

THE  
SAHEL  
IN A  
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE  
(A Systematic Situation Study)

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For  
The Club of Sahel

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## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a situation study of the Sahel region of Africa. Sahel is an Arabic word meaning "desert-border", and justly so, because it lies south of the Sahara, and west of Sudan. The region comprises eight countries and totals thirty-five million inhabitants. Six of these countries: Burkina Faso; Mali; Mauritania; Niger; Chad; Senegal; were former French colonies of equatorial Africa and became independent in 1960. They were joined later on by a former British colony, Gambia, and finally by the former Portuguese islands of Capo Verde.

The Sahel is considered a geopolitical region because it shares many common characteristics and interests. The most important, for a social situation study such as this one, is its "underdevelopment"; undoubtedly, one of the worst in the world. The purpose of this study is to describe, explain and project this problematic situation. To do so, the study utilizes a model procedure developed by the same author elsewhere.\* On the basis of this model, any dynamic system can be studied methodically by following three operational steps: condition-diagnosis; factor-analysis; trend-prognosis. This report will therefore, be divided into three chapters, each of which treats one of the steps.

The parameters of this model determine the breadth of the study, but not its depth. For that, the limit has to be imposed by the imperatives of keeping it within manageable proportions and at

\*P.J. Arnopoulos: "A Situation Study: Model and Application" Annals of Air & Space Law (Vol. VIII). McGill University, Montreal, 1983.

the same time fulfill its terms of reference. In this case, the terms are to look at the Sahel in a global perspective. This means placing the Sahel in the current world context and tracing the dynamics of its past and future.

In order to do this, within the limits of the study, we have to aggregate the variables of the region into their common elements and treat them as a whole. In doing so, we consider the Sahel as a social system, upon which we focus our attention; the rest is peripheral. This attention tries to find out what is wrong with the Sahel, why it is in such unenviable position and where is it going from here. If it can answer these three questions in a general but adequate manner; this study will have fulfilled its purpose as a background document for policy-planning.

## DIAGNOSIS

The first stage of any situation study is the diagnosis of the actual condition of the system under consideration. By this we mean to discern the problem, if any, which affects the proper functioning of the system. In order to perform a correct diagnosis, one has to do certain things which may be classified under three headings: symptom-noting; standard-setting; problem-defining. We shall undertake these three tasks in sequence to identify the present condition of the Sahelian system.

### 1 - Symptoms

This step requires keen observation of the salient features of the situation in question. Selecting the significant data from a plethora of diverse phenomena presupposes the existence of a conceptual framework which focuses attention in some things and ignores others. In this case, the given terms of reference delimit our scope to certain aspects of the Sahel. These aspects, which are implicit here will become explicit in the next section. For now, we look at how the people live, how their environment affects them and how their institutions operate in the context of the global system.

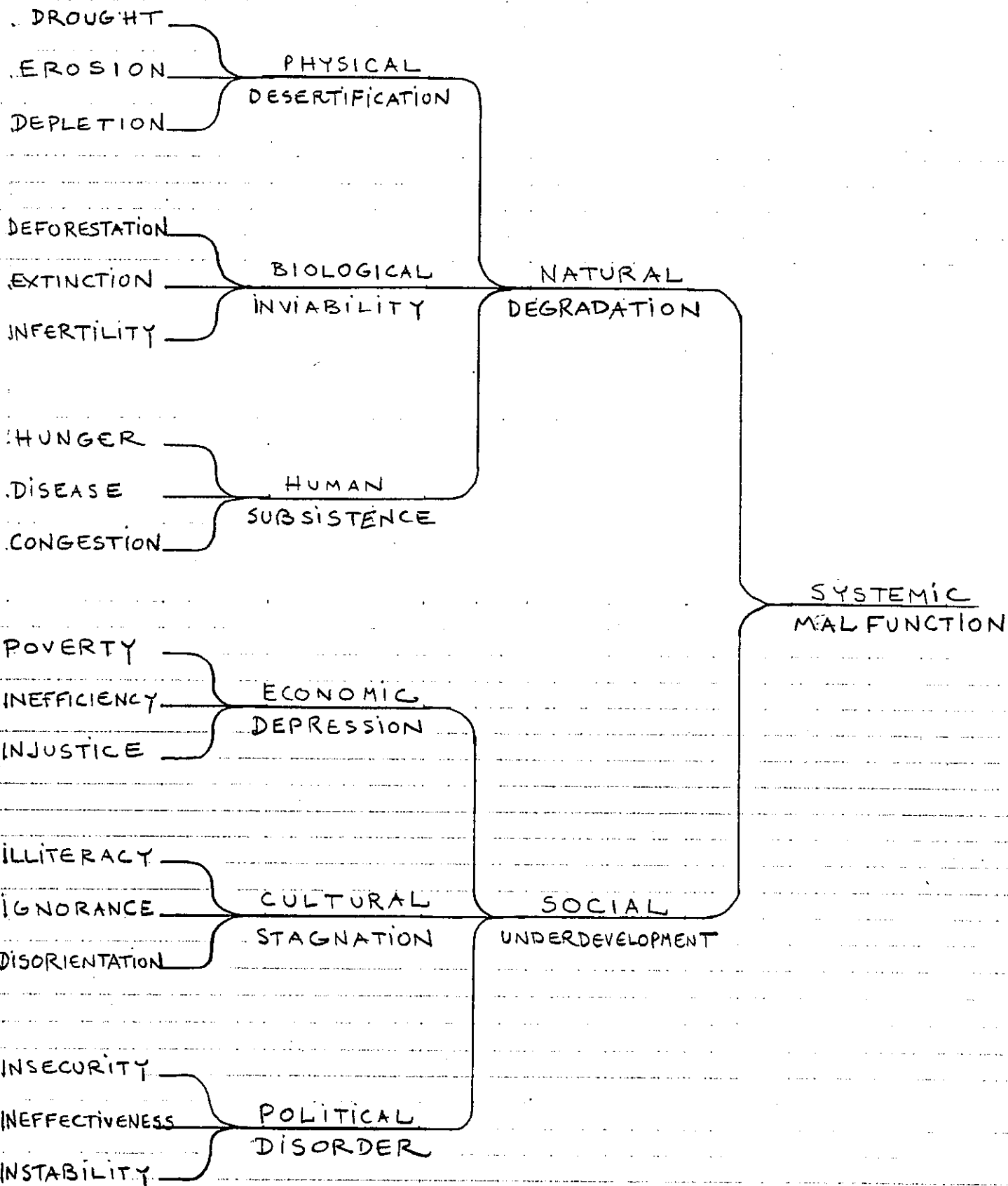
Lack of space and time, preclude details of such description and assumes some knowledge of the facts. We shall therefore, simply note what appear to be the most important points pertaining to our investigation.

