

# Scienza e Pace

## *Science & Peace*

ISSN 2039-1749

Vol. XV, No. 2 (2024)

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Online Journal of the "Sciences for Peace"  
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***This paper has been refereed through double-blind peer review***

Received: 15 December 2024.

Accepted: 15 April 2025.

Published: 31 July 2025.

To cite this paper:

Ayuk, M.E., Chirambwi, K., (2024), "Galtung's Structural Violence Paradigm: A Crucial Analytical Framework for Understanding Violence in the Sahel region of Africa", *Scienza e Pace*, XV (2), pp. 25-46.

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# Galtung's Structural Violence Paradigm: A Crucial Analytical Framework for Understanding Violence in the Sahel region of Africa

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## Abstract

Violence in Africa has often been analyzed through sociological, economic, political, and international relations lenses, while rarely through Johan Galtung's Structural Violence framework. Yet, Galtung provides a more nuanced understanding of the region's megatrends. This paper explores the relevance of his theory, particularly in the Sahel, by drawing from his 1969 work *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. Structural violence focuses on systemic and institutional factors—such as inequality, ethnic domination, weak governance, and lack of the rule of law—that fuel unrest beyond direct physical violence. In the Sahel, these structural conditions have led to political instability, social unrest, coups, climate vulnerability, unemployment, and widespread suffering. Deprivation and marginalization become fertile ground for conflict. The paper argues that deviant political leadership and poor arms control are both products and drivers of these embedded structural issues. It also examines how climate change, as a “violence multiplier,” worsens instability and undermines adaptation strategies. While Galtung's framework has limitations, especially when used in isolation, it offers a valuable lens for understanding violence rooted in colonial legacies, inequality, and political dysfunction. Structural, direct, and cultural violence are interlinked, necessitating holistic approaches for addressing violence in diverse geopolitical contexts.

**Keywords:** Structural violence, Sahel, political instability, climate change, weak governance

## Abstract

La violenza in Africa è stata spesso analizzata attraverso le lenti sociologiche, economiche, politiche o delle relazioni internazionali, mentre raramente è stata analizzata attraverso la concettualizzazione della violenza strutturale di Johan Galtung. Tuttavia, Galtung fornisce una comprensione più sfumata delle megatendenze di quella regione. Questo articolo esplora la rilevanza della sua teoria, in particolare nel Sahel, attingendo dal suo lavoro del 1969, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. La violenza

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strutturale si concentra su fattori sistemici e istituzionali - come la disuguaglianza, la dominazione etnica, la governance debole e la mancanza dello Stato di diritto - che alimentano i disordini al di là della violenza fisica diretta. Nel Sahel, queste condizioni strutturali hanno portato a instabilità politica, disordini sociali, colpi di Stato, vulnerabilità climatica, disoccupazione e sofferenza diffusa. La privazione e l'emarginazione diventano terreno fertile per i conflitti. Il presente lavoro sostiene che una leadership politica deviata e uno scarso controllo delle armi sono sia il prodotto che il motore di questi problemi strutturali radicati. Esamina inoltre come il cambiamento climatico, in quanto "moltiplicatore di violenza", aggravi l'instabilità e comprometta le strategie di adattamento. Sebbene il lavoro di Galtung presenti dei limiti, soprattutto se utilizzato in modo isolato, offre una prospettiva preziosa per comprendere la violenza radicata nelle eredità coloniali, nella disuguaglianza e nella disfunzione politica. Le violenze strutturali, dirette e culturali sono interconnesse e richiedono approcci olistici per affrontarle nei vari contesti geopolitici in cui si manifestano.

**Parole Chiave:** Violenza strutturale, Sahel, instabilità politica, cambiamento climatico, governance debole

## Introduction

As we celebrate Johan Galtung's legacy in the field of peace and conflict studies, we argue for the continued relevance of his structural violence model in explaining how extractive economic and political institutions in the Sahel countries have caused immense suffering in communities. In subsequent sections, we will demonstrate how Galtung conceptualized structural violence as "the systematic constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures" (Galtung 1968). Understanding these extractive institutions (Acemoglu *et al.* 2012) is crucial for achieving peace, as Galtung (1990, 172) emphasized: "If the concern is with peace, and peace is the absence of violence, then action should be directed against personal as well as structural violence." While some studies have highlighted the importance of peacebuilding in Africa, few have focused specifically on the relevance and applicability of Galtung's structural violence theory in addressing the causes of conflict and the distribution of suffering in the Sahel region. What makes the Norwegian sociologist and mathematician's contribution unique is that he

addressed the micro-structural root causes emerging from systemic oppression and repression by societal structures.

