Conflicted colonialisms: multi-dimensional violence in the Western Sahel

Emily McGiffin

Published online: 28 Jul 2022.

Submit your article to this journal ⤤

View related articles ⤤

View Crossmark data ⤤

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Conflicted colonialisms: multi-dimensional violence in the Western Sahel

Emily McGiffin

Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

In October 2020, French-language media overflowed with coverage of the release of Sophie Pétronin, the last French hostage held overseas. Pétronin, a 75-year-old humanitarian worker, had been kidnapped in northern Mali nearly four years earlier and returned to France as a Muslim convert who challenged received ideas about security and terror, generating a violent backlash across French social media. She made headlines again a year later for her unlawful clandestine return to Mali. This article argues that the complex figure of Sophie Mariam Pétronin brings into focus the masculinised necropolitics of the Sahelian conflict, including the assumed privilege of white actors, hostility towards female involvement, and the 'relations of enmity' that Europe maintains with the racialised others of its former colonies.

Introduction

Although the event caused barely a ripple in the anglophone media, in early October 2020, French-language media were dominated by coverage of the release of Sophie Pétronin, the last French hostage detained overseas. Pétronin, a 75-year-old humanitarian worker, had been captured by insurgents in northern Mali nearly four years earlier. French television networks broadcast Pétronin's arrival in the Malian capital of Bamako on 8 October, her reunion with her tearful son that evening, and her arrival in France the following day where she was greeted on the tarmac by French President Emmanuel Macron. In these broadcasts, Sophie Pétronin failed to denounce her captors as jihadist terrorists. On the contrary, on the eve of her arrival in Bamako, it surfaced that Pétronin had converted to Islam during her captivity and now goes by the name Mariam. She arrived in France wearing a hijab and affirming that during her four years in captivity she suffered no mistreatment.[1] She pledged to return to the town of Gao in Northern Mali, where she has lived and worked for 25 years and has established a charity for orphans and the elderly, to follow up on her programmes for malnourished children.

Pétronin was one of four hostages released, along with Malian opposition party member Soumaila Cissé and two Italian hostages, Father Pier Luigi Maccalli and Nicola Chiacchio, who remained largely nameless in the francophone press. As well as covering the hostages' return home, the media also raised questions about the terms of the

---

CONTACT Emily McGiffin ✉ e.mcgiffin@ucl.ac.uk

hostage release. Initially, reports spoke of the release of 100 Malian prisoners in exchange for the hostages, then 130, then nearly 200. The final count of 204 included militants known to have committed fatal attacks at points throughout Mali who were sent by airplane to various parts of the country over the course of several days (Alonso and Célian 2020). Although France insists that no ransom was paid, observers speculate that there likely was a ransom and that it may have reached 30 million Euros (Alonso and Célian 2020). Within a week of the prisoner swap, 40 Malians were dead following further insurgent attacks in the country.

The terms of the exchange, Pétronin's religious conversion, her failure to condemn her captors, and her pledge to continue her work in Mali sparked media criticism and a flurry of outrage and vitriol on French social media. The media noted Macron's embarrassment at confronting a veiled Pétronin at the airport, reporting that he failed to deliver his planned public address. Commentators on social media brushed off Pétronin's defence of the kidnappers' concerns as Stockholm syndrome and held her responsible for the release of the 204 prisoners and the subsequent attacks, despite the fact that responsibility for this decision allegedly rested entirely with the Malian government, which began negotiations for the prisoner swap after the abduction of prominent Malian politician Soumaila Cissé (Kane 2020; Alonso and Célian 2020). As a new wave of violence linked to Islamist extremism swept through France in late October, Sophie Pétronin disappeared from the news. However, she made headlines again a year later following her clandestine re-entry into Mali via Senegal in May 2021 after twice being denied a Malian visa.

In her high-profile return to France in the fall of 2020, transformed by her experience in captivity, Pétronin disrupted the secularist French identity; a white European clad in observant Muslim dress, she called into question the boundary between self and other, challenged narratives about the nature of 'terrorists,' and provided a counterpoint to the masculinisation of the conflict. At the same time, the terms of her release are illustrative of Achille Mbembe's claim that terror is entwined in European democracy. As Pétronin's case illustrates, the maintenance of the European social order, including privileged access by European citizens to the wealth and power of its institutions, involves the imposition of terror elsewhere – in this case on the villages that immediately fell prey to the terrorist activity of the newly released prisoners, but also upon the tens of thousands of other nameless West Africans affected by the conflict whose lives, works, and sacrifices are considered unremarkable by the wider world. Within this context, the case makes plain the inequitable valuations of human life within territorial and ethno-religious conflict even as the multi-dimensional figure of Pétronin complicates stereotypes. The racialised inequalities brought into sharp relief in this instance reveal the contours of a white supremacist global order that takes shape across three territorial scales:

(1) climatic: escalating security concerns in the Sahel are exacerbated by a global climate crisis whose inequitably distributed causes and effects are directly shaped by a neocolonial world order;
(2) landscape: ongoing security and migration concerns within the European community underpin international interventions in the Sahel, dubbed 'Europe's southern border'; and

(3) body: inequitable options and outcomes for individual bodies confronted by situations of violence are determined by gender, race, and nationality.

Against the backdrop of the multidimensional violence playing out in the Western Sahel, France's lengthy military involvement in the region, its colonial role in West Africa that dates from the nineteenth century, and its troubled relationship with Islam both at home and abroad, Pétronin's case illustrates how France's 'relations of enmity' with racialised others of its former colonies is part of a far-reaching neocolonialism at scales ranging from the personal to the global.

The article begins by presenting the methodological framework of the analysis, then draws on the existing literature to present a brief overview of Mali's recent history and a contextualisation of the three scales of territory under consideration before moving on to an examination of the case of Mariam Sophie Pétronin. I draw on decolonial feminist scholarship on the geopolitics of bodily territories, Achille Mbembe's writings on necropolitics, and Ghassan Hage's analysis of the interconnection between Islamophobic racism and environmental crisis to argue that discourses of violence and terrorism, which focus on racialised insurgent bodies, obscure the much more dangerous forms of terrorism including border regimes that inhibit the movement of racialised others and the global destruction of climatic stability by wealthy countries.