On a simple or primary level of observation, the Sahel region presents a bleak picture of semi-desert; sparse vegetation; little water; poor soil; extreme weather. In this desolate natural

environment, live malnourished people in primitive conditions with no amenities. Most of the population barely subsists by agricultural or pastoral occupations in a state of illiteracy and ill health. Some of the people try to make a living in congested slums choking few urban centers. These conditions appear even worse, because they are contrasted with small islands of opulence in the midst of a sea of poverty. Under the circumstances, the rich few seem arrogant or insecure, while the many poor are restless or resigned. It is difficult to say whether the soldiers who roam the land are there to protect or loot it. Although governments show great force and inspire fear, they hardly control what is going on and are often toppled quite easily.

From these anecdotal perceptions, one can move to a more complex or secondary recounting of statistical data which confirms the same overall picture. About 70% of the Sahelian population is seriously poor, while 40% is really destitute. The average income is below \$150 per year per capita, half the labour force is either un- or under-employed, 75% of the population is illiterate, and life expectancy is about 40 years. The significance of these figures becomes obvious when compared with the equivalent ones in North America and Western Europe, which average \$10,000, only a tenth, about 1% and 75 years respectively. On this basis, the United Nations has designated the Sahel region as the poorest of the poor. Of the 30 Least Developed Developing Countries 20 are in Africa and 7 in the Sahel. Similarly, of the fifty countries most seriously affected by the economic crisis, nearly all 15 West African States are included. Of these, most of the Sahel belongs

# SAHEL PROBLEMATIQUE



to the draught-stricken and land-locked countries, a category considered as the most disadvantaged.

Because of this adverse situation, the Sahel must be economically supported from external sources. Without such foreign assistance, poverty and malnutrition would be even greater than they are. Such external dependence, puts Sahelian governments in debt to the outside world which they are hardly in a position to service, let alone repay.

These socio-economic indicators are coupled by serious political ones of actual or potential instability, turbulence and ungovernability. Political disorganization goes together with military intervention, where a great deal of energy is used up in revolts and suppressions.

The table in the next page puts all these symptoms together in a taxonomic order, so that one can get the whole picture of the Sahel plight in a glance. This synoptic view of our problematique shows the seriousness of the Sahelian condition at present and helps us diagnose the situation in all its complexity.

## 2 - Criteria

As was mentioned in the previous section, the selection of symptoms requires the existence of certain standards which were taken for granted. In this section, these standards will be spelled out, thus clarifying our criteria of choice. These criteria are of two general types:

Taxonomic: presenting the conceptual framework within which perceptions can be focussed and ordered. In this case the central focus is on the social system of the Sahel region. This system is



looked upon from two points of view: spatial and functional.

The former divides the system into levels of geographical aggregation, with the main dichotomy being drawn between the internal and external space of the system. The internal space is divided primarily into the local, nation-state and Sahelian region. The external is divided into three concentric circles of increasing extent: the continental, the hemispheric and the global. In other words, the Sahel is seen as a geographical system existing within the African environment, which in turn is part of the third world which finally is the largest part of the whole world.

The latter view distinguishes between the social system and its natural environment. As in the case of the geographical space, this perspective also differentiates between internal and external spheres, each of which has a social and natural realm. The natural environment may be subdivided into three sectors: The Human, Biological, and Physical; depending on whether one is speaking of population, organic and other natural resources. The social system is divided into economic, cultural, and political sectors. The first serves primarily the productive and exchange, the second the creative and consumption and the third the cybernetic and distribution functions of society.

The table in the next page shows the two dimensions we just described, together with their various subdivisions. These divisions of course, can be further sub-divided, depending on the depth of detail one is looking for. A complete diagnosis would then have to fill in all the boxes of such table, describing the

SPATIAL-FUNCTIONAL

TAXONOMY

FUNCTIONAL SECTORS SPACE LEVELS		SOCIAL			NATURAL		
		POLITICAL	CULTURAL	ECONOMIC	HUMAN	BIOLOGICAL	PHYSICAL
EXTERNAL	GLOBAL						
	HEMISPHERIC						
	CONTINENTAL						
INTERNAL	REGIONAL						
	NATIONAL						
	LOCAL						

CONCEPTUAL-FRAMEWORK

TABLE

SAHELIAN SOCIAL SYSTEM = SHADED AREA

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situation in each one of them. In our case, the main interest is in the external social aspects of the Sahel, therefore, we shall concentrate on the relations between the regional system and the rest of the world.

