

Dari Bricolage ke Biopolitik: Negosiasi Ruang Hidup dan Resistensi Kultural Masyarakat Sahel dalam Pusaran Krisis Ekstremisme dan Keamanan

From Bricolage to Biopolitics: Negotiating Living Space and Cultural Resistance of Sahelian Communities in the Vortex of Extremism and Security Crisis

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Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana kekerasan ekstremis dan kontra-insurgensi negara bersama-sama membentuk ulang ruang hidup komunitas pedesaan dan perbatasan di Cekungan Danau Chad, dengan fokus pada wilayah Far North Kamerun, timur laut Nigeria, dan Provinsi Lac di Chad. Kajian yang ada cenderung memandang ekstremisme agama sebagai ancaman keamanan atau penyimpangan teologis, sementara pengaturan spasial atas kelangsungan hidup sehari-hari relatif kurang diteliti. Melalui analisis dokumen interpretatif-teoretis atas teologi sosial Jean-Marc Ela, gagasan Foucault tentang biopower dan keamanan, nekropolitik Mbembe, serta teori praktik Bourdieu, yang ditopang literatur empiris sekunder dan laporan PBB maupun LSM, artikel ini berargumen bahwa jam malam, pembatasan bertani dan menangkap ikan, penutupan pasar, dan kontrol perbatasan, bersama pajak, pos pemeriksaan, dan kekerasan publik kelompok insurgen, membentuk dua mode pengaturan mobilitas dan subsistensi yang asimetris namun saling bersinggungan. Artikel ini membedakan kekerasan berdaulat–nekropolitik kelompok insurgen dari tata kelola keamanan negara, serta membedakan strategi bertahan (*coping*), adaptasi, dan resistensi. Perdagangan informal, migrasi strategis, skema modal tanpa bunga, dan bantuan timbal balik dibaca sebagai spektrum bricolage yang makna politisnya beragam. Peran komunitas masjid dan otoritas tradisional sebagai pelengkap negara yang hadir sebagai aparat koersif tetapi absen sebagai penyedia layanan diajukan sebagai hipotesis untuk penelitian lapangan, bukan sebagai temuan yang telah terbukti. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa kebijakan keamanan perlu memperlakukan perlindungan ruang hidup dan mata pencaharian sebagai prasyarat keamanan, bukan sekadar efek sampingnya.

Kontribusi: Artikel ini menawarkan ruang hidup sebagai kategori analitis dalam studi konflik, menetapkan batas konseptual penerapan biopolitik pada konteks kontra-insurgensi, dan mengusulkan pembedaan *coping*–adaptasi–resistensi untuk membaca praktik bertahan hidup lokal.

Kata kunci: biopolitik; bricolage; resistensi sehari-hari; ruang hidup; Cekungan Danau Chad; ekstremisme.

Abstract: This article examines how extremist violence and state counter-insurgency jointly reshape the living space of rural and borderland communities in the Lake Chad Basin, with

particular attention to Cameroon's Far North, north-eastern Nigeria and Chad's Lac province. Existing scholarship tends to treat religious extremism either as a security threat or as theological deviation, and leaves the spatial organisation of everyday survival comparatively unexamined. Using a theoretical-interpretive document analysis of Jean-Marc Ela's social theology, Foucault's accounts of biopower and security, Mbembe's necropolitics and Bourdieu's theory of practice, supported by secondary empirical literature and UN and NGO reports, the article argues that curfews, farming and fishing restrictions, market closures and border controls, together with insurgent taxation, checkpoints and public violence, constitute two asymmetrical but intersecting modes of governing movement and subsistence. It distinguishes insurgent sovereign-necropolitical violence from state security governance, and distinguishes coping, adaptation and resistance among local responses. Informal trade, strategic migration, interest-free capital schemes and mutual aid are read as a spectrum of *bricolage* whose political meaning varies. The role of mosque communities and traditional authorities as partial substitutes for a state that is present as coercion but absent as provision is advanced as a hypothesis for fieldwork, not as a demonstrated finding. The article concludes that security policy should treat the protection of living space and livelihood as a condition of security rather than its by-product.

Contribution: The article offers living space as an analytical category for conflict studies, specifies the conceptual limits of applying biopolitics to counter-insurgency settings, and proposes a coping–adaptation–resistance distinction for reading local survival practices.