Necropolitics in the colonial present

A key methodological concept underpinning this analysis is Achille Mbembe's necropolitics. Necropolitics relates Foucault's theory of biopolitics to the politics of sovereignty, building on Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* and state of exception. Necropolitics views sovereignty as 'the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die' (Mbembe 2019, 66), that is, 'the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not' (Mbembe 2019, 80). The entanglement of necropolitics and territory is an outgrowth of colonial histories that is reiterated in the postcolonial global order. Of colonialism, Mbembe writes,

> *Colonial occupation* itself consisted in seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area — of writing a new set of social and spatial relations on the ground. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) ultimately amounted to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the differential classification of people; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. These imaginaries gave meaning to the establishing of different rights to different categories of people. (Mbembe 2019, 79; emphasis in the original)

In the contemporary world, colonial relationships persist in the form of 'relations of enmity' in which 'power [...] continuously refers and appeals to the exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy' (Mbembe 2019, 70). The need to protect European society from this perceived enemy involves not only the creation, maintenance, and continual reinforcing of notions about this enmity and borders and boundaries to protect against it, but also, as we shall see, the outsourcing of borders and their regimes of violence to peripheral regions (Puig 2020).

While the cultural imaginaries that create and uphold relations of enmity designate racialised Others as loci of terror, Mbembe insists that terror is inherent to contemporary liberal democracy, that 'death and freedom are irrevocably interwoven' (Mbembe 2019, 91). Stuart Elden points out that 'terror' and 'territory' are also closely linked; not only do they share common etymological roots but also the creation of 'a bounded space is, already, a violent act of exclusion; maintaining it as such requires constant vigilance and the mobilisation of threat; and challenging it necessarily entails a transgression' (Elden 2007, 822). In this light, the violent histories of democracy and the ideal of equality can be seen more clearly. For instance, as C.L.R. James demonstrates and Achille Mbembe reiterates, the *liberté, égalité, fraternité* of the French revolution are built not only upon terror on French soil but also the terrorism of the African citizenry through the transatlantic slave trade that provided an economic basis for the political reforms of the French Revolution (Mbembe 2019; James 1989). The shaping of a new Atlantic economy through the eighteenth century, the emergence of which generated the wealth that powered democratic revolutions in France and elsewhere – was based on colonial acquisitions in the Caribbean and North America and African slaves that rendered these territorial acquisitions highly productive (Miller 2008). Slavery was an enterprise *integral* to European democracy and freedom, which in many cases depended on overseas territories and colonial holdings (Miller 2008). The racism and its cultural imaginaries that made colonialism and the slave system possible are hence fundamental to and remain embedded within the societies of liberal democracies (Magubane 2016). As the long arms of these states extend to humanitarian or military enterprises elsewhere, particularly to racialised postcolonies, these fraught histories must be kept in mind.

A feminist approach to territories involves 'shifting scales . . . to employ analyses both finer and coarser than that of the nation-state' recognising that geopolitics operates along a continuum from the global to the human body (Hyndman 2001). As various feminist geographers have shown, the territories of bodies and land are densely entangled; women's bodies in particular may figure 'as contentious sites over which territories and geopolitical disputes are negotiated' (Naylor et al. 2018, 203). In emphasising embodied experiences of power and control, feminist geopolitics redirect attention from the masculine terrain of political elites 'to the structures and processes that create marginality' and form a necessary part of 'the operations of political systems' (Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake 2004). In France, the political system operates at the level of the body perhaps most notably in its enforcement of the principle of *laïcité*, or secularism, which bars people from wearing conspicuous religious symbols in the public realm – a cultural orientation which particularly affects Muslim women. While *laïcité* originated from resistance to the Catholic church's control over public life, its controversial and disputed modern expression is entangled with public anxieties over the country's increasing religious and ethnic pluralism (e.g., Tolan 2017; Hunter-Henin 2012; Akan 2009). This pluralism, which has seen a growing proportion of the French population of Muslim rather than Christian heritage, is in turn inextricable from France's history of colonial and neocolonial interventions in the Muslim world.

This article brings these frameworks to the case of Sophie Mariam Pétronin to examine how the case elucidates the necropolitics at play across multiple scales of territory in the Sahel. In its examination, the article draws on descriptions of the case presented in several forms of popular media. These include news articles on Sophie Petronin from anglophone

and francophone media outlets including *Le Monde, Liberation, France24, TV5Monde, The Guardian, Radio France Internationale*, and *Jeune Afrique*; the book *Il suffit qu'un espoir* by the French journalist Anthony Fouchard that describes Pétronin's kidnapping, repatriation, and charitable work in Mali; and Twitter posts collected under the hash tag #SophiePetronin. The aim here is not to quantify particular themes or responses through an empirical approach, but rather to examine the case in detail and the relevance of these themes to the broader Sahelian conflict. The following section provides context for the present case with a brief overview of Mali's recent history. This description is necessarily a simplification of a nuanced scenario involving many groups and their complex inter-relationships over an extended period of time.

Multi-scalar violence in Mali and the Western Sahel

While Mali has faced spates of insurgent violence at various points since it gained independence from France in 1960, for decades it was held up as a model of stable and functional West African democracy. This all changed with what has been dubbed the 'Mali crisis' of 2012, when a *coup d'état* overthrew the democratically elected president Amadou Toumani Touré. The coup, staged by junior officers disgruntled with the government's handling of Tuareg separatist attacks in the country's north, resulted in 'the near total collapse of Mali's army and most of its democratic institutions; the seizure of all of northern Mali by Tuareg rebels [...] and the effective occupation of the north of the country by an alliance of Jihadi–Salafi movements who imposed their form of shari'a law on a suffering and largely recalcitrant population' (Lecocq et al. 2013, 344). French armed forces arrived in the country in early 2013 at the behest of the junta government under the banner of Opération Serval. This military intervention marked 'the return of the colonial power into the region even though France has been careful to ensure that it is seen to be aiding an African intervention led by ECOWAS' (Ahluwalia 2013). Speaking shortly after the subsequent establishment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), then French President François Hollande stated that '[c]oncerted international support would help "to ensure Mali's authorities can actually have control over the territory"' (Sears 2013, 445).