Supplementing the taxonomic criteria of diagnosis are the axiological ones. These introduce the value contents to the formal concepts presented above. The identification of a problem would be impossible without the assumption of certain normative criteria. If a problem is defined as an abnormal or unacceptable situation, then we have two criteria which determine what kind of problem we are dealing with. One is objective and the other subjective.

Objectively speaking, a system has a problem if its performance does not measure up to the standards expected of it. Expectations are created on the basis of what is considered normal. Given the ends which a system is supposed to fulfill its means of attaining these ends can be judged objectively on some criterion of optimality. The ends themselves can only be judged subjectively, whether they are acceptable (i.e. desirable) or not.

In order to diagnose the existence of social problems, one must determine the normal functions of a social system. According to our subjective norms, the *raison d'etre* of society is to facilitate the fulfillment of its members' basic needs so that they can develop their human potential. Within this ultimate purpose, the various specialized sectors of society concentrate on intermediate objectives, such as productivity and efficiency for the economic sector; creativity and community for the cultural sector; autonomy and security for the political.

Given these values, we have to evaluate the performance of

the Sahelian societies in attaining them. How well they perform, of course, is relative and can only be judged in comparison of other similar systems. All systems must fulfill some of their functions, otherwise they become extinct. The degree to which they fulfill them above a certain minimal threshold can be assessed in a comparative perspective, by looking at the system in the context of its peers. Whether the Sahel comes up to par, will be determined in the next section.

### 3 - Problems

Juxtaposing the two previous sections together, we are now in a position to define the problems of the Sahel. Direct observation and comparative statistics on the one hand, along with contemporary standards of performance and social values, undoubtedly show that the Sahelian system is seriously malfunctioning. We say that because a large number of its population is not able to fulfill its basic human needs and thereby cannot realize its potential.

After twenty years of statehood, the countries of the Sahel are still far from a self-sustained economy, a modicum of social welfare, or a stable governing machinery. The region remains fragmented and decentralized, thus it cannot muster the necessary energy and volition to absorb the shocks of environmental turbulence or natural disturbance. More important still, it needs the continuous infusion of external aid, even to maintain itself at such minimal operational level. Left on its own, the Sahel would probably disintegrate as a modern system altogether and

revert back to its traditional way of life at the subsistence level.

Summarizing this diagnosis, we can take another look at the synoptic table of symptoms in the first section. Altogether, these symptoms spell out the disease both in the natural and social spheres. Nature is overtly in a process of rapid deterioration, both in ecological and human terms. Accordingly, society suffers from galloping underdevelopment. Defined in this way, "underdevelopment" means the inability of the social system to optimize its contribution to human development: which is in itself the process of realizing one's natural potential.

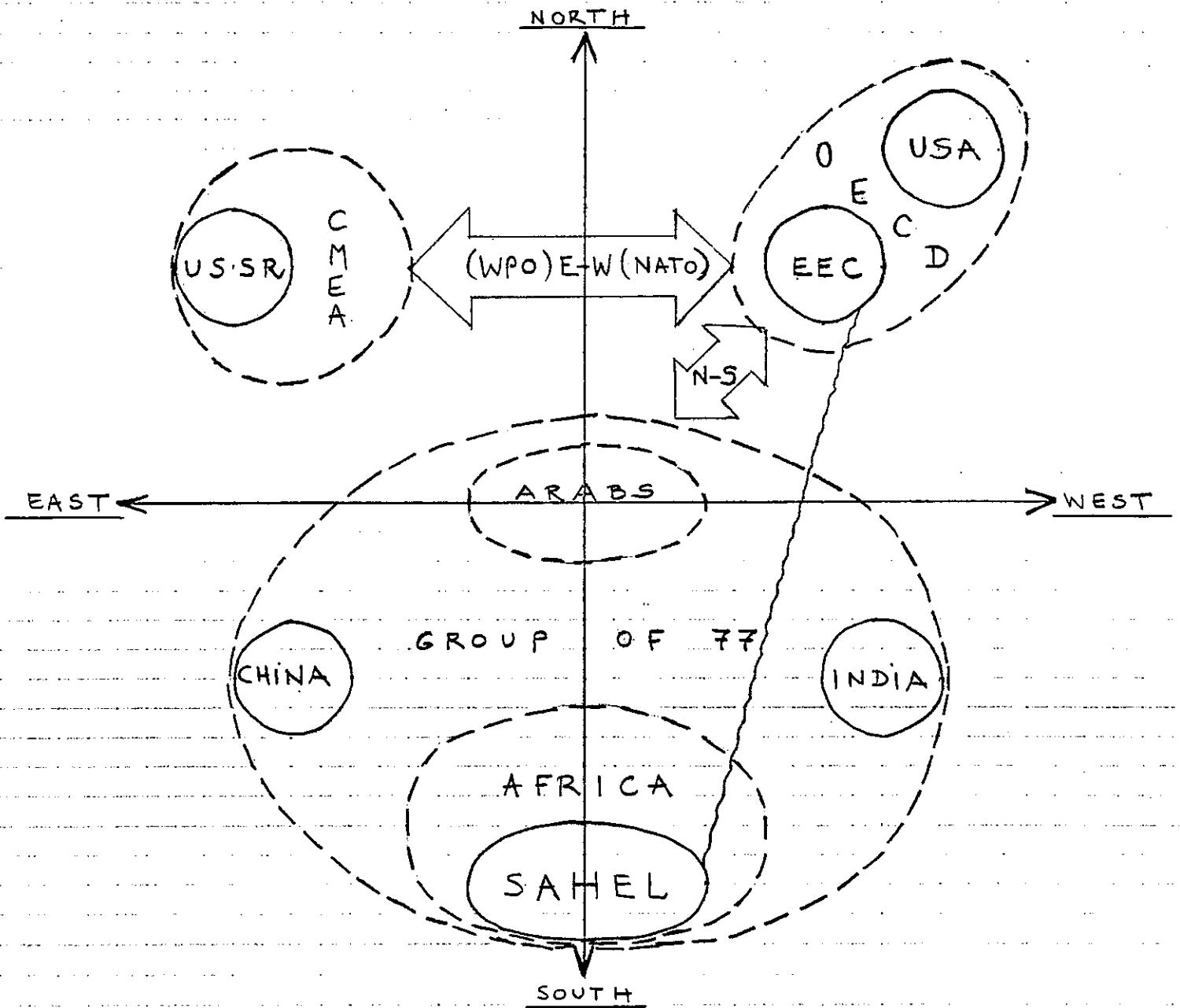
Viewed from the global perspective, this critical condition of underdevelopment is reflected in the well-known North-South gap of wealth distribution between the rich and poor hemispheres. Although the average per capita income gap is bad enough at 10 to 1, some regions of the Sahel have reached the catastrophic 100 to 1 ratio. Such a high degree of social inequality, not to say inequity, can hardly be maintained for very long within a modern social system.