Keywords: biopolitics; bricolage; everyday resistance; living space; Lake Chad Basin; extremism.

INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa has become the most lethal theatre of political violence carried out in religious idiom. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that the region accounted for 48 percent of global terrorism-related deaths in 2021 (UNDP, 2023). The same report, based on interviews with nearly 2,200 people in eight countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan), qualifies the popular image of religiously driven recruitment: one-quarter of voluntary recruits named job opportunities as their main reason for joining, 40 percent reported an urgent need for livelihood (a 92 percent increase over the 2017 study), and religion came third at 17 percent (a 57 percent decrease), with most recruits admitting limited knowledge of religious texts. Of the recruits who cited a triggering event, 71 percent pointed to government action such as the killing or arrest of a relative or friend (UNDP, 2023). These are recruits' self-reported motives and do not show that religion is irrelevant; they do show that ideology is rarely the entry point, and that the conduct of the state is itself part of the causal picture.

This matters for how violence is understood. Jean-Marc Ela (1980) described the condition of rural Africans as *le cri de l'homme africain*, a life lived under chronic threat to

its material basis, and his work in Tokombéré (Mayo-Sava, Far North Cameroon) treated land, water and food as matters of life and death (Ela, 1990). Ela argued that an extractive state "penetrating the bush" deepened rural impoverishment (Ela, 1990, 1994) while peasants and urban poor nevertheless generated social innovations from below (Ela, 1998). Two cautions apply to using Ela here. His fieldwork centred on Tokombéré, whereas this article concerns, among others, Muslim lowland and lake communities; what travels is his analysis of state penetration, extraction and peasant response, not his pastoral setting. And his major works predate Boko Haram by decades, so they establish the structural background, not the dynamics of the present conflict.

Three strands of research frame the problem. First, security and counter-terrorism studies treat extremism as a threat to state and regional stability and stress early warning, regional cooperation and military capacity (Dowd, 2016; O. Ismail, 2013; Haruna, 2022; Mshelia, 2024; Sambaiga, 2022). Second, ideological-theological studies analyse doctrinal change, transnational puritanism and the communication of extremist discourse (Hexham, 2002; Chiluwa et al., 2020; Hassan, 2022; Ottuh & Erhabor, 2022); this literature also warns that "extremism" is a contested label (A. M. Ismail et al., 2025). Third, socio-structural and political-economy studies read extremism through inequality, marginalisation and governance failure (Ela, 1980, 1990, 1994, 1998; Walker, 2012; Pérouse de Montclos, 2014; Thurston, 2018). A fourth body of work, produced largely by human-rights organisations and policy institutes, documents abuses by security forces and the problems of vigilante groups (Amnesty International, 2015, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2016, 2018). The claim made here is therefore modest. It is not that state conduct has been ignored, but that three things are seldom analysed together: the spatial regulation of movement and subsistence by insurgents and by the state, the way that regulation contracts the space in which people can make a living, and the local practices that respond to it.

The article uses *living space* as the integrating category. The term has a troubled genealogy in German geopolitics (*Lebensraum*), which the article does not invoke; the sense used here derives from Lefebvre (1991), de Certeau (1984) and Ela (1990). Living space is the socially produced and materially bounded ensemble of places in which people farm, fish, herd, trade, worship and move. Its extent depends on legal permission, physical safety, the price of goods and transport, and the social ties that grant access. Contraction

of living space is therefore measurable in principle: fewer accessible plots, shorter permissible hours, longer or costlier routes, closed markets.

The Sahel proper (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) differs in actors, histories and state responses from the Lake Chad Basin. The empirical material used here concerns the Basin borderlands, above all Cameroon's Far North, and the article does not generalise to the wider Sahel or to Sub-Saharan Africa. Terms are used as follows: *insurgent violence* for the actions of Boko Haram factions and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP); *violent extremism* where source documents use that term; *state security measures* for the actions of national armed forces, administrations and state-aligned vigilante groups.