France's military involvement with the territories of the western Sahel dates from the nineteenth century. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, the Federation of French West Africa (AOF) formed a vast administrative unit governed from Dakar that encompassed what is now Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. As Harrison points out, capital expansion and resource extraction during the colonial era along with the establishment of state boundaries that made little sense to the region's social and cultural realities had profound impacts on the continent's development (Harrison 1988). In the post-independence period, France's close and often corrupt relationship with its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa morphed into what critics have called 'Françafrique' (Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde 2020). These relationships have been economically important for France in the past, but more recently have largely served to bolster France's image of power and grandeur on the world stage (Rieker 2017b). As well as providing an important source of support during UN votes, France's African allies have become an important part of its national security strategy in the face of terrorist acts

in France linked to Islamist extremism. As one scholar has noted, 'the recent surge in terrorism, with France as a main target, has made the fight against Islamist radicalism in the Sahel region a key priority in French national security' (Rieker 2017b, 39).

The violence in northern Mali that precipitated the coup was not an isolated occurrence and can be viewed as a corollary of both the country's colonial history and more recent neocolonial interventions (Bergamaschi 2014). As elsewhere in the colonised world, French colonial control of the territory that became Mali was deeply disruptive of traditional life and interethnic relationships, particularly for Tuareg people, and these disruptions have had lasting effects. Colonial boundaries preceded the 'carve-up of the Tuareg homeland' into five separate states: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger (Lecocq and Klute 2013, 424). Mali's postcolonial borders rendered Tuaregs remote and disenfranchised minorities in a country in which they were distinctly different from other ethnic groups (Bøås and Torheim 2013b; Cline 2013). Even as the newly independent government imposed new policies that were deeply unpopular among Tuaregs, their education in Koranic schools rather than the French system left them less equipped to participate in postcolonial governance processes (Bøås and Torheim 2013b; Cline 2013).

Tuareg revolts against a system of rule deemed untenable have occurred throughout Mali's post-independence period. The first Tuareg rebellion took place shortly after independence in the 1960s, a second followed in the 1990s and a third in 2006 (Kone 2017). Over the same period, rising populations combined with unstable environmental conditions further disrupted livelihoods in northern Mali. In the 1970s and 80s, disastrous droughts throughout the Sahel decimated livestock herds and forced many ruined Tuareg herders into other livelihoods and regions. Many thousands entered neighbouring Algeria and Libya where they were integrated into various security forces and militia groups (Kwiatkowska 2016). After the Algerian civil war in 1991, jihadist groups began to appear in northern Mali as many of these fighters returned. A further influx of between 1000 and 4000 heavily armed soldiers, who had lived for years in Libya, began to return to Mali following the death of Muammar Gaddafi (Bøås and Torheim 2013a). The arrival of these groups gave rise to a new movement: the Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) (Lecocq et al. 2013). However, the unity that enabled this movement was short-lived and quickly splintered into an alphabet soup of fractured groups that, like the ethnically diverse region, held a variety of divergent – and at times conflicting – interests, outlooks, and livelihoods. As violence has become more widespread across the Sahel, it has become dissociated from any single ethnic group, position, or interest.

Climate contexts

Central to issues of territory and violence in the western Sahel is the issue of climate change, a risk multiplier that contributes to the current instability in the region. Regional temperatures are rising at a rate at least 1.5 times that of the global average and the response from the international community to help under-resourced and destabilising countries adapt has been 'totally inadequate' (Burke 2020). That is, terrorist violence takes place not only in a postcolonial context but also a context of environmental fragility and increasing climatic instability created primarily by industrialised Western nations that are failing to take adequate

responsibility for its repercussions (Igarapé Institute 2021). Across the Sahel, displacement due to terrorism has added to the burden borne by communities already struggling with global heating and growing populations that must now also host rising numbers of refugees.

At the same time, the International Crisis Group warns that drawing a straight line between global heating, resource depletion and violence is an overly simplistic formulation that is unhelpful when it comes to designing suitable policy responses (2020). While climate change certainly contributes to increased social tensions and violence, overemphasising its role in the conflict shifts responsibility from regional states that need to be held accountable for their role in perpetuating corruption and mismanagement that contribute to the crisis. Emily Meierding advocates severing climate change and conflict research altogether, arguing that 'there is no robust evidence that climate change is linked, directly or indirectly, to violent contention' (2016, 52). Citing the many alternative livelihood and relational strategies that people employ in situations of climate instability, she notes that the overwhelming focus on climate violence causes harm, both by framing poor countries as more likely to erupt into violence and by shifting the culpability for the climate crisis away from wealthy nations (Meierding 2016). While many climate advocates aim to encourage increased international aid and service provision by invoking the rhetoric of climate instability and violence in the Sahel, there is a danger that such narratives will contribute to further militarisation. Uncritical scripts about the location of climate violence in poor nations (particularly sub-Saharan Africa) and the threat of climate instability to northern nations (particularly Europe) can easily become part of the discursive maintenance of global systems of power and hegemony (Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015).

On the other hand, downplaying the role of climate change removes responsibility from wealthy nations of the global North, which are not only failing to substantially curb the emissions that are so drastically affecting the lives of poor people elsewhere but which are also home to movements against climate action that are overtly racist and xenophobic (Malm and Collective 2021). In his discussion of the tangled relationship between racism and environmental crisis, Ghassan Hage argues that 'the racial crisis manifested by Islamophobia and the ecological crisis not only happen to have an effect on each other; they are in effect one and the same crisis, a crisis in the dominant mode of inhabiting the world that both racial and ecological domination reproduces' (Hage 2017, 14). Hage notes further that while the acts of violence that respond to untenable environmental circumstances are easily classed as terrorism, the systems of economic power that produce climate change and underdevelopment are rarely viewed as forms of violence inflicted by the wealthy world on poor and marginalised populations. Even as racism continues to produce environmental crises, the standard framing of terrorism obscures the culpability of neocolonial powers in creating conditions that contribute to terrorist actions and to the uneven landscapes of violence that result. The Sahel is in a state of environmental crisis; Islamaphobia and racism exacerbate this crisis and render western states less capable of producing a suitable response. The connective thread that extends from the biopolitical control of individual bodies to expanses of land to the global climate raises important and difficult questions about identity and concepts of terrorism, which are highly regulated by France and other western states.