Coupled with the equally dangerous East-West military-ideological confrontation, the cross-cutting North-South gap reflects the precarious condition of the contemporary world. Within such unstable world, the Sahel seems to have settled into the lowest cast of the international stratification. Caught between opposing superpowers and competing social systems, Sahel is trying to survive the economic and political squeeze by riding the wave of Third World neutrality and solidarity.

The foregoing description is illustrated in the following

geopolitical and socio-economic field diagram. In its presentation of the global configuration of forces, it shows the comparative position of the Sahel within various groups reflected in the United Nations. It is evident that the Sahel occupies a marginal position in the structure of the global system and plays an even more marginal role in its dynamics. Although it is in a significant geopolitical location within Africa, the Sahel is secondary in the third world as a whole and tertiary in the North-South dialogue. One relationship which is of crucial importance is the special ties it maintains with the European Community and by extension with OECD. As we shall see later on, this is perhaps the most critical point in the analysis and prognosis of the Sahelian predicament.

# GLOBAL FORCE CONFIGURATION



GEOPOLITICAL COORDINATE  
FIELD

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## II.

### ANALYSIS

Having completed the diagnosis of the actual situation in which the Sahel finds itself, we shall now move to the analysis of the antecedent conditions which brought about this situation. This means that we shall delve into the dynamics of the Sahelian problems and try to find some cause-effect relationship among them. For that purpose we shall utilize an etiological model based on the "input-conversion-output" process, well-known in systems theory. This analytic study should indicate the roots of the problem, in this case Sahelian underdevelopment, so that a proper treatment can be devised later on.

#### 1 - Inputs

Any open and dynamic system must interact with its environment. Some of the ways of interaction are the inputs entering the system in various forms of matter or energy. A social system, like the Sahel, receives its inputs either from the natural environment or from other social systems. These two input sources provide it with the wherewithall for its survival. To a large extent, therefore, its problems can be traced to inadequate quantity or deficient quality of inputs.

In order to classify and thus clarify the various types of resources entering the Sahel and the different sources from which they originate, we have constructed the table in the next page. Accordingly, to that table, the Sahel, like any other society gets raw materials, sunlight and heat, as well as its people, from natural processes. In addition, it imports from foreign countries



# ENVIRONMENTAL INPUTS

SOURCE CONTEXT		SOCIAL			NATURAL		
		U.N	NORTH	SOUTH	EARTH	WATER	SPACE
ENERGY	DATA	INFOR- MATION	TECHNO- LOGY		GEOGRAPHY		
	CAPITAL		MONEY				
	WORK	SERVICES				HYDRO	LIGHT
MATTER	HUMAN		EXPERTS	IMMIGRANTS	BIRTHS		
	ORGANIC		FOOD			FISHING	
	PHYSICAL		ARMS		MINERALS		

# SAHEL SYSTEM IMPORTS

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or international organizations, much of its food, goods, capital, technology and ideology. The examples given in the Table may be multiplied, detailed and quantified, but they will suffice for purposes of general analysis.

Since the present situation in the Sahel began with its previous inputs, it is not difficult to discern the sources of its problems. From the natural side the Sahel receives too much heat and light, but too little water and rain. A hostile climate and scarce resources can only sustain a limited population beyond which the ecological system becomes unstable, thus undermining the social system it supports. This is precisely what happened in the Sahel with the introduction of modern (western) medicine, which lowered mortality rates, thus effecting a population explosion, far too high for the natural infrastructure to maintain.

In order to make up for the natural shortfall, the social environment tried to make up the difference; but with very little success, since it could not meet the additional matter-energy demands. Foreign aid is too little and too late to satisfy the enormous needs of the Sahel. As such, it shows mainly as emergency stop-gap and disaster relief to alleviate immediate problems, while it hardly touches the ultimate issues of social development.

Moreover, even if natural inputs are mostly free, social imports hardly come without reciprocity. International trade demands payment in kind or money, either of which the Sahel does not have in large amounts. The only imports that do not require payment are ideologies, which enter the Sahel both from the East and West. Not only that, but both sides are willing to pay the

Sahel for imports of this kind. It is for this reason that foreign influences abound in poor countries. Propaganda loves an ideological vacuum towards which it is inexorably drawn and tries to fill out. In this sense, the Sahel is an arena where different northern cultural products compete for supremacy.