This analytical perspective is consistent with UKEssays (2018, 1), which viewed the framework of structural violence as “essentially useful as it is an attempt to expand the existent spectrum of traditional physical threats into the realm of intangibles, which is paramount for deriving the underlying causes of violence.” This paper aims to accentuate Galtung's legacy by examining the enduring questions: How does Galtung's notion of structural violence speak to the existential realities of extractive economic and political institutions in the Sahel region? How do his insightful scholarly investigations on structural violence provide opportunities to mainstream peacebuilding systems in the Sahel and beyond the region? In addressing these questions, the study takes a retrospective view of Africa, applying the structural violence paradigm to the Sahel region. We are fully aware of Galtung's linkages and causal flows between direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence (the metaphor of a violence triangle) and the distinction between personal and structural violence and negative and positive peace, respectively. We are equally aware that direct violence is an event, structural violence is a process, and cultural violence is a permanence. However, we aim to foreground and enrich structural violence theory by bringing politics and economics back into the fold, using institutional explanations as the root cause of violence.

The analysis of the contribution of structural violence in extractive institutions will be conducted in three steps. Our investigation will begin by analyzing violence and its affiliation with “structural violence”. The second section will examine the contribution of extractive political institutions to violence. Here, we argue that ambitious leaders exploit natural resources and innate ethnic and religious hatred for self-entrenchment and consolidation of power. By nature, extractive political institutions are not inclusive, discouraging participation by the majority of citizens, stifling talent, skills, and choices. The institutional quality is insufficient to prevent manipulation by the elites. The third section will explore the structural violence emitted by extractive economic institutions during production, consumption, and distribution processes. Here, we argue that deprivation has become a breeding ground for violence and armed conflicts in the Sahel. Extractive economic

institutions have created distributional grievances, leaving behind divided and polarized communities that are easily exploited by both leaders and rebel groups, fueling conflict.

## 1. The Sahel in Context

To understand the basis of structural violence in the Sahel, Johan Galtung's work is instructive. Galtung's structuralist view of the world posits that structures and institutions are key sources of conflict. Although Sahel countries share different histories, economic structures, and identities of political elites, one consistent feature is the existence of extractive institutions that have produced deleterious structural violence. Structural violence addresses the underlying causes of precarious conflicts, coups, armed violence, instability, and exposure to extremism facing the Sahel region today. The intrinsic relationship between extractive and political institutions reinforces a strong feedback loop. Violence is embedded in the economic and political linkages that exist among the nine countries, as shown in the map below.

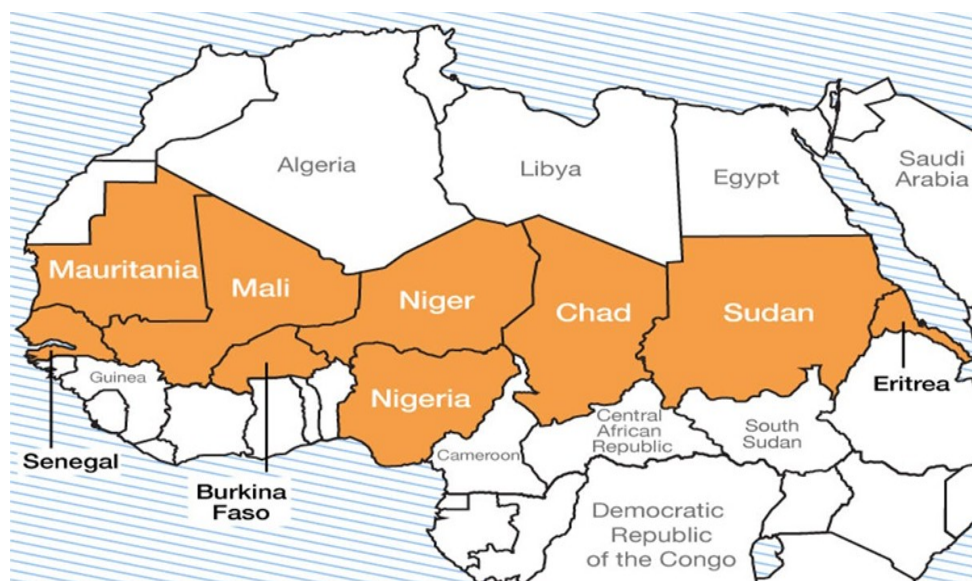


Figure 1: **The Sahel Region.** Source: The Conversation (2017)