Europe's southern border

Since the 2012 Malian coup d'état, the Sahel has witnessed an ongoing deterioration of its security situation and year-over-year increases in violence. Despite the presence of tens of thousands of international troops in the Sahel in the decade following the coup, little progress has been made at establishing government control of the territory. On the contrary, violence in northern Mali has proliferated, spilling over into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger and giving rise to new insurgent groups (Zimmerer 2019). Even as instances of terrorism decreased worldwide between 2018 and 2019, Mali and Burkina Faso were not only among the top five countries most affected by terrorism but they were also the only two of these countries that experienced a rise in the total number of deaths due to terrorism (IEP 2020). During this period, ACLED reported 5000 fatalities, 2100 of which 'resulted from attacks targeting civilians,' and over 1200 violent events across the two countries, which 'represents an increase of 46% and 31%, respectively, relative to the same period the previous year' (ACLED 2022). Mark Lowcock, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, is forthright about the situation, warning that the Sahel faces disaster following an 'alarming deterioration' that includes 'rising extremist violence, massive violations of human rights and growing political instability' (Burke 2020). As Lowcock and others point out, the deteriorating situation directly threatens European security.

Commenting on the French military intervention that followed on the heels of the 2012 coup, Pal Ahluwalia remarked, 'that a Western power, France in this instance, has intervened should not be seen as a benevolent act aimed at protecting the democratic values of an independent nation-state. Rather, there is little doubt that when such a power intervenes, it is to protect its own interests. In this case, it is about oil and uranium and the ever-present threat of competition that China poses in what has been a Francophone-influenced region for well over a century' (2013, 1–2). Uranium from Niger, for instance, is crucial to the operation of French nuclear reactors that supply 75% of the country's electricity (Ghanem-Yazbeck et al. 2018). While work by Henke (2017) and others complicate these relatively simplistic views, Western military interventions are seldom viewed as acts of pure altruism. In the case of the Sahel, Western interests also include re-establishing security in a region now commonly viewed as 'Europe's southern border,' a euphemism for the arid zone that buffers white Europeans and lighter-skinned north Africans from migrants from Black Africa to the south. A briefing note for the European Parliament states that 'the region's strategic location between the north-African coast and southern sub-Saharan countries makes it a key transit point for migrants and therefore a region that is of significant interest to the EU' (Pichon and Betant-Rasmussen 2021, 2). Involvement in the Sahel is clearly a 'strategic priority for the EU, not least because it wishes to lessen and control migration flows from the African continent' (Pichon and Betant-Rasmussen 2021, 5). Security concerns have led to steadily mounting EU involvement in the region over the past decade (Ghanem-Yazbeck et al. 2018) to the extent that the Sahel has become an EU 'laboratory for experimentation on the security-migration-development nexus' that has ushered the region into a new era of securitisation (Venturi 2017). Despite the ostensibly good intentions of EU initiatives in the region, there is a risk that these interests will produce securitisation initiatives that continue to be 'more accountable to the imperatives of external donors and military partners than to local aspirations for peace, justice and good governance' (Raineri 2016).

Bodily territories

Days after Pétronin's return to France, the story of the hostage release all but disappeared from the daily news on French television networks and was quickly replaced by coverage of schoolteacher Samuel Paty's brutal assassination by a Muslim extremist. This latter event was part of a wave of violent incidents linked to Islamist extremism that struck France in the closing months of 2020 as well as a larger trend of such violence in the country. Since the 2012 attacks in the French cities of Montauban and Toulouse, France has suffered more Islamist attacks than any other country in Europe, most notably the attacks in Paris and Nice in 2015 and 2016, respectively (Rieker 2017a). The case of Mariam Sophie Pétronin is set within this recent history of domestic terrorism, France's response – which included an inflammatory speech by French President Emmanuel Macron and the passing of a new 'Separatism Bill' by the French senate that touches on many fundamental liberties – and global protests by conservative Muslim's enraged by France's real or perceived animosity towards Islam.

Among the most controversial aspects of the Separatist Bill were new regulations regarding the hijab. The Bill prevents women under the age of 18 from wearing a hijab in public and bars women wearing headscarves from accompanying their children on school outings. These restrictions follow an April 2011 ban on the niqab from public spaces in France and, in 2016, a controversial ban of the burkini, a full-body swimming garment designed to enable observant Muslim women to enjoy water sports. These policies reveal a profound degree of public mistrust of racialised women and in response regulate and control women's bodies to ever greater degrees, offering Muslim women a choice between unwillingly exposing their bodies or accepting exclusion from public spaces and public life. They also reveal how the construction of Islam as dangerous 'relies on a set of discourses around bodies, particularly women's bodies' and the ability of individual bodies to reproduce territory and identity (Smith 2012, 1513).

While the geopolitics of violence linked to Islamist extremism and military responses by the French state are typically framed as masculine, these policy responses operate at the level of the intimate and the domestic, upholding the longstanding politicisation of Islamic women's bodies. In a climate of fear and suspicion in France, racially motivated political control is directed at individual bodies – most visibly but not only female bodies. A large part of the social media vitriol directed at Pétronin is linked to her visible conversion to Islam and to the threat her desire to return to Mali poses to male combatants. Online comments also suggest that Pétronin's independence of thought and action are unacceptable in a woman of advanced age. As Malargadis notes, 'Many expected to see her reappear fragile, humble, grateful, even traumatized by the ordeal she endured. And now, after three years, nine months and fifteen days, emerges an eloquent woman who speaks intelligently and upsets all predictions. And maybe clichés' (Malagardis 2020b). Pétronin is an uncommon example of a white body caught up in a geopolitical project. While her age frees her from the geopolitics of the reproductive body, there are nevertheless strong imaginaries around the role, mobility, and lifestyle of 75-year-old European women that Pétronin actively defies.

The case of Mariam Sophie Pétronin

Amid political and environmental turmoil in West Africa and religious and politically motivated violence in France, Mariam Sophie Pétronin is a complicated figure, embodying overlapping layers of power and marginality. As a middle-aged woman, she placed herself in a position of vulnerability by choosing to move to a region of extreme material deprivation where she dedicated herself to improving the wellbeing of her adopted community. In doing so, she offered her education and privileged access to European funding and institutions in the service of people living with limited resources and an increasing level of exposure to violence. Pétronin persisted in her work even as security deteriorated and her own safety was compromised. In 2012, she narrowly avoided a kidnapping attempt by taking refuge in the Algerian Consulate, yet she returned to Mali the following year determined to continue her work (Malagardis 2020c).