## 2 - Conversions

Although we have been speaking of an "ideological vacuum" in the Sahel, no society has a complete vacuum in any respect. The countries of the Sahel have their own structures and cultures which serve to filter and combine with incoming influences to form particular mutations. The Sahel, like any other social system, has various institutions and processes, which convert foreign goods and messages into useful and meaningful products for the domestic market.

In this section, we shall outline these structures and functions of the Sahelian system as illustrated in the matrix diagram of the next page.

Using the same two dimensions as those of the conceptual framework, the matrix cross-cuts the system's functional sectors (social and natural) with its spatial levels (national and international). Unlike the conceptual framework matrix, however, we have now opened up the shaded part to see the details inside. These details consist of sub-divisions of the political, cultural and economic sectors in the vertical axis; and the eight nation-states of the Sahel in the horizontal. If we could look into each of the resulting hundred cells of this 10 x 10 matrix; we would be able to describe the activities of the Sahelian institutions in the



local, national and international level, and thereby determine the conversion mechanism of the whole system.

Of course we cannot go into such detailed analysis here. All that can be done is point out some salient features which characterize the Sahel and explains why it is in its present condition.

Resting on its natural infrastructure, Sahelian society is severely limited by its ability to extract the necessary resources for its survival. First at the local level and then at the national, the economic sector is too primitive to produce and distribute enough goods for supporting its population. Not only is the quantity of production low, but its rate and location is so variable as to create periods and areas of alternating glut and penury. The social system has not yet developed sufficient shock absorbers to withstand the vagaries of nature. So the population of the Sahel is at the mercy of the weather and other factors beyond its control. The cultural structures of the region are hardly in a position to do much about this situation. Non-viable agriculture drives people to the urban centers for alternative means of subsistence. But this rapid urbanization overloads the system which cannot cope with such high influx of new demands. Public utilities and social services are overwhelmed and break down by the sheer weight they have to carry. The low quality of life, along with family breakdown and value deterioration, creates an anomic situation in which it is almost impossible to grasp and resolve social problems.

At the superstructural level, the political institutions operate in some sort of social vacuum. Since the economy can hardly

support the population, and the cultural institutions are in a precarious state; a top-heavy state apparatus tends to loose control of events and flounder in the cross-currents of social change. The lines of communication between governments and people are not strong enough to allow much downward control or upward influence flows.

Shifting our attention from the intra to the international level, we can see that the Sahelian intergovernmental organization leaves a lot to be desired. Although most problems are common to the region, sovereignty is divided into eight geopolitical units.

The system is thus decentralized and most power lies in the member states, rather than in the central IGO's. Energy and materials flow throughout the system in varying degrees, so there is some interrelationship and interaction among the units which define the system. Since each state has its own political, economic and cultural institutions, there are many decision-making centers with overlapping jurisdictions, which make for conflicts of interest and contradictory policies.

We cannot go into a detailed analysis of each Sahelian country, so we shall have to aggregate the discussion for the system as a whole and the common problems it faces. To begin with, we can place the main responsibility of the structural fragmentation of the system to its colonial past, which its present elites have been unable to overcome. Because of this fragmentation, not enough power can be concentrated in order to deal with the enormity of the current problems. Parochial interests make Sahelian interdependence very often a zero-sum

competition. Cooperation is limited primarily in very restricted matters, such as the CILSS (Organization against draught); and agreement rarely goes beyond rhetorical anticolonialism and pan-africanism. Economic cooperation was supposed to be developed in a common market (ECOWAS), but it has yet to succeed after ten years of existence. Since the costs of intergration for each member are immediate, whereas the benefits are ultimate, no progress can be made in the short run. Power politics or realpolitik have so far won over social welfare or the common interest.

As a result of institutional mismangement and lack of political will, the problems of primitive technology, low skills, inferior agriculture and maldistribution of wealth continue unabated. The cybernetic mechanisms of the Sahel are therefore too weak and soft to bring about significant social change which would require some radical transformation of the system.

### 3 - Outputs

However inefficient and ineffective, the social institutions of the Sahel still manage to produce a few things. Its governments legislate, families procreate, schools educate, farms nurish, and markets exchange. These outputs of goods and services correspond to the inputs of matter and energy, as they have been transformed by the throughputs of human will and ingenuity.

In order to analyze system outputs, we can use a table similar to that for inputs; only instead of sources and resources, we have products and targets. Accordingly, the social system rejects back into nature used up materials and degraded energy. Wastes of all kinds, and environmental pollution are such

# SOCIAL-SYSTEM OUTPUTS

TARGET CONTEXT  PRODUCT CONTENT		SOCIAL			NATURAL		
		U.N.	NORTH	SOUTH	EARTH	WATER	SPACE
ENERGY	DATA	VOTES		POLICY			STATIC
	CAPITAL		INTEREST				
	WORK				CULTIVATION		HEAT
MATTER	HUMAN	DIPLOMATS		EMIGRATION	DEATHS		
	ORGANIC		CASH CROPS			WASTES	
	PHYSICAL			GOODS			POLLUTION

SAHEL EXPORTS X DESTINATIONS.

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social outputs, of the the Sahel produces relatively little. Unlike consumer societies, subsistence ones neither waste nor pollute very much, because they do not have enough inputs to do so.

At the same time, the outputs destined to other societies are equally low. The few material and energy outputs of the Sahel are consumed in place. Some exports are raw materials, cash crops, and handicrafts. Due to the high unemployment and miserable life, many people would like to leave, but few are able to emigrate abroad. Finally the political outputs of the Sahel, are its foreign policies which try to influence other countries. Needless to say, in this domain as well, Sahelian output is minimally effective in changing the world.