The Sahel, a 5,000km vast semi-arid region, is home to approximately 300 million people. The Sahel region is one of the poorest and least developed, with the world's most youthful population. Almost 64.5% of the population is below 25 years old. Population growth is pegged at 3.5%, and it is expected to reach about 340 million by 2050. The region heavily

relies on rain-fed agriculture for food production, with about 95% of food production based on rain-fed agriculture. It also relies on subsoil fossil fuel resources (crude oil, gas, and coal) for economic development (Osinbajo 2021). Besides experiencing variable rainfall, frequent droughts, floods, desertification, and degradation, the Sahel remains a war zone characterized by coups, rebels, and rebellion. There is evidence of increased natural resource conflicts and recruitment into armed groups, in addition to conflicts between sedentary farmers and pastoralists. Boko Haram has occupied Lake Chad, and more than 800 deadly attacks by armed groups are experienced daily. Between 2013 and 2021, internal displacement increased from 217,000 to 2.5 million. In the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger), approximately 410,000 refugees have been recorded. The violence has driven both internal and external migration. Climate change has become a threat multiplier, accelerating migration, instability, and security risks. It is estimated that 86 million people will migrate internally by 2050. The Sahel is increasingly witnessing the rise of deviant political leaders due to the systemic problems confronted by many African institutions. Deviant political leaders, in this case, are those who are power-hungry and take advantage of the vulnerability of society and the fragile political environment to overthrow governments and seize power. They are authoritarian and seek every means to gain power.

The concept of violence in the context of the Sahel remains contested. Structural violence is broadened to include actions resulting in deprivation, physical injury, the use of weapons, sexual assaults, and bad governance. Stemming from this broadened view, Galtung has greatly influenced recent developments in systems theory, poststructuralist, postcolonial, decolonial, feminist, and queer scholarship in understanding the different kinds of structural inequalities oppressing and repressing communities in the Sahel region.

Although Galtung differentiates between three typologies of violence - direct, structural, and cultural - the analytical focus of this paper will primarily be on structural violence, with full awareness that the three forms are intrinsically linked and mutually connected, as one feeds into another. The connection, interaction, and distinction between these kinds of violence enable us to approach the Sahel conflicts at their roots rather than their effects. The next section explores the ontology of structural violence in relation to the Sahel context.

## **2. The Ontology of Structural Violence**

Johan Galtung, as a founding member of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Journal of Peace Research, where he published many of his conceptualizations of violence and peace that continue to influence research in peace and conflict studies, viewed peace as the absence of violence. He defined violence as "the unavoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible" (Galtung 1993, 106). In 1969, he introduced the notion of the violence triangle. Drawing from this definition, one of the overarching categories of his violence triangle is structural violence. For Galtung, peace cannot be achieved without a better understanding of what structural violence is. He raised a thought-provoking question: Does the absence of armed conflict and physical repression entail a society at peace? The negative response to this complex question compelled him to distinguish between negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to a state of affairs where overt violence, such as physical harm, exploitation, punishment, and denial, is absent. In contrast, positive peace refers to the positive affirmation of social justice or the absence of structural violence.

Galtung defines violence as any avoidable insult to basic human needs and, more generally, to sentient life of any kind, defined as that which is capable of suffering pain and enjoying well-being (Dilts 2012; Dilts *et al.* 2012). Violence lowers the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible. Violence hurts and harms the human body, mind, and spirit. Hurting or harming one aspect usually affects the others through psychosomatic transfers. This is an example of one of the most solid theorems in social science: violence breeds violence within and among actors, in space and over time (Galtung & Fischer 2013, 1).

As we examine the extractive institutions more closely, we can infer that violence is exercised even when the actors are invisible (Galtung 1969, 171). Violence is built into structures and is synonymous with social injustice (Payne 2021). Galtung describes structural violence as "violence built into the structure, showing up as unequal power and, consequently, unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969, 171). A structure, in this context,

refers to the set of all political, economic, social, and cultural systems of interaction for a given set of actors. These actors “represent a nation-state that, in a sense, is an integrated structure in its own right” (Galtung 1969, 175).

In the Sahel countries, structural violence, which is increasingly becoming a threat multiplier, originates from extractive institutions where power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of African leaders. The structural violence emerging from these institutions is often indirect, invisible, silent, and static, resulting in the systematic closure of possibilities in society. Galtung described this as “tranquil water” (1969, 173) because structural violence is associated with needs deprivation.