The article asks three questions. (1) How do insurgent violence and state security measures regulate living space, and how do the two differ? (2) How do communities respond, and which responses are properly described as resistance rather than coping or adaptation? (3) What role can mosque communities and traditional authorities play, and what evidence presently supports claims about that role? The next section sets out the concepts; the method section follows, and the analysis, discussion and conclusion complete the article.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Sovereign power, biopower and necropolitics

Foucault distinguished the classical sovereign right to "take life or let live" from biopower, which works on populations to "make live and let die" through statistics, public health, and the management of circulation within a territory (Foucault, 1976, 1997, 2004). Disciplinary power, a different modality, shapes individual bodies through training and surveillance, and is the source of the "docile bodies" idea (Foucault, 1975). Mbembe (2003) extended the analysis to colonial and postcolonial settings, where sovereignty is exercised as the power to expose categories of people to death. Agamben (1998) located "bare life" in the sovereign decision on the exception, not simply in deprivation.

These distinctions discipline the argument. Public executions staged by insurgents are closer to sovereign spectacle and necropolitics than to biopower or discipline. Curfews, checkpoints, travel permits and bans on motorbikes are better analysed as security apparatuses that govern circulation within a milieu (Foucault, 2004), sometimes under emergency powers that approximate Agamben's exception. Restrictions that erode subsistence over time have been theorised as slow violence (Nixon, 2011) and slow death

(Berlant, 2011), not as biopolitics in the narrow sense. The article uses "biopolitical" as a broad heuristic only where the object of regulation is a life process (subsistence, mobility, settlement, access to food and fuel), and it states plainly that this is an analogical extension of a framework built on European cases.

Habitus, field and symbolic capital

Bourdieu's *habitus* names durable, embodied dispositions formed by past conditions; it changes slowly, which is why this article does not claim that a "habitus of fear" has replaced a productive *habitus*. The more defensible claim is that insecurity disrupts the conditions under which existing dispositions can be exercised (access to markets, credit, kin networks). The religious field (Bourdieu, 1971) is a space of competition over legitimate interpretation of salvation goods. In the Basin that field includes Sufi brotherhoods, Salafi-oriented currents such as Izala, Christian churches and customary rulers (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014; Kobo, 2021). Symbolic capital is used here as a descriptive term for recognised authority; claims about its redistribution are treated as hypotheses.

Bricolage, tactics and resistance

Bricolage originates with Lévi-Strauss (1962), for whom the *bricoleur* makes do with whatever is to hand. Ela and, following him, Assogba (1999) use it for the improvised "art of living" of African popular classes, close to the Francophone notion of *débrouillardise*. De Certeau (1984) describes the "tactics" of the weak, which exploit openings in a space controlled by others, and Scott (1985) describes everyday peasant resistance. The risk in this tradition is conceptual stretching: if every act of survival is resistance, the term loses analytical value (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). The article therefore treats *bricolage* as an umbrella and separates three analytic categories. *Coping* sustains survival without altering the constraint (for example, selling assets). *Adaptation* changes practice to preserve a livelihood within the constraint (for example, relocating a trade). *Resistance* contests the constraint or the authority behind it, by intent or in effect, and is recognisable as such by the actor or the target. The political meaning of a practice can be ambiguous: cross-border trade may sustain households and also feed a war economy.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design. The study is a qualitative, theoretical-interpretive document analysis. It is not an empirical field study and collected no data from human participants. Its claims are therefore of two kinds: conceptual claims about how the theoretical frameworks apply, and empirical statements that rest entirely on secondary sources. The article does not use the word "finding" for any proposition that no cited source documents.

Corpus. Three groups of documents were analysed. (a) Theoretical and interpretive works: Ela (1980, 1990, 1994, 1998), Assogba (1999), Foucault (1975, 1976, 1997, 2004), Mbembe (2003), Agamben (1998), Bourdieu (1971, 1977a, 1977b), de Certeau (1984), Scott (1985) and Lévi-Strauss (1962). (b) Empirical secondary sources on the Lake Chad Basin: scholarly work (Hamdy, 2020; Magrin & Pérouse de Montclos, 2018; Thurston, 2018; Pérouse de Montclos, 2014; Saunders, 2019), reports by UNDP, UNESCO, Crisis Group and Amnesty International, and press material (VOA, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2014). (c) The author's earlier study of mosque communities (Talikoa, 2026), used as a source of hypotheses and flagged wherever it is the sole support for a claim.

Selection. Documents were selected purposively against four criteria: relevance to Ela's analysis of structural suffering; contribution to the study of violent extremism in the Basin; theoretical relevance to biopolitics, practice and resistance; and empirical detail on spatial and material conditions. The selection was not a systematic review, and no reproducible search protocol was used. To limit one-sidedness, sources critical of security forces were included alongside sources on insurgent violence.