Despite the courage demonstrated by such dedication, it is Pétronin's willingness to place herself in harm's way that has come under fire by her critics. As a highly visible white foreigner in a conflict where such people quickly became targets of kidnapping and pawns in geopolitical negotiations, Pétronin's refusal to recognise the danger her ongoing presence in Mali posed to herself and others suggests a large degree of either hubris or naïveté. The presentation of her charitable work also raises questions about its orientation and guiding philosophy. The website of her charitable organisation, sprinkled with clichéd images of malnourished and underweight children, suggests a paternalistic orientation to humanitarian work that reproduces hegemonic discourse and stereotypes about the continent (Daley 2013). In drawing a portrait of a needy and suffering Africa in order to attract charitable donations, the website reproduces the sort of stereotypical development tropes for which many larger charities and causes have drawn sharp criticism.[2]

At the same time, in a region where most media representations emphasise terrorist violence and French military activities, Pétronin's work represents an important form of international awareness and support. With substantial funding from the European Union, her foundation is a legitimate provider of services and resources that are very much needed. Such humanitarian assistance is increasingly emphasised as a means of addressing the security situation that is as much or more valuable than military interventions. In a bulletin published by the World Economic Forum, Robert Muggah and José Luengo Cabrera state that security and stability in the region 'will only be achieved if foreign and national governments can move beyond counterterrorism and divert a greater share of resources toward reconciliation, dialogue and tangibly improving vulnerable people's livelihoods' (Muggah and Cabrera 2019). Noting the 'vast and unmet need' for service provision across the Sahel, the researchers go on to emphasise the need for '[s]ustained improvement in service delivery to marginal areas, and efforts to redress political and economic inequality' (Muggah and Cabrera 2019).

By her own account, Pétronin commands tremendous respect in the communities where she works on behalf of women, children, and the elderly thanks in large part to her willingness to live like locals in simple conditions, and her successful fundraising on behalf of orphaned and malnourished children (RFI 2020). Video footage from 2009 shows her travelling on foot to the Centre de santé de Boulgoundje where she worked for over two decades alongside a cadre of local staff she has trained herself (TV5Monde 2018). This

experience has given her a nuanced understanding of the dire conditions and delicate dynamics of the region. In interviews following her release, Pétronin refused to dismiss her kidnappers as jihadists and instead stated of their demands,

> These are the same demands as those of the nomadic communities that I have frequented for nearly twenty-five years in this region. They are Tuareg or Arab and live in remote areas. They've been calling for strengthened health structures and the construction of schools and wells for decades. Today in this remote area women still die in childbirth, after being transported on donkeys to the nearest dispensary, sometimes more than 40 kilometres from their camps. [. . .] Northern Mali has seen many uprisings and rebellions. There have been peace agreements but nothing has changed, and the anger has only increased. (Malagardis 2020a)[3]

The criticism of Pétronin's work that raged across social media in the wake of her release target her gender, her faith, and the challenge she posed to the masculinist, heavily militarised French intervention in West Africa. They also held her personally responsible for the final terms of the negotiated prisoner swap. At 11:04 pm on 8 October, a Twitter commentator posting as Max wrote 'This evening, I have a particular thought for my fallen comrades in Mali, who spilled their blood to neutralise the jihadists, of which 100 have been liberated in exchange for an illuminated old woman lacking exoticism. Shame on her' (@holste_max 2020). The post, which garnered 2253 likes and was retweeted 1233 times, prompted a string of replies. One of these, by a commentator posting under the name Camille, stated, 'And I hear on the radio this morning that the illuminated old woman already wants to return to Mali, she knows that she puts our soldiers in danger who will have 100 more jihadists on their backs, liberated so that she could be free. There's her thanks. Should have left her there' (@RDUPONT21 2020). Another wrote 'A small pleasure for this reckless Dora the Explorer: playing dolls with Malian children, going for a walk to find Nigerian giraffes, and so on, in bright red zones. This kills local populations, and those who came on a REAL mission' (@oscarnovember5 2020). The commentator @TutoInformatik went a step further, launching a Twitter poll to gauge support for the suppression of Pétronin's civil liberties: 'Should Sophie Pétronin's passport be revoked to prevent her from being captured again in Mali?' (@TutoInformatik 2020). Seventy percent of respondents said yes.

While Twitter commentary such as that shown above cannot be seen as representative of the sentiments of the general public and while it is not possible to speculate what percentage of the population holds such views, the 'barrels of insults' launched against this 'frail but still energetic woman' are a disturbingly unusual response to a hostage release (Malagardis 2020b). Malagardis called the online attacks a 'strange and disturbing surge of hatred,' remarking that although 'social networks have always been a convenient outlet for the most radical and ignorant opinions . . . rarely has a hostage release been so vilified' (ibid.). The anger may stem in large part from Pétronin's refusal to play 'the role that some obviously expected of her, that of the frightened victim of the barbarian jihadist hordes' (ibid.) Instead, during her first interview in Bamako with RFI, she reported being in excellent health. Her captivity, she said, 'went well,' she ate and drank well and transformed her detention, like prisoners before her, into a spiritual retreat (Radio France International (RFI) 2020). When asked about her jailers, she replied, 'I'd say they're armed groups that oppose the regime. There was the one in 1990. In 1996, they signed peace accords. If we really want peace in Mali, everyone must respect their commitments' (Radio

France International (RFI) 2020). Pétronin's comments suggest a complex and perceptive view of violence as a multidimensional flow that exists in insurgent acts, but also within government failures and lack of legitimacy, as well as the uncritical exercise of military control, particularly by a former colonial power. Many social media commentators centred on the risk Pétronin posed to male military operatives in the region and urged further legal control of the already highly regulated terrain of female bodies. Such responses illustrate the persistent masculinisation and racialisation of the conflict, viewed by many commentators as the purview of white men in which there is no room for women, particularly those of a certain age (cf Enloe 2019).