The disproportionate and inequitable sharing of valuable natural resources has led to numerous conflicts, particularly in territories rich in mineral resources. These resources are captured, looted, and preyed upon by both governing and ruling elites and marauding militias for private funding. Dysfunctional governments, characterized by weak, undemocratic economic and political institutions, have resulted in national grievance, where the performance of leaders is perceived as being against the national interest.

We argue that the effects of structural violence, such as ethnic division, domination, inequalities in resource allocation, broken social contracts, lawlessness, and the absence of the rule of law, are a result of leadership deficits and extractive economic institutions. Citizens experience relative deprivation instigated by these institutions, which degenerates into physical violence. This reinforces Galtung's view that violence is present when human beings are pressured so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations (Galtung 1969, 168).

In the Sahel region, it is the difference between the “potential” and the “actual”, caused by extractive institutions, that has brought about extreme suffering. Therefore, physical violence can only be avoided if the “potential” is higher than the “actual”. Violence is only avoidable when political and economic institutions provide for basic human needs (Galtung 1990, 292).

The following section explores extractive institutions as the perpetrators of structural violence and the link between structural violence and direct violence in the Sahel countries. For a clearer understanding of the Sahel, Galtung instructs us to consider another approach: “using the form of organization, starting with the lone individual, proceeding via mobs and crowds, and ending up with the organizations of modern guerrilla or army warfare” (Galtung 1968, 174).

### **3. Extractive Institutions**

What are the key institutions that perpetuate structural violence in the Sahel? This analysis will focus on the two interconnected components of sources of structural violence: extractive economic and political institutions. The discussion for each component will be guided by a couple of questions. Although interconnected, the political and economic institutions operate individually at various scales.

For instance, the extractive Sahelian economic institutions are concerned with the production, consumption, distribution, and circulation of goods and services. In contrast, the political institutions exercise power and authority over citizens. Galtung's work is instructive for the Sahel region, as he asserted that structural violence is indirect because there are no actors directly involved in the commission of violence. He contends that structural violence is built into structures and shows up as unequal power and, consequently, unequal life chances (Galtung 1969, 170-171).

In the case of Sahel countries, violence has been triggered by structures and institutions that have created unequal distribution of resources. The motivation behind this violence is the structural agent, which is a subtle, embedded violence in the structures of society and state policies, causing human suffering and avoidable human death.

The first component is the extractive political institutions, which involve ruling and governing elites controlling the state and accessing resources through patronage. A clear mark of this is the criminalization and securitization of political dissent, where criminal offenses are assessed and determined based on race, ethnic, and political identities, as

well as perceived security threats. The second component, which builds upon the first, is the extractive economic institutions.

#### **4. Political institutions**

Galtung's theory of structural violence stands out in the Sahel region, as it seeks to explain and expand on how politics has become an invisible force that constrains human social conditions (Galtung 1999, 2). Politics is a violent structure, which Galtung would identify as an "archetypal structure" where ruling elites, described as the "top dogs" in a structure, have their needs met through their interactions in the structure more than the masses or less privileged, whom he referred to as "underdogs" (Galtung 1990, 293). Galtung believed that every society has some form of power relations. However, he was critical of power relations that turn into relations of domination, causing suffering for the majority of people. In this regard, structural violence leads to poverty and unjust political systems and structures that harm, maim, and kill people.

Politics also govern incentives, who gets what, and who should wield power, in what Mbembe (2019) called necropolitics. African leaders create extractive political institutions to consolidate and sustain their power. The non-inclusive governance models used by ruling and governing elites lead to personalization, informalization, and commercialization of the security sector institutions, which function to consolidate and sustain power. For instance, political institutions allow African leaders who control political power to choose economic institutions that enrich them.

In turn, these economic institutions give wealth and power that help consolidate the control of political elites. These ruling elites use their "official positions to fulfill their (un)official obligations to their clients" (Chabal 2002, 452). Mali under President Boubacar Keita is a classic example of how inefficient, corrupt, oppressive, and failed government provoked spontaneous social uprisings in the country, with a domino effect in other countries, such as Mali with Presidents Roch Marc Kaboré and Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba being ousted. For several decades, Burkina Faso had been under authoritarian rule, where leaders were corrupt, oppressive, and arrogant.