Analysis. Coding proceeded in three steps: deductive codes from the frameworks (sovereign power, security apparatus, necropolitics, slow violence, field, habitus, bricolage, coping, adaptation, resistance); an actor-by-domain matrix comparing insurgent and state measures across movement, land and water, markets, resources and settlement; and claim-evidence mapping, in which each empirical statement was traced to a source and labelled by evidential status (Tables 1 and 2). Claims resting on a single source, or on none, are marked as such.

Relation to earlier work, positionality and limits. The discussion of mosque communities builds on Talikoa (2026). The present article differs in its object (living space and the regulation of subsistence), its comparison of insurgent and state measures, and its distinction between coping, adaptation and resistance; the overlap is acknowledged and the earlier study is not treated as independent corroboration. The

author writes from Cameroon, which may shape the choice of sources; Francophone and Anglophone sources differ in coverage, and official data may reflect state priorities.

RESULT

Two modes of governing living space

Insurgent governance: sovereign violence and territorial control

Boko Haram factions and ISWAP govern through territorial control, taxation, checkpoints and exemplary violence. Video recordings of Boko Haram analysed by Voice of America show villagers in Nigeria compelled to watch public floggings and executions carried out with the declaration "We have carried out God's punishment" (VOA, 2017). This is sovereign spectacle: its audience is meant to learn who holds the right to kill, and the religious idiom supplies legitimacy. It is better described as necropolitical (Mbembe, 2003) than as biopolitical or disciplinary, since it works through terror and the exposure to death, not through the administration of life. Reports also describe restrictions on fishing and on livestock routes in the Lake Chad area, which confine people to zones where they are exposed to attack (UNESCO, 2022).

State security governance: circulation, curfew and restriction

State responses are mostly regulatory. In Cameroon's Far North, authorities have imposed curfews and targeted restrictions on motorbikes; reporting from Maroua in 2014 described taxis available only at night after a motorbike-specific curfew (Al Jazeera, 2014). Night travel bans after 6:00 p.m. are reported to undermine the livelihoods of drivers, loaders and "motorboys" whose income depends on daily mobility (Hamdy A., 2020). Farming bans in frontline zones are reported to have been justified on the ground that insurgents hide in millet fields, but the legal instruments behind such bans lie outside the sources reviewed here, and their effects are treated as a matter for further documentation. These measures respond to real threats and are, in Foucault's terms, security apparatuses that manage circulation; where they are imposed under emergency powers they also resemble the exception.

The state is also a source of insecurity in its own right. Amnesty International has documented war crimes by the Nigerian military (2015) and torture and unlawful detention in Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram (2017), and Crisis Group has analysed the risks posed by vigilante groups and by the treatment of former combatants in the Far

North (International Crisis Group, 2018). The UNDP finding that most recruits who cite a triggering event point to government action (UNDP, 2023) gives this a causal weight: it is the one feedback mechanism between the two modes that the sources support.

Asymmetry and shared effect

The two modes should not be equated. They differ in avowed purpose (protection against terror), legal accountability, forms of violence, and reversibility; insurgent killings of civilians are deliberate, whereas the livelihood harms of curfews and bans are, in the first instance, side effects of policy that can in principle be reviewed. What the modes share is an effect on living space. Table 1 compares them across five domains and states the evidential basis of each entry.

Table 1. Insurgent and state measures regulating living space in the Lake Chad Basin borderlands.

Domain	State security measures	Insurgent measures	Effect on living space; evidence status
Movement	Curfews; night travel bans; restrictions on motorbikes (Al Jazeera, 2014; Hamdy A., 2020).	Checkpoints; regulation of movement in controlled areas (UNESCO, 2022).	Shorter permissible hours, costlier travel; reported in sources, legal instruments to be verified.
Land and water	Farming bans in frontline zones and border closures (not documented in the sources reviewed).	Restrictions on fishing and livestock routes (UNESCO, 2022).	Loss of access to fields, fishing grounds and pasture; state side undocumented here.
Markets and trade	Closure or relocation of markets near the border.	Attacks on markets, including suicide bombings (Hamdy A., 2020).	Disappearance or decline of markets at Mémé, Mora, Amchidé and Banki; supported by Hamdy (2020).
Fuel and prices	Controls on informal fuel trade (not documented in the sources reviewed).	Disruption of supply routes by violence.	Price shocks (see below); price series need unit and source verification
Settlement	Concentration of displaced people in public buildings and sites; humanitarian management.	Forced flight from villages.	Displacement into overcrowded host households and public buildings; mainly insurgent-caused, with state and humanitarian management on arrival.

