea, The Central African Republic and Niger scored worse than Chad. In 2016 it sank one place to position 186 (see [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf), 211, Accessed January 5, 2017, and [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf), 201, accessed on March 15, 2017).
35. For this paper we limit ourselves to 2016 because of the limitation of space; however, it is good to note that initial protests were held in 2014 as a reaction to severe inflation, and then a serious renewal of youth protest and state violence occurred in March 2015, when a measure against the wearing of helmets led to youth protests that were cruelly repressed by the state, resulting in the death of one of the protesters (see De Bruijn, blog post). See also De Bruijn, *Citizen journalism at crossroads*; and De Bruijn, 2017).
36. Re-established only in January 2017, but then without the extra *primes* for state employees, which in fact means a reduction in their salaries by 50%. The unions have announced that if this does not change, they will renew their actions. Strikes by students and teachers in Chad are not a new phenomenon; however, it seems they have reached a new dynamic and size in recent years, accelerated by increased communication possibilities.
37. Hansen, "A Democratic Dictator's Success," 584.
38. See for example Collet, "The Challenges of," 6–7.
39. This information was obtained through Facebook, based on research by the first author. See also Séverin, "Fighting Terrorism in Chad."

40. Similar sentiments, though less strong, resonate in Uganda with regards to donor support for the Museveni regime. See for example Branch and Mampilly, ch. 6.
41. De Bruijn 2017, blog post, <https://mirjamdebruijn.wordpress.com/2017/03/03/ugly-contrasts-in-chad/>.
42. See for example Collet.
43. Ellis, "Briefing: The Pan-Sahel Initiative," 462–3.
44. See Wing, 2016 for critical comments on the international war on terrorism as waged in northern Mali.
45. Griffin, "Operation Barkhane and Boko Haram."
46. Behrends et al., *Travelling Models*.
47. Hansen, "A Democratic Dictator's Success."
48. See also Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity."
49. After the failed coup attempt of February 2008, Déby invested even more heavily in his army than before, breaking the agreement signed with the World Bank to use oil revenue money for investing in development and the future generations. See Behrends et al., *Travelling Models*; Hansen, "A Democratic Dictator's Success."
50. See also Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity"; Vromen et al., "Young People, Social Media."
51. The extent to which the state and international military endeavours control information channels and content is not obvious for both countries. For example, while the Internet was cut off in Chad in 2016 and there had been earlier reference to close contacts between mobile phone providers and the state (for example, during the 2008 rebel advance), the population to a certain extent found ways to circumvent the restrictions on communications this caused. Nevertheless, more research is required into the control and surveillance by states such as Chad and Mali in the digital age (see also Herrera and Sakr, *Wired Citizenship* and Herrera, *Citizenship under surveillance* for discussion of such practices in the Middle East).
52. Lund, "Twilight Institutions."
53. Collet, "The Challenges."
54. Ellis, "Briefing: The Pan-Sahel Initiative."
55. See for example Human Rights Watch, 2016.
56. For the questionability of their effect, see also for example Carayannis and Lombard, *Making sense of the Central African Republic* on external interventions over time in the Central African Republic.
57. Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, "Re-reading Weber, Re-conceptualizing State-building."
58. Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, "Re-reading Weber, Re-conceptualizing State-building," 9.
59. Jackson and Rosberg, "Popular Legitimacy in African Multi-ethnic States."
60. Finnström, "Meaningful Rebels," 205.
61. Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity."
62. Herrera, "Youth and Citizenship"; Iwilade, "Crisis as Opportunity."
63. Herrera, "Youth and Citizenship."
64. As noted above, this is not a new phenomenon. Think, for example, of 'Cold war imperatives, [...] there can be little question that they helped to legitimize some of the most repressive regimes anywhere in the continent' (Lemarchand, *Uncivil states and civil societies*: 184). See also HRW, 2016. Or, as Mampilly and Branch show for Uganda, military spending was condoned and made possible by extensive and continuing donor support in the field of development (118–119). And despite popular protest in the aftermath of the 2011 election: 'Today the state's donor-supported militarization continues unhindered' (*ibid.*, 145).

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