The authoritarian leader could only be overthrown by another authoritarian leader through a coup. Power possessed by leaders is exercised through the law, which is enforced whenever leaders make illegitimate decisions. For instance, the rents generated by economic institutions have enabled political leaders to build up security forces armies, police, gendarmeries, and private security, mercenaries, to rig elections and buy judges. These sub-institutions also have an interest in keeping the regime in power, defending it for continued benefits from economic riches offered by extractive institutions. There are no checks on excesses of power. Here, Galtung is instructive, particularly on the different but intersecting nodes of power found in extractive institutions. The security sector represents visible coercive power in the case of direct violence, while predatory elites represent invisible economic power in the case of structural violence. However, the link is that material power is associated with control over the production, consumption, and distribution of resources, and physical power is deployed to cause harm through direct violence. Power plays a central role in the wider scholarship on violence.

Several governance styles have contributed to the presence of structural violence in the Sahel region, undermining peace, security, and development. Five competing governance models have been identified, including liberal-technocratic leaders such as former President of Niger Mohamed Bazoum who believe in democracy and deliver on democratic promises, but are often overshadowed by neo-patrimonial leaders such as former president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Burkina Faso who personalize institutions and resources for their own benefit.

Other governance models include electoral leaders who are active during elections but become inactive afterward, populist leaders who use top-down approaches and make unfulfilled promises, and putschists leaders who take power through coups and consolidate it through coup-proofing mechanisms. These governance styles perpetuate unequal power relations, violence, and exploitation, leading to structural violence and repression. The consequences of such repression are severe, with disadvantaged groups facing starvation, disease, and misery, leading to malnutrition and illnesses like diarrhea. These governance structures have components like exploitation, penetration, segmentation, marginalization, and fragmentation, which are impeded in structurally built-in repression, ultimately leading to violence (Galtung 1990, 293).

Galtung's liberal peace concept of modernising institutions is sharply challenged by the notion of political systems of "retraditionalizing" leadership. This concept does not suggest regression into backwardness but rather acknowledges that everyday life in Africa oscillates between tradition and modernity. Some African scholars, like Chabal (2002, 453), conclude that "the failure to understand the apparently contradictory nature of politics in Africa is itself very largely the result of a Western analytical convention which tends to assume a dichotomy between the modern and the traditional." While corruption and predatory tendencies may cause conflict, they are equally important as stabilizing factors in fragile contexts.

The Big Men (political elites) derive their legitimacy from accessing, controlling, and distributing resources to their clients, guided by the principle of "what's mine is mine, what's ours is mine" (Labonte 2012, 94). As political elites "capture, control, shape, or manipulate decision-making processes or institutions", they serve their self-interests and priorities, typically resulting in personal gain at the expense of non-elites and local communities (Labonte 2012, 94). The criminal justice system plays a significant role in maintaining patron-client networks, with police unleashing violence and repression to ensure the Big Men retain control of the state and its resources (Utas 2012). This guarantees the maintenance and continuity of patronage networks (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Formal and informal institutions overlap and accommodate each other in the Sahel. It is this intersection that should be explored and negotiated to understand the structural violence paradigm as applied by Galtung. There is an undefined role between formal institutions and informal groupings, such as the mix of police and illegal armed militias, which include purely criminal or organized crime groups with political ambitions, as well as networks of neighboring countries like Mali and Burkina Faso.

However, patronage networks are not permanent; they are changeable, reversible, and unstable, as the interests of the patron shift. As such, the patron's close relationship with their security advisors—military, police, judges, and prison leaders—is crucially significant (Hills 2007; 2009). Appointment to high-ranking positions is less meritocratic but personalized (Andrews 2013). Galtung's instructive paradigm of structural violence mirrors patronage that sidelines the majority and critics. He asserted:

with structural violence, we could imagine a relatively egalitarian structure insufficiently protected against sudden feudalization, against crystallization into a much more stable, even petrified, hierarchical structure. A revolution brought about by means of a highly hierarchical military organization may, after a brilliant period of egalitarianism, and after a major challenge, revert to a hierarchical structure. Structural violence is also meaningful as a blueprint, as an abstract form without social life, used to threaten people into subordination (Galtung 1969, 172).

Second, within the political marketplace, the criminal justice system is required to regulate competing political constituencies, political parties, government departments, and individual politicians at the local and national levels. Therefore, resources for development are redirected to sustain the neo-patrimonial order, with the security sector receiving the largest share of the budget. Third, and relatedly, the security sector is part of the government with legitimate power to distribute resources and provide security (Albrecht and Kyed, 2015). They monitor the flow of resources into the unregulated neo-patrimonial economy. In the process, what stops the police from distributing economic benefits to themselves? This raises a question about the incentive for reforms. What are the possibilities of police reform succeeding in a neo-patrimonial order? Not many, as Albrecht and Stepputat (2015, 160) conceive security systems as a “package of political trouble” rife with “institutional and personal interests that are involved in the distribution of resources, privileges, and authority between the actors and individuals involved.”