The foreign policies of the Sahelian states may be classified both as to their targets and functions. The former are aimed either within the region or to the rest of the world; whereas the latter are concerned with political independence, economic development, and cultural identity. In Sahelian policies try to increase cooperation and intergration. Beyond these goals, the main focus of African foreign policies is the total decolonization of the continent, whose target is South Africa.

Outside the continent, the Sahel is enterely allied with the rest of the Third World in demanding a New International Economic Order, but to little avail so far. The structures of the world economy are too strong and the powers which support them too formidable to succumb to the pinpricks of Sahelian diplomacy or even Third World pressure. Since African policies are not backed

by credible threats of sanctions, they are more like supplications than demands. The superpowers of the First and Second World can hardly be moved by the pleadings of the small states of the Third.

In this area, perhaps the most successful policy is that of non-alignment, which has kept the Sahel out of major great-power conflicts and has even contributed in some mediation of regional disputes, as in the Middle East. Such international involvements however, are exceptional. Countries at the subsistence level, can hardly afford to spend their limited resources in foreign adventures. Sahelian foreign relations have, therefore, always been of low priority, compared to domestic affairs.

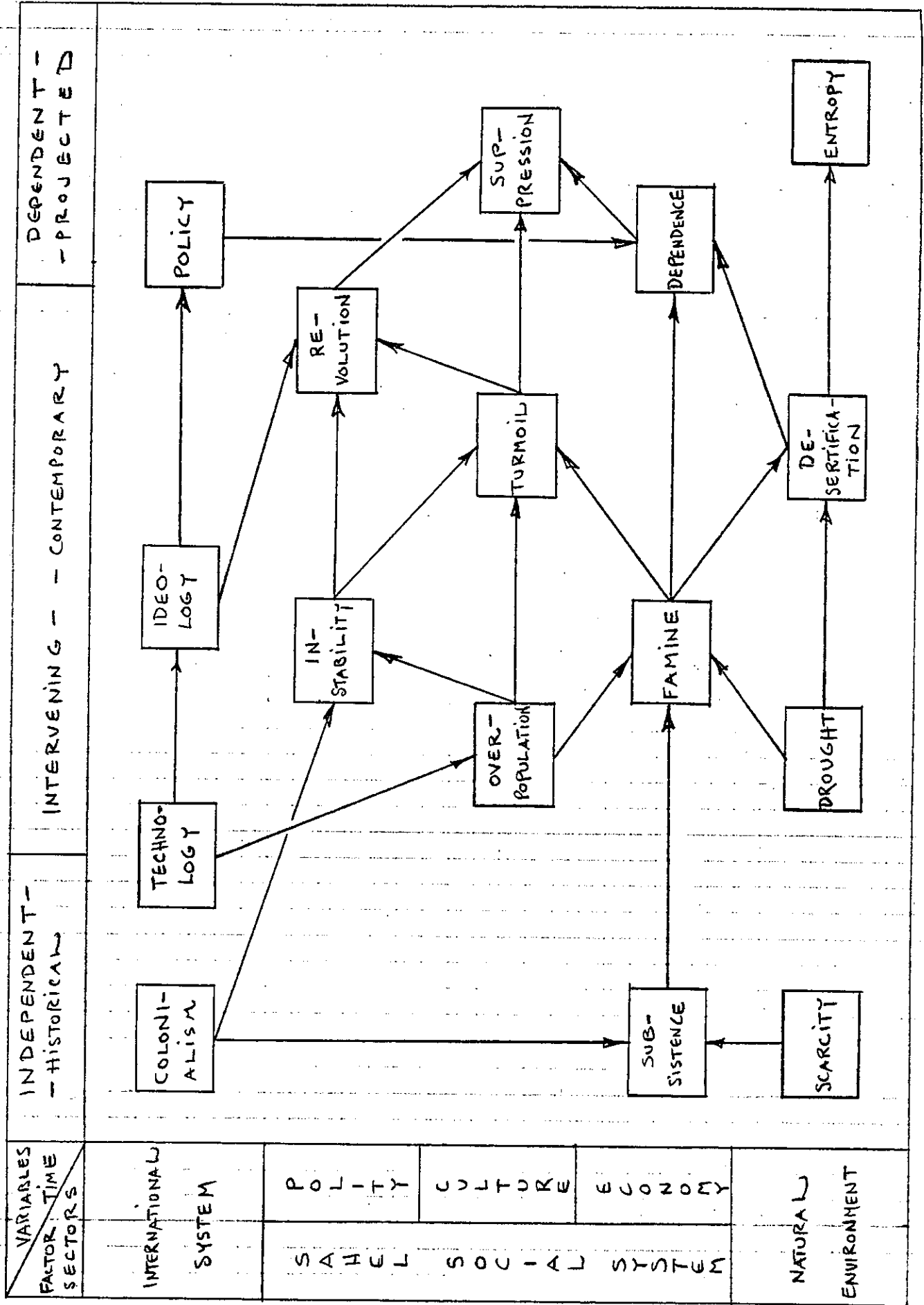
After the diagnosis and analysis, comes the prognosis of the probable outcome of a situation. This third and last phase of our study will emphasize the temporal element and try to follow the arrow of time into the future. In order to do that, we shall have to go back into the history of the Sahel and look for any patterns that form long-range trends which may lead us beyond the present.

#### 1 - System Dynamics

In order to set the stage of our historical description, we must first establish some cause-effect relationships in time. This will enable us to follow the temporal sequence of independent - intervening - dependent variables, as they interact among the different sectors of the social system and its environment. At the same time, it will allow us to tie together the diagnosis, analysis and prognosis of this study.