Market collapse, price shocks and displacement

The collapse of market places is the clearest material expression of contracted living space. Hamdy A. (2020) reports suicide attacks on the Mémé livestock market in Mayo-Sava (Cameroon), the relocation and decline of Mora market after repeated attacks, and the disappearance of the Banki livestock market (Nigeria), the Amchidé market and the Limani customs post (Cameroon), described locally as *rasés de la carte*. Informal workers dispersed to cities such as Douala, Yaoundé, Lagos, Abuja and N'Djamena, while those unable to leave depended on begging or humanitarian aid.

The supply of *zouazoua*, cheap fuel brought from Nigeria and widely used where licensed stations are few, was disrupted after displacement from Banki and Kerawa. Fuel that sold for about 350 CFA francs a litre in Mora, and 200 CFA in Kerawa or Amchidé, became scarce, so that people travelled up to 250 kilometres to buy it; intra-city fares rose from 100 to 200 CFA, and goods once bought in Banki, 27 kilometres from Mora, had to be sourced about 250 kilometres away. Reported price changes include eggs from 75 to 125 CFA, cooking oil from 350 CFA a litre in 2013 to about 1,000 CFA, red millet in Mora from 150 to 350 CFA between harvest and lean season, and powdered sugar from 17,000 to 58,000 CFA in June 2015 before fluctuating between 36,000 and 58,000 CFA (UNESCO, 2022). The source does not always specify the unit of each price or the year of each observation, so the series are indicative. These data show that poverty is not only low income but a widening gap between prices and purchasing power.

Interpretation requires care. Price shocks are best explained as the cost of disrupted routes and added security risk; calling them "biopolitical regulation through the market" adds little unless a deliberate regulatory act is shown. Displacement is, likewise, primarily an effect of violence, not a technique of rule. What can be said is that where authorities and aid agencies concentrate displaced people in stadiums, schools and public buildings, those people become objects of humanitarian government (Agier, 2011), made visible, countable and dependent on assistance.

Structural vulnerability and what the conflict adds

Ela's analysis directs attention to what precedes the conflict. The Far North is Cameroon's poorest region and has some of its lowest schooling indicators (International Crisis Group, 2016). Livelihoods rest largely on smallholder farming, herding and petty

trade, which are exposed to short rainy seasons and low yields. The conflict intensifies these conditions in three ways that the sources support: it removes access to fields, fishing grounds and markets; it raises the cost of mobility and goods; and it displaces households into places where they depend on others. Whether it "transforms economic uncertainty into a permanent emergency" is an interpretive judgment, not a measured result, and it would need comparative data on livelihoods before and after the conflict to be tested.

A Bourdieusian reading needs the same restraint. It is reasonable to say that insecurity narrows the horizon of planning and small-scale investment, and that the social networks on which *bricolage* depends (credit, kin hospitality, market acquaintance) are weakened by displacement and mutual suspicion. It is not demonstrated that a productive habitus has been "paralysed" and replaced by a habitus of fear, and Ela's claim that social innovation needs minimal security (Ela, 1998) is a condition to be examined, not a finding.

From bricolage to resistance: a spectrum of local responses

Communities are not passive. The question is what kind of agency their practices express. Table 2 classifies the main responses discussed in the sources and states how well each is documented.

Table 2. Local responses to the contraction of living space: classification and evidential status.

Practice	Classification	Main actors	Evidential status
Migration of informal workers to large cities	Adaptation	Traders, transport workers, youth	Documented (Hamdy A., 2020)
Informal "clando" transport adjusted to curfew hours and routes	Adaptation	Drivers, passengers	Cited to Magrin & Pérouse de Montclos (2018)
Home-based enterprises, petty trade, cross-border trade	Adaptation; ambivalent where trade crosses insurgent areas	Women, traders, families	Partly documented in the literature reviewed
Interest-free trading capital; weekly "prayer contributions"; targeted <i>zakat</i>	Adaptation and mutual aid; resistance only if it contests recruitment or exclusion	Families, mosque congregations	From Talikoa (2026) only; Saunders (2019) is background on Kanuri scholarship, not evidence for the schemes
Kin-based hosting of displaced relatives	Coping and solidarity	Households	Documented in outline (Hamdy A., 2020)
Clandestine fishing; hidden or night	Potential resistance or risk-taking	Fishers, farmers, herders	Hypothesis: not documented in the sources reviewed; night