The absence of meritocratic recruitment in the bureaucracy is generally seen as producing public administrations that are inflated, inefficient, dishonest, and lacking autonomy from political leaders. Drawing from Alex de Waal's research, the development community should note:

Contemporary political marketplace systems differ on all key variables. The ruler possesses (much or most of) the national revenue, by virtue of state rents. Control over organized violence is widely distributed among intermediate elites, both those within the governing system and those outside it. Historically, these peripheral governance systems are constituted around centralized monopoly over communication and convening, which has recently and rapidly been transformed by new transport and communications infrastructure and technology (de Waal, 2014, 7-8).

The law enforcement and judiciary systems in the Sahel are largely defiant and corrupt due to their connection to the ruling elites. The police, who took an oath to protect the people, have instead become drivers of violence. They have been involved in rape, violence, theft, and other illegal activities to such an extent that reporting a crime to the police is impossible, especially for vulnerable groups like women who fear being subjected to rape and other forms of violence. The judiciary system has become very corrupt and unfair. For example, in a few cases where women and young girls who have been raped get the opportunity to identify their rapists, prosecutions are very slow and sometimes non-existent. It has also been noted that crime perpetrators often go free, even when imprisoned, by bribing their way out or paying prison guards for release.

The absence of accountability and coherent policies on resource distribution is consistent with the ideals of neo-patrimonialism – a political economy of disorder (Lindberg 2010; Andreski 1968). What happens 'when kleptocracy becomes insolvent?' (de Waal 2014, 347). While Chabal's (2009) response includes state collapse, suffering citizens, and more police violence, Labonte (2012, 93) cites "entrenched patterns of unresponsive governance, urban-rural disparities, predation, social exclusion, and inequality persist." Albrecht and Stepputat (2015, 159) complete the vicious cycle of extractive political institutions by pointing out, "in contexts where state sovereignty is fragmented and regimes are fragile, existing governments base their survival on the very same practices of clientelism, patrimonialism, and short-termist logics."

## **5. Economic institutions**

Structural violence emerges from institutions structured to extract resources from many for the benefit of a few elites. The leftovers are forced on the people. One might ask: Despite having natural resource endowments, why is the Sahel region poorer than it was in the 1980s? How does the economy work in the Sahel? Economic institutions in the Sahel are not inclusive and do not create space for people to innovate and invest—central features of peace and development. Poverty and unemployment have motivated armed conflicts, where rebellion has become an employment choice, and the prospective gains from capturing the state and its resources are appealing. Poverty, particularly among young

people who are not in education, training, or employment and still live with their parents, is inextricably linked to violent conflict (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al.* 2018).

Galtung argues, “if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject-action-object relation” (Galtung 1969, 171). University degrees are worthless, as it is difficult to find a job that suits the degree. The employment situation has worsened for already vulnerable groups due to a lack of connection to patronage institutions. If the job market does not incorporate youth who are already poor, joining a rebel army or extremist group becomes a viable employment opportunity. This situation motivates everyone to engage in active conflict to capture the state and its endowed resource base.

The Rostowian (1961) view of economic “take-off” using natural resources to catalyze industrialization is strongly challenged by the practice in the aphorism “the cow eats where it is tethered”—hence the looting and gorging of resources. Elites always expropriate because they operate in an economy of affection. The concept of “economy of affection” was coined by Goran Hyden (2013) after studying political affairs in Tanzania and Kenya. The economy of affection is “constituted by personal investments in reciprocal relations with other individuals as ways of achieving goals that are seen as otherwise impossible to attain.” As such, “it is an invisible economy that conscientious policymakers have no taste for, and economists find no effective way to incorporate into their conventional forms of analysis” (Hyden 2013, 337). As a result, the economy of affection has created structures that have resulted in inequalities between local communities, rural areas, and urban cities in most parts of the Sahel.