The complexity of interacting variables requires some simplification, which we have tried to do in the following diagram. According to it, we have plotted the various factors of social change through time. The three sectors of the Sahelian social system are affected by its natural environment as well as the international system. On this basis, the historical factors of colonialism and the environmental factors of ecological scarcity, combined to create a precarious existence for the population of the Sahel. The vulnerability of the system was further undermined by natural disasters and foreign interference. The present conditions of overpopulation, famine and instability, can be

# SYSTEM DYNAMICS



TEMPORAL/FUNCTIONAL VARIABLES

traced to these previous factors. As a result, one can expect further social turmoil and natural deterioration, accompanied by external dependence and internal suppression.

This model of social dynamics is based on the analysis just completed and should clarify the flow of events in the case of the Sahel. Once this causal chain is accepted, it brings out the vicious circle in which the region is caught and from which it is so difficult to extricate itself. More accurately we should speak of vicious spiral rather than circle, because of the time element in it. The duration of each cycle might take anywhere from a few years to few generations. To complicate matters, there exist short-local epicycles, riding the long waves of the global spiral.

What is depicted in the diagram can therefore be seen as one cycle, repeating itself over time. As it is, positive feedbacks from one cycle to another produce the deteriorating process which the Sahel is undergoing presently. Only the infusion of some negative feedbacks can reverse the situation, but such massive intervention is not yet in our horizon. For the purposes of this study, all we can do is translate this theoretical model into the actual history of the Sahel and from that draw our conclusions for the future.

## 2 - Historical Cycles

Any speculation about the future requires some knowledge of the past. Out of that knowledge, we discern the dynamics of social change and analyze the functions of system relationships. Since human reason abhors chaos, we seek some underlying order behind

the apparent randomness of phenomena. This, we shall try to do by the sequence of events which highlight African history.

Although that history goes back a long time, for our purposes which concern international relations, we need not go beyond the nineteenth century, when European exploration of Africa went into high gear. As a result, the ensuing scramble for territory, ushered in modern colonialism and ended up in the complete subjugation of the continent by the imperial powers of Europe.

Exactly one hundred years ago in 1885, the Congress of Berlin, "legalized" the division of Africa, which to a large extent forms the boundaries of the Sahel up to the present. In spite of this geopolitical continuity, many changes did take place in three generations. The first generation (1885-1915) witnessed the consolidation of colonial regimes. At the end of this period, the first World War eliminated Germany and Turkey from the colonial game. The Treaty of Versailles mandated their territories to the victorious allies until the second World War and the birth of the United Nations (1915-1945). The third generation (1945-1975) saw the reversal of the first, by the process of decolonization, which is by now almost completed. In the ten years between 1955 and 1965, the number of African states rose almost by a factor of ten (from 4 to 40): Most of the Sahel became independent in the middle of this period (i.e. 1960) and completed the process in the next decade.

With the creation of the Club of Sahel in 1975, a fourth generation of European-African relations may be said to have began. This new era, is not as turbulent as the first or the

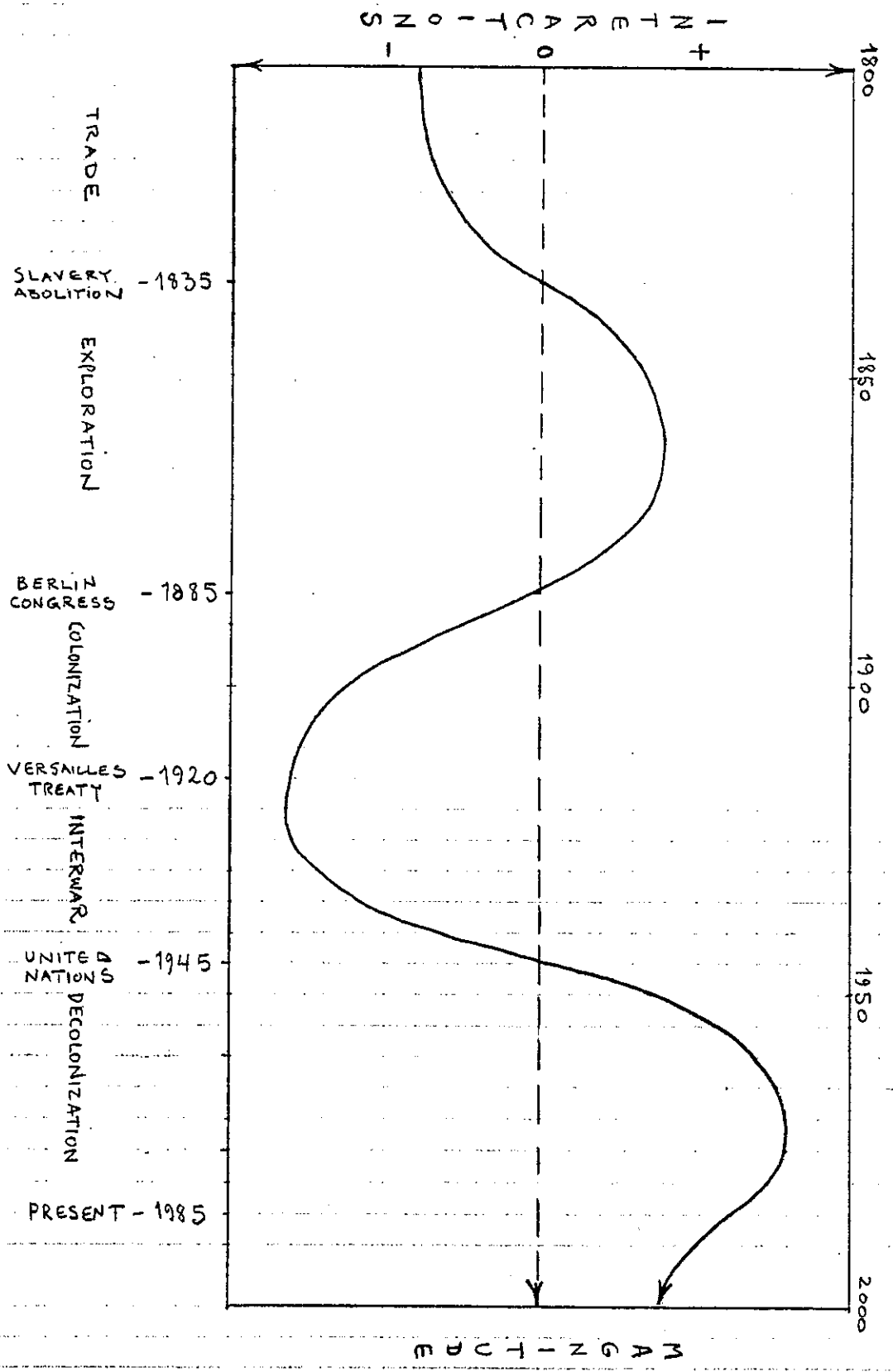
third, since it covers a period of "normal" intercontinental relations. Since that time, the Treaty of Lome ranged fifty African, Caribbean and Pacific states on the one side and ten European Community members on the other in a renewed economic development process. The eight states of Sahel were central to that larger pact, as was the intermediate Economic Community of the sixteen West African states. By 1975 then, all the international structures were in place for the activities of the new period.