cultivation; night grazing; fuel stockpiling			cultivation under curfew is dangerous and would need direct evidence From Talikoa (2026) only; effectiveness untested
Sermons, Qur'anic schooling and community forums that contest insurgent readings of scripture	Resistance (symbolic)	Imams, ulama, educators	
Negotiation with local authorities and vigilance committees	Adaptation; resistance in some cases; risk of co- optation	Chiefs, mosque assemblies, local officials	Partly documented (International Crisis Group, 2018)

Note: classification follows the definitions of coping, adaptation and resistance given in the conceptual framework.

Most documented responses fall under coping or adaptation. They show considerable inventiveness and deserve analytic attention, but they do not by themselves contest the restrictions that shape them. Resistance in the stronger sense is best evidenced where communities contest the insurgents' claim to speak for religion, or negotiate the terms of state restrictions with local authorities. Some practices are politically ambiguous. Cross-border trade and fuel supply can sustain households while also sustaining a war economy, and the vigilance committees that communities form for protection have been identified by Crisis Group as a security problem in their own right (International Crisis Group, 2018). The conclusion that "biopolitical control is never total" is therefore sound, but the more romantic reading, that every survival practice is cultural resistance, is not.

Mosque communities and traditional authorities: a hypothesis, not yet a finding

The earlier study (Talikoa, 2026) proposed that mosque congregations are the institutions closest to everyday life and can mobilise action across families and villages more easily than distant state agencies, especially in the porous border areas of Cameroon, Nigeria and Chad where formal control lags behind armed actors. That proposal is plausible and consistent with UNDP's emphasis on local communities in sustainable pathways out of violent extremism (UNDP, 2023), but its support here is a single prior study. The mechanisms identified there, namely Qur'anic and theological schooling, forums held under trees (*wazu*, from Arabic *wa'z*, exhortation) for discussing threats, short sermons after prayer, the integration of violence and poverty into Friday and Eid sermons, and *zakat*-funded micro-capital, are best treated as proposed pathways. Their effectiveness has not been evaluated, and the comparative literature cited for

similar mechanisms (Thurston, 2012, on Mauritania; Bava et al., 2021, on imam training in Morocco) concerns different settings.

Three qualifications follow. First, the state is not simply absent: it is present as coercion (troops, checkpoints, curfews) and absent as provision (services, credit, markets). The "void" is therefore one of provision and trust, and religious and customary actors fill it only partly. Second, mosque communities and traditional authorities are plural and sometimes rivals; Sufi and Salafi-oriented currents differ over authority and practice, and chiefs and imams may themselves become targets of violence or objects of state co-optation, which could erode their legitimacy. Third, faith-based welfare in other settings tends to supplement rather than substitute for the state, and may treat symptoms rather than causes of poverty (Owens & Smith, 2005; Jawad, 2009). Women are central to informal economies but are rarely leaders in mosque institutions, so a mosque-centred strategy may reproduce exclusions.

The Bourdieusian proposition that mosque communities are building alternative symbolic capital through moral legitimacy and social proximity is thus a hypothesis. Testing it would require evidence of whether interpretive authority actually shifts, for example through surveys of trust in religious leaders, ethnography of sermons and schools, and tracking of recruitment. A related point concerns causation. UNDP's data (2023) emphasise livelihood and state conduct over religious motivation, so the claim that mass violence relates chiefly to a "dissolution of the religious" finds little support in that source. A defensible position, held in tension with the UNDP data, is that ideology rarely draws people in but supplies the language that legitimates violence once they are in.

DISCUSSION

The analysis supports claims of different strength. Well supported: insurgent violence and state security measures both contract the living space of borderland communities, through restrictions on movement, access to land and water, and markets; conflict-related price shocks and displacement have large material effects; local people respond with a wide range of inventive practices. Moderately supported: the state's conduct is part of the causal chain through which violence is reproduced (UNDP, 2023; Amnesty International, 2015, 2017), and the two modes of governance, though asymmetrical, are linked through this feedback. Tentative: that mosque communities and

traditional authorities constitute a significant resource for protection and recovery, and that symbolic capital is shifting toward them.