The economy of affection also points to the utilization of government budgets for threatening opposition, buying votes for repeated election victories, co-opting, and coercing supporters. Control of policies and laws is strategic in the ascension to power and wealth, hence the inter-penetration of politics and economic interests in fragile states that has resulted in the politicization, militarization, and commercialization of economic institutions. The consequences are that economic institutions cease to be neutral structures and become just another resource for capture. Bad governance of economic resources has exposed Sahel countries to external structural violence, such as climate

change, which has become a threat multiplier and a wicked problem. Why? Because climate change is interacting with pre-existing economic challenges, as demonstrated above. Galtung also began, in his later writing (Galtung & Fischer 2013; Galtung 1990), to allude to the idea of environmental violence – by which he meant the effects of humans’ destruction of the natural world for personal gain. For instance, the large-scale extraction of natural resources, pollution of land, and logging of trees by individual politicians and international investors have damaged ecosystems, thereby increasing environmental risk, particularly for the poor and vulnerable.

However, climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, such as reducing fossil fuel use, pose a threat to the political economy of ruling elites. Extractive institutions are known for “double dipping”—seeking rents from both fossil fuels and development finance meant to tackle climate change. Neopatrimonial practices resist transitioning from fossil fuels to clean renewable energy for two reasons. First, to secure rents that will assist in coup-proofing and consolidate power. Second, fossil fuel rents sustain rentier economies since most Sahel countries heavily rely on hydrocarbon subsoil resources, such as crude oil, coal, and gas, for survival. African leaders argue that they still need to benefit from these primary resources, despite being severely impacted by climate change. Since economies survive on such resource rents, divestment will crush their economies, risking fragility, rebellion, and conflict.

Resource incentives are helpful in peacebuilding, especially by checking and rebalancing rebels and rebellion. The same resources are used by leaders to incentivize rebel groups to stop violence. Many armed groups use rape as a deliberate tactic to drive away local populations from mining sites, allowing them to loot and control these areas. Few international companies are willing to invest in the war-torn Sahel, and those that do are primarily interested in exploiting and extracting resources. This fuels competition and violence among government forces and armed groups, resulting in economic decline that severely affects citizens and the investment environment. Many people live in fear due to constant armed violence, forced recruitment, and rape. State institutions are weak and unable to guarantee protection, leading to ongoing violence and deprivation. Therefore, adaptation initiatives will not progress at the expected speed or be sustained in their implementation because African leaders dominate control and access to subsoil resources. Inclusive, green,

and smart energy initiatives are part of a creative destruction process that destabilizes established institutions, power, and economic relations. The elites fear this and will resist.

The question remains: how do extractive political and economic institutions intersect to produce structural violence, undergirding misery and wars in the Sahel region? Extractive political institutions have deliberately created extractive economic institutions as a means of transferring power and wealth into the hands of ruling elites. Extractive political institutions intrinsically support extractive economic institutions by cementing the power of political elites who benefit from extraction—neopatrimonialism, rents, and rent-seeking (Erdmann & Engel 2007). Consistent with rent-seeking behavior, political elites, who double as economic elites, are happy to extract subsoil resources without creating spaces for other economic activities. They also neglect investment in public amenities. Any independent economic activity that threatens or disrupts their political power and economic activities is squashed. In other words, they limit any competition that reduces their share.

Structural violence has clearly aggravated the rise of extreme poverty, unemployment, social stratification, inequality, and animosity in Sahel countries. The twin tragedy of predatory political and economic institutions has shattered the lives of many Africans, degenerating into other forms of violence—physical, psychological, and emotional. Nations are left with disillusioned and unemployed young people, staggering levels of corruption, looting, and predation of natural resources. Leaders have normalized corruption. The institutions established are not properly tailored or suited to tackle the challenges society faces today.

Extractive politics and extractive economics are inconsistent with economic growth, security, and stability. Both extractive politics and extractive economics inevitably degenerate and collapse into state failure due to the absence of sufficient economic activity and the presence of political centralization. If elites greatly benefit at the expense of the majority, political power becomes highly sought after by those disadvantaged. Those who feel victimized by state-sponsored poverty take up arms to obtain political power, often raising political and economic grievances. In the Sahel, numerous forces—including political elites, rebels, and sobels—fight to control extractive institutions. This infighting for control of extractive institutions has unfortunately degenerated into civil strife.