Any interpretation of historical events requires some decoding mechanism, which will give meaning to symbols. Perhaps the most accepted key is contained in Cyclical Theory, according to which history flows in dialectical cycles of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, combining periodic ups and downs with certain progressive elements. The periods of these cycles and their epicycles varies according to the kind of generating factors at work in any particular time and place.

In the case of Africa and the Sahel, the macrohistory of the last two centuries, outlined above, may be fit into the cyclic theory, as far as North-South relations go. We have attempted to do this in the histogram of the next page. Its horizontal axis, of course measures time, while its vertical axis measures the quantity and quality of African external relations, particularly with Europe. These relations fluctuate up or down from a zero level of isolation. Below that line lie negative or detrimental relations; above it are relatively positive or beneficial ones.

The sinosoidal curve we have traced on the chart shows a

# SAHELIAN EXTERNAL RELATIONS





long-wave of African history having about one hundred years periodicity. Due to the well-known phenomenon of historical acceleration, however, the cycles should shorten progressively. This longitudinal compression is coupled with amplitudinal extension, due to the higher systemic instability of positive feedbacks. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been such times of global crisis and dramatic change. During these periods, international relations reflect both the best and the worst than at any other time; oscillating between extremes of slavery or colonialism and discovery or independence.

As forecasters, the significance of all this lies in the establishment of a heavy trend which we can then project to the future. Without going too far, it is evident from the chart that Africa's external relations have peaked in the sixties and seventies and are now subjected to the negative pull of antinomic forces. Although these forces are negative, they serve as correctives to dampen the otherwise explosive oscillations of the system. If they can be controlled, they could stabilize at an optimal positive plateau of both amplitude and frequency modulation.

Whatever the long-range effects of such movement, the immediate results to the end of this century do not bode well for the Sahel. The euphoria of political independence could not be sustained for long. The explosion of rising expectations has given way to post-independence depression and rising frustrations. "Learning by doing" is certainly educational, but at a high cost, repeating the mistakes of others. Yet, the price and beauty of "freedom" is the right to make one's own mistakes and this the

Africans have earned by now. Whether the rest of the world is willing to save the Sahel from its own sins is another matter.

### 3 - Trends

On the basis of the preceding discussion, we can now make our conditional forecast. If the trends we have traced continue, the remaining of the fourth African generation (1975-2000) will be riding a down-swing of the wave.

Beginning with the environmental parameters; the rainfall is expected to continue its decline to half the optimal level, into the next century, producing recurrent droughts, and desertification. As a result, food production will decrease, so that it would only suffice for half its rising population by the year 2000, thus increasing the seriously undernourished Africans to over one hundred million people. A tragedy of such proportions will dominate the world's human problem for the rest of this century and beyond.

Food scarcity coupled with further decline in the price of raw materials exported by the Sahel, will increase import dependence and raise the external debt. The resulting economic depression and cost inflation will continue the decrease of real income which began with independence in the sixties.

Along with this economic decline, there will be a further increase of income maldistribution. The famous gaps between the rich and poor, whether they be classes or nations, are deepening into veritable chasms. This trend is much more important politically than the generalization of poverty; especially since

the gaps are most visible in exploding urban conglomerations.

As natural and social pressures are rising, political institutions are overwhelmed in trying to cope with the recurring crises. The trend for the state to loose control of the social system and be overtaken by events, is evident throughout the Sahel. In many cases, the situation has reached economic non-viability and political bankruptcy. It is at this point when military takeovers occur; but with hardly any better prospects of success where politics failed.

In their external relations, these states continue to increase their dependence by adding military imports to those of emery and foodstuffs. Increasing foreign aid thus becomes the "opium" of these nations, which are less and less capable of doing without it. How long will this aid continue depends on the political interests of the OECD states and the philanthropic generosity of their people. But there is evidence of satiation in both. The intrest of the superpowers for the Sahel is waning and the region is increasingly marginalized in world affairs. As long as the need of the outside world for the Sahel remains low, its help or interference will be minimal.

To summarize these trends, we can say that there is a high probablity for the following evolution:

- Ecological: erosion; disertification; deforestation;
- Economic: dependence; stagnation; underperformance
- Cultural: overpopulation; urbanization; alienation
- Political: destabilization, militarization; polarization