The provocation that Pétronin posed to hard-line and moderate critics alike intensified in 2021 in the months following her unlawful return to Mali that May. After twice applying unsuccessfully for a visa from the Malian embassy in Switzerland, Pétronin travelled by air to Senegal, which she could enter without a visa, and from there travelled overland to Mali via a clandestine border crossing. In November, Malian authorities issued a notice ordering her return to Bamako. Speaking to reporters about the developments, French government spokesperson Gabriel Attal stated, 'It shows a form of irresponsibility towards her own security and also that of our military [. . .] We've had soldiers killed while taking part in operations to save hostages abroad' (BBC 2021). Pétronin's son came to her defence, explaining that his elderly mother wished to spend the final years of her life where she is comfortable. For her own part, 'when asked about the government's reaction, Ms Pétronin told the AFP news agency: "Why irresponsible? This is my home"' (BBC 2021).

Pétronin's mobility defies expectations of someone of her age and gender, and her life choices (choosing to live in what many Europeans would consider uncomfortable conditions in her later years) defy Western convention in valuable ways. Particularly given her high profile, her choices could provoke critical reflection and discussion in a broader public. At the same time, the very fact that her mobility and lifestyle are *choices* rather than exigencies illustrate both the impossibility and undesirability of fully embodying otherness. Pétronin's body became part of the Sahelian geopolitical battlefield *because of* its privileged race and nationality; thanks to this identity she also has the option of exit at any time.

Regulating difference

As part of a broader project of limiting immigration to the continent by racialised undesirables, the European Union has expanded military, governance, and development interventions in the Sahel to unprecedented levels. In the face of a climate crisis and climate-induced environmental damage in the Sahel as elsewhere, such efforts are adding to what is increasingly being recognised as a 'militarised and corporatised version of climate security' (Daggett 2018, 27) dominated by 'a militarised adaptation, [. . . and] a politics based on exclusion, segregation and repression' (Parenti, qtd in Daggett 2018, 27). West Africans are actively contained by heavily policed border regimes that largely restrict them from travelling abroad, let alone emigrating from the region in search of a more secure future. Irregular migration, the option chosen under duress by thousands of sub-Saharan Africans, involves an arduous, expensive journey that often proves fatal. Even if 'successful,' undocumented Africans in Europe face racism, poverty, violence, and the

constant threat of deportation. Pétronin's clandestine migration to Mali, which she appears to view as legitimate given that she considers Mali 'home,' makes particularly visible the assumed privilege of the white European identity and its insistence on exceptional mobility, including the ability to establish itself in the home of its choosing.

Pétronin's mission in Mali is ostensibly anti-racist, yet the case demonstrates the problematic means by which whiteness exerts itself on the global stage, even when complicated by gender and religion. In the wake of her high-profile release, an elderly, white, Muslim woman briefly became the face of a territorial conflict that is typically the remit of young, white, Christian men, their middle-aged commanders, and their nameless black and brown Islamic enemies. Both the event and the media and social media responses raise important questions about how gender, age, nationality, religion, and race intersect with the ongoing colonisation of territory at varying scales. Yet even as she challenges social norms and assumptions, Pétronin's release and subsequent actions are illustrative of the vastly inequitable outcomes for Europeans and Sahelians cohabiting in the same territories. Her capture illustrated the stark differences between her and her Malian colleagues. As a French citizen, she owes both her capture and her release from captivity to her visibility as a white French citizen and to the power of the French state and its institutions. Both the media and social media responses to Pétronin's release obscure the larger issue of kidnapping of and violence towards West Africans, who remain almost entirely faceless and voiceless in these accounts. While Petronin's unlawful return to Mali has been condemned by French and Malian authorities alike, these actions can be seen as part of the European domination over the territories of racialised others that has been upheld by assumptions and cultural imaginaries of European superiority since colonial times (e.g., Pratt 2008; Said 1994b, 1994a).

The rising incidence of violence both in France and in France's former West African colonies affirm that the terror of the French revolution is not confined to events of the past. Rather, it is continuous within contemporary imaginings of territory, habitation, identity, and belonging. However, the framing of the circumstances in the Sahel are troubling; the increasing emphasis on climate conflict in the Sahel has an orientalising effect that risks further obscuring the culpability and moral imperatives of the global North (Meierding 2016). Furthermore, even as Malians are forced to accept both environmental instability and policed borders imposed by western nations, military forces and humanitarians exert their right to exceptional mobility. The case is also illustrative of how necropolitics plays out across multiple scales, from the individual body to the global climate. Mbembe notes that 'the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death' (Mbembe 2019, 71); in this case, European powers clearly aim to limit the distribution of deaths linked to both terrorist and climate violence to the sub-Saharan region. While racism is commonly interpreted as acts of malice directed at individual bodies, these dynamics illustrate how the structural nature of racism plays out at the scale of landscape and climate.

On its termination in 2021, Opération Barkhane, the French military operation in Mali that replaced Opération Serval in 2014, gave way to an international combat support system for troops from regional countries (Le Monde with AFP 2021b). Rather than continuing to play the role of the sovereign Malian state through attempts to secure areas where Mali has been 'unable to maintain a foothold,' France shifted its aim to 'focus on the targeted fight against jihadists and support for local forces' (Le

Monde with AFP 2021a). The decision to draw down troops, clearly linked to France's looming 2022 presidential elections and to public concern about the lives of 50 French troops lost in combat, was also a response to accusations that France is playing the role of occupying colonial force in Mali (Rushworth 2021). Nevertheless, the announcement raised concerns that the absence of a significant military presence in the region could lead to vast areas falling completely under the control of insurgents (Le Monde with AFP 2021b). Clearly, there are no easy answers for Mali, France, or Europe when it comes to resolving the entangled crises of environmental and political violence and the human movements they precipitate. What is certain is that European citizens and the interventions they support must be attentive not only to the terror embedded in colonial histories but also to its lasting echoes in the colonial present.

Notes

1. Soumaila Cissé likewise affirmed that he had suffered no mistreatment at the hands of the kidnappers.
2. At least since the release of the report *The Live Aid Legacy* (VSO 2001), development and humanitarian groups have become increasingly conscious of how negative portrayals of non-western peoples and settings reinforce a sense of western superiority while dehumanising negatively represented groups. Much research and advocacy since then has highlighted the need for nuanced communications that acknowledge the severity of many people's circumstances without robbing them of dignity (e.g., Girling n.d.; Hanchey 2016).
3. French media and social media excerpts translated by the author.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Notes on contributor

Emily McGiffin has held teaching and research positions at the University of Ghana, the University of Edinburgh, and University of British Columbia. She is currently a Research Fellow at University College London. Her current research is concerned with the cultural politics of extractivism, with emphasis on bauxite and aluminium. She is the author of a monograph published by University of Virginia Press and articles published in *Canadian Journal of Development Studies, Research in African Literatures*, and *Third World Thematics*.