Development resources are at the center of most conflicts in the Sahel, which most scholars consider resource-based conflicts. Evidently, there is a direct link between natural resources and violent conflict. Several arguments have been put forward to explain this link, with the “greedy or grievance” debates (Berdal 2000) being prominent. Some argue that the reasons behind most conflicts are simply greed, rather than real grievances. Here, conflicts are motivated by greed, occurring when those who control resources can benefit from scarcity and abundance of resources, i.e., predation. Others argue that conflict is often caused by real grievances emanating from the disproportionate distribution of resources. Those who want to benefit from natural resources present grievances to start a conflict, gaining access to natural resources during the conflict. On closer examination, both scarcity and abundance of natural resources lead to conflict. If resources are scarce, conflict arises in two main ways: (1) resource scarcity drives elites to “capture” resources, marginalizing powerless groups and leading to frustration and aggression, and (2) if resources are abundant, those responsible for making investment decisions are less likely to invest in dynamic sectors like manufacturing and technology, preferring to mine and sell resources. However, when resources are depleted, friction occurs.

The enduring question remains: how can the vicious cycle be broken, or these extractive institutions be transformed into inclusive ones without reducing the benefits of the political elites? How can extractive political institutions coexist with inclusive political institutions? Political elites must feel secure first; only then can they create spaces for creative destruction and technological change necessary for structural reforms.

## **6. Limitations of Structural Violence Paradigm**

From the analysis above, it is clear that Galtung's concept of structural violence remains relevant to contemporary theory and practice, helping us understand the concrete situation in Africa. However, there are moments when Galtung's perspectives on the primacy of structural violence as a root cause of conflict are confusing. At one point, Galtung asserted that “behind all this (violence triangle) is cultural violence” (1999, 2). He presented violence as a vertical ladder instead of a triangle, beginning with cultural violence at the top, structural violence in the middle, followed by direct violence (Galtung 1999, 2). The

challenge is that structural violence, a key concept underlying his model of violence, is insufficiently explained, limiting its analytical purchase. The structural violence theory has too broad a definition to explain the shifting conflict dynamics of the Sahel region. It is no surprise that Galtung's theory of structural violence contains subtle weaknesses. Scholars, such as Levine, argue that all theories, no matter how polished, encompass innate assumptions and prejudices (2003, 126).

The structural violence theory categorizes society into structures but fails to recognize individual human characteristics in the violence. For instance, the theory does not account for how different individuals respond to various stresses emerging from extractive economies and political institutions. Similarly, violence resulting from poorly managed politics and economics is not universal to Sahel communities. Some societies remain peaceful due to the absence of violence on their territories, while others form organized groups or armies. Some individuals remain extremely peaceful despite adversity. Individuals also face personal pressure issues, such as domestic violence, which have dire health, physical, and economic consequences equivalent to those produced by structural violence. Attributing these consequences solely to structural violence overlooks other contributing factors to violence.

The extractive institutions and models of governance in the Sahel directly reveal the limitations of structural violence as an idealized concept and achieving peace as a utopian goal. This is because the actors, structures, and institutions are unpredictable, stubborn, impulsive, unreasonable, and erratic, making them difficult to understand through theories. Galtung's framing of structural violence requires updating, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Several scholars have pointed out the limitations of Galtung's phenomenology of structural violence, arguing that it is too amorphous. Scholars like Parsons (2007) have argued that Galtung uses the concept of structural violence from a highly generalized perspective. He posits that using the concept as an umbrella term or broad scope to describe other forms of injustice, such as exploitation, penetration, marginalization, inequality, subordination, and repression, undermines relevant aspects of peace and conflict transformation. Additionally, Leech (2014) asserts that the greatest pitfall of Galtung's structural violence concept lies in its logical consistency. Leech states: "...having outlined a generalized, non-

judgmental framework for violence, Galtung makes a profound moral judgment. He designates some aspects of structural violence as attributable to 'sick states' and some aspects as perfectly normal within 'healthy states.' He neither explains the two sides to his moral assertion nor justifies the position he has taken.”

## **Conclusion and Way Forward**

Structural violence has dominated the Sahel region, although other forms of violence also exist. Galtung has provided a framework to understand the systematic oppression underlying most forms of violence in the region. However, structural violence is caused by extractive economic and political institutions that benefit the ruling and governing elites who perpetrate it. As Galtung stated, structural violence is driven by the political economy, which, in the Sahel countries, is largely extractive. It should be highlighted that the same extractive political economy has empowered organized crime groups, militias, and insurgent groups. They maximize their use of violence and exploit the economically vulnerable environment to loot and accumulate resources for personal gain. Galtung instructively notes that "violence breeds violence" (1990, 295). What accounts for this is that most Sahel countries lack well-defined institutional structures that ensure and celebrate equality, inclusion, and diversity. Going forward, Sahel countries must reconfigure and recalibrate their structures and institutions to meet demands for social justice among citizens. According to Galtung, what is socially just is a situation where there is no “systematic constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures”.

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