Contributions. Relative to the security strand, the article shows that the pattern of restrictions imposed in the name of security has costs for living space that are rarely counted in assessments of effectiveness, which is consistent with the UNDP's judgment that security-driven responses are costly and minimally effective (UNDP, 2023) and with Crisis Group's call for a shift from military to development approaches in the Far North. Relative to the ideological strand, it shows that ideology is only one of the channels through which violence acquires force; livelihoods and state conduct are others. Relative to the socio-structural strand, it adds a spatial analytic, the contraction of living space, that links structural suffering to concrete restrictions and to concrete responses.

Theoretical implications. Three points emerge. First, biopolitics is useful for the regulation of circulation and subsistence but should be separated from sovereign-necropolitical violence and from discipline; collapsing them under one label weakens the concept. Second, living space can be operationalised through indicators of accessible land, permitted hours, route length and cost, and market availability, offering a bridge between critical theory and measurable conditions. Third, the distinction among coping, adaptation and resistance guards against two errors: treating survivors as passive victims, and treating all survival as political opposition.

Alternative explanations and counter-arguments. A security analyst could argue that curfews and bans save lives and that livelihood losses are an unavoidable cost; the analysis does not deny the threat but asks for impact assessment, sunset clauses and safe-access arrangements as part of security design. Others could argue that insurgent groups are driven by ideology, not grievance; the UNDP data do not rule that out for leaders and may understate it for ideologues, since they report recruits' own accounts. A third objection is that resource competition between farmers and herders, not the insurgency, explains much of the local conflict; this is likely to be partly true and is another reason to treat attributions of cause cautiously.

Implications for policy and practice. (1) Restrictions on movement, farming, fishing and markets should be accompanied by published legal instruments, reviews of livelihood impact and defined end dates. (2) Accountability for abuses by security forces and vigilante groups is a security measure, not only a rights measure, given the role of government action as a trigger for recruitment (UNDP, 2023). (3) Safe-access

arrangements for fields, fishing grounds and markets, such as escorted seasonal access or protected market days, should be piloted and evaluated; they are illustrative, and no evidence of their effect is presented here. (4) Support for local religious and customary actors should be voluntary, transparent and non-instrumental, to avoid turning religious leaders into security agents and securitising religion; such support should include women and be evaluated. (5) Investment in basic services, work and credit addresses the structural vulnerability that Ela described and that predates the conflict.

Limitations. The analysis is document-based and conceptual and presents no new field data. The selection of sources was purposive. Evidence on the state side (farming bans, border closures, market closures) is thinner than evidence on insurgent violence; price and market data come from a small number of sources and require verification; and the evidence on religious communities rests largely on one earlier study by the author. Findings are specific to the Lake Chad Basin borderlands and do not generalise to the wider Sahel. A further risk is inherent in the framework: a biopolitical lens can overstate the coherence and reach of governing power, and, in the opposite direction, the language of resistance can romanticise survival.

Directions for research. Priority tasks are primary data on living space (household surveys of land and market access, GIS mapping of restrictions), systematic documentation of legal instruments, ethnographic and interview work with mosque communities, women traders and chiefs, and evaluation of the pathways proposed for religious communities, including the risk of harm.

CONCLUSION

Violence in the name of religion in the Lake Chad Basin cannot be understood solely as theological deviation or as a security threat. It unfolds on ground already marked by structural vulnerability, and it is accompanied by state security measures that, however justified, also narrow the space in which people can farm, fish, herd, trade and move. Insurgent violence and state security governance are asymmetrical, and they should be analysed with different concepts (sovereign-necropolitical violence in the first case, security apparatuses and emergency regulation in the second), but they intersect in their effects on living space and, through state abuses, in the reproduction of violence.

Local communities respond with a broad repertoire of *bricolage*. Most of it is coping and adaptation, some of it is resistance, and some is politically ambiguous. Mosque

communities and traditional authorities may be important partners in protection and recovery, but this remains a hypothesis that the present evidence does not settle. For policy, the central implication is that protecting living space and livelihoods belongs inside security policy, not beside it. For research, the article offers living space as an analytic category and a set of distinctions that can be tested with field data.

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