ORCID

Emily McGiffin 🔵 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5479-215X

References

ACLED. 2022. "Political Violence Skyrockets in the Sahel according to Latest ACLED Data." *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*. Accessed 10 January. https://acleddata.com/2019/03/28/press-release-political-violence-skyrockets-in-the-sahel-according-to-latest-acled-data

Ahluwalia, P. 2013. "The Mali Crisis." *African Identities* 11 (1): 1–2. doi:10.1080/14725843.2013.775845.

Akan, M. 2009. "Laicite and Multiculturalism: The Stasi Report in Context." *Br J Sociol* 60 (2): 237–256. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01229.x.

Alonso, P., and M. Célian. 2020. "Échange de prisonniers au Mali: Le coup de la libération." *Libération*, 15 October 2020. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/10/15/echange-de-prisonniers-au-mali-le-coup-de-la-liberation_1802490/.

BBC. 2021. "Sophie Pétronin: France Criticises Saved Hostage Who Went Back to Mali." *BBC News*, 3 November 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59147487.

Bergamaschi, I. 2014. "The Fall of a Donor Darling: The Role of Aid in Mali's Crisis." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52 (3): 347–378. doi:10.1017/s0022278x14000251.

Bøås, M., and L. E. Torheim. 2013a. "The International Intervention in Mali: "Desert Blues" or a New Beginning?" *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 68 (3): 417–423. doi:10.1177/0020702013505430.

Bøås, M., and L. E. Torheim. 2013b. "The Trouble in Mali—corruption, Collusion, Resistance." *Third World Quarterly* 34 (7): 1279–1292. doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.824647.

Burke, J. 2020. "Sahel Region Is 'Canary in the Coalmine' on Climate, Says UN Official." *Guardian*. London, 19 October 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/19/sahel-region-is-canary-in-the-coalmine-on-climate-says-un-official.

Chafer, T., G. D. Cumming, and R. van der Velde. 2020. "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43 (4): 482–507. doi:10.1080/01402390.2020.1733987.

Chaturvedi, S., and T. Doyle. 2015. *Climate Terror: A Critical Geopolitics of Climate Change.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cline, L. E. 2013. "Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers: The Struggles for Northern Mali." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36 (8): 617–634. doi:10.1080/1057610x.2013.802972.

Daggett, C. 2018. "Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47 (1): 25–44. doi:10.1177/0305829818775817.

Daley, P. 2013. "Rescuing African Bodies: Celebrities, Consumerism and Neoliberal Humanitarianism." *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (137): 375–393. doi:10.1080/03056244.2013.816944.

Elden, S. 2007. "Terror and Territory." *Antipode* 39 (5): 821–845. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00554.x.

Enloe, C. 2019. "Wounds: Militarized Nursing, Feminist Curiosity, and Unending War." *International Relations* 33 (3): 393–412. doi:10.1177/0047117819865999.

Ghanem-Yazbeck, D., R. Barras Tejudo, G. Faleg, and Y. Zoubir. 2018. "The Sahel: Europe's African Borders." *Euromesco Joint Policy Study*, 8. 2 April 2018. Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-sahel-europes-african-borders/

Girling, D. n.d. "Radi-Aid Research: A Story of Visual Communication in Six African Countries." SAIH The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund. https://www.radiaid.com/radiaid-research.

Hage, G. 2017. "Is Racism an Environmental Threat?" In *Debating Race*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hanchey, J. N. 2016. "Agency beyond Agents: Aid Campaigns in Sub-Saharan Africa and Collective Representations of Agency." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 9 (1): 11–29. doi:10.1111/cccr.12130.

Hage, G. 2017. *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* Cambridge: Polity.

Henke, M. E. 2017. "Why Did France Intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the Role of Intervention Entrepreneurs." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23 (3): 307–323. doi:10.1080/11926422.2017.1352004.

@holste_max. 2020. ""Ce soir, j'ai une pensée particulière pour mes camarades tombés au Mali, qui ont versé leur sang pour neutraliser des djihadistes dont 100 ont été libérés en échange d'une vieille illuminée en manque d'exotisme. Honte à elle. #Petronin." Twitter. https://twitter.com/holste_max/status/1314325702066438145

Hunter-Henin, M. 2012. "Why the French Don't like the Burqa: LaÏcitÉ,National Identity and Religious Freedom." *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 61 (3): 613–639. doi:10.1017/s0020589312000280.

Hyndman, J. 2001. "Toward a Feminist Geopolitics." *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien* 45 (2): 210–222. doi:10.1111/j.1541-0064.2001.tb01484.x.

Institute, I. 2021. "West Africa at the Precipice: Visualizing Climate Stress and Insecurity." Igarapé Institute. https://igarape.org.br/en/west-africa-at-the-precipice-visualizing-climate-stress-and-insecurity/ .

Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). 2020. "Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism." Sydney.

James, C. L. R. 1989. *The Black Jacobins*. New York: Vintage Books.

Kane, M. 2020. "Mali: 4 Hostages Released in 'Prisoner Swap'."*DW*, 8 October 2020. https://www.dw.com/en/mali-4-hostages-released-in-prisoner-swap/a-55181784.

Kone, K. 2017. "A Southern View on the Tuareg Rebellions in Mali." *African Studies Review* 60 (1): 53–75. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.10.

Kwiatkowska, O. 2016. "The Influence of the Crisis in the Republic of Mali on the Political Situation of the Sahel." *Politeja* 13 (42): 421–477. doi:10.12797/Politeja.13.2016.42.23.

Le Monde with AFP. 2021a. "Au Mali, l'armée française affirme avoir tué un chef d'AQMI impliqué dans le rapt des journalistes Ghislaine Dupont et Claude Verlon."*Le Monde*, 11 June 2021. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/06/11/au-mali-l-armee-francaise-a-tue-un-chef-d-aqmi-implique-dans-le-rapt-des-journalistes-ghislaine-dupont-et-claude-verlon_6083772_3212.html.

Le Monde with AFP. 2021b. "Au Mali, un « cadre » du groupe Etat islamique au grand Sahara arrêté par la France."*Le Monde*, 21 June 2021. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/06/17/au-mali-un-cadre-du-groupe-etat-islamique-au-grand-sahara-arrete-par-la-france_6084496_3212.html.

Lecocq, B., G. Mann, B. Whitehouse, D. Badi, L. Pelckmans, N. Belalimat, B. Hall, and W. Lacher. 2013. "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A Multivocal Analysis of the 2012 Political Crisis in the Divided Republic of Mali." *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (137): 343–357. doi:10.1080/03056244.2013.799063.

Lecocq, B., and G. Klute. 2013. "Tuareg Separatism in Mali." *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 68 (3): 424–434. doi:10.1177/0020702013505431.

Magubane, Z. 2016. "American Sociology's Racial Ontology: Remembering Slavery, Deconstructing Modernity, and Charting the Future of Global Historical Sociology." *Cultural Sociology* 10 (3): 369–384. doi:10.1177/1749975516641301.

Malagardis, M. 2020a. "Sophie Pétronin "Ou tu acceptes et tu vas moins souffrir, ou tu résistes, et là, tu vas morfler"."*Libération*, 14 October 2020. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/10/14/sophie-petronin-ou-tu-acceptes-et-tu-vas-moins-souffrir-ou-tu-resistes-et-la-tu-vas-morfler_1802375/.

Malagardis, M. 2020b. "Sophie Pétronin, la résilience à toutes épreuves." In *Libération*, 10 October 2020.

Malagardis, M. 2020c. "Sophie Pétronin, presque quatre ans aux mains des groupes armés." In *Libération*5 October 2020. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/10/05/sophie-petronin-presque-quatre-ans-aux-mains-des-groupes-armes_1801504/.

Malm, A., and Z. Collective. 2021. *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*. New York: Verso.

Mbembe, A. 2019. *Necropolitics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Meierding, E. 2016. "Disconnecting Climate Change from Conflict: A Methodological Proposal." In *Reframing Climate Change: Constructing Ecological Geopolitics*, edited by S. O'Lear and S. Dalby. London: Routledge, 52–66.

Miller, C. L. 2008. *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Muggah, R., and J. L. Cabrera. 2019. "The Sahel Is Engulfed by Violence. Climate Change, Food Insecurity and Extremists are Largely to Blame." World Economic Forum.

Naylor, L., M. Daigle, S. Zaragocin, M. M. Ramírez, and M. Gilmartin. 2018. "Interventions: Bringing the Decolonial to Political Geography." *Political Geography* 66: 199–209. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.11.002.

@oscarnovember5. 2020. "Petit plaisir de ces inconscients Dora l'exploratrice: Jouer à la poupée avec les enfants maliens, aller se balader trouver les girafes nigériennes, j'en passe, ce dans les zones rouges vifs. Ça tue des populations locales, et celles et ceux qui sont venus en VRAIE mission." Twitter. https://twitter.com/oscarnovember5/status/1314479043656462341

Pichon, E., and M. Betant-Rasmussen. 2021. "New EU Strategic Priorities for the Sahel: Addressing Regional Challenges through Better Governance." European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing (EPRS). European Union. 1-12

Pratt, M.L. 2008. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Puig, O. 2020. "The Sahel: Europe's Other Border." *CIDOB Notes Internacionals* 230: 1–5.

Radio France International (RFI). 2020. "Sophie Pétronin: « J'étais dans l'acceptation de ce qui m'arrivait »." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we8uYvx7BOc

Raineri, L. 2016. "Mali: The short-sightedness of donor-driven Peacebuilding." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 11 (1): 88–92. doi:10.1080/15423166.2016.1145516.

@RDUPONT21. 2020. "Et j'entends à la radio, ce matin, que la vieille illuminée veut déjà retounet au Mali, elle sait qu'elle met en danger nos soldats qui vont avoir 100 djihadistes de plus sur le dos libérés pour qu'elle puisse être libre elle. Voilà son remerciement. Il aurait fallu la laisser." Twitter. https://twitter.com/RDUPONT21/status/1314427192001073152

Rieker, P. 2017a. "Fighting International Terrorism the French Way." In *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 133-157. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-55269-9_7

Rieker, P. 2017b. "Moving Beyond Françafrique?" In *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, London: Palgrave Macmillan. 39-59. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-55269-9_3.

Rushworth, N. 2021. "Macron Announces the End of France's anti-Islamist Operation Barkhane in the Sahel." https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210610-live-macron-to-announce-a-restructuring-of-french-forces-in-mali.France24

Said, E. W. 1994a. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Said, E. W. 1994b. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Sears, J. M. 2013. "Seeking Sustainable Legitimacy: Existential Challenges for Mali." *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 68 (3): 444–453. doi:10.1177/0020702013505438.

Smith, S. 2012. "Intimate Geopolitics: Religion, Marriage, and Reproductive Bodies in Leh, Ladakh." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 102 (6): 1511–1528. doi:10.1080/00045608.2012.660391.

Staeheli, L. A., E. Kofman, and L. J. Peake. 2004. *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*. New York: Routledge.

Tolan, J. 2017. "A French Paradox?: Islam and Laïcité." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 18 (2): 41–50. doi:10.1353/gia.2017.0019.

@TutoInformatik. 2020. "Faut-il supprimer son passeport à #SophiePetronin pour éviter qu'elle se fasse encore capturer au Mali ?" Twitter https://twitter.com/TutoInformatik/status/1314473037992022016

TV5Monde. 2018. "En 2009, rencontre avec Sophie Pétronin, l'humanitaire franco-suisse, otage depuis deux ans au Mali."

Venturi, B. 2017. "The EU and the Sahel: A Laboratory of Experimentation for the Security -Migration -Development Nexus." *IAI Working Papers*. Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali / Foundation for European Progressive Studies (IAI-FEPS). 1-20.

VSO. 2001. "The Live Aid Legacy."

Zimmerer, M. 2019. "Terror in West Africa: A Threat Assessment of the New Al Qaeda Affiliate in Mali." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12 (3): 491–511. doi:10.1080/17539153.2019.1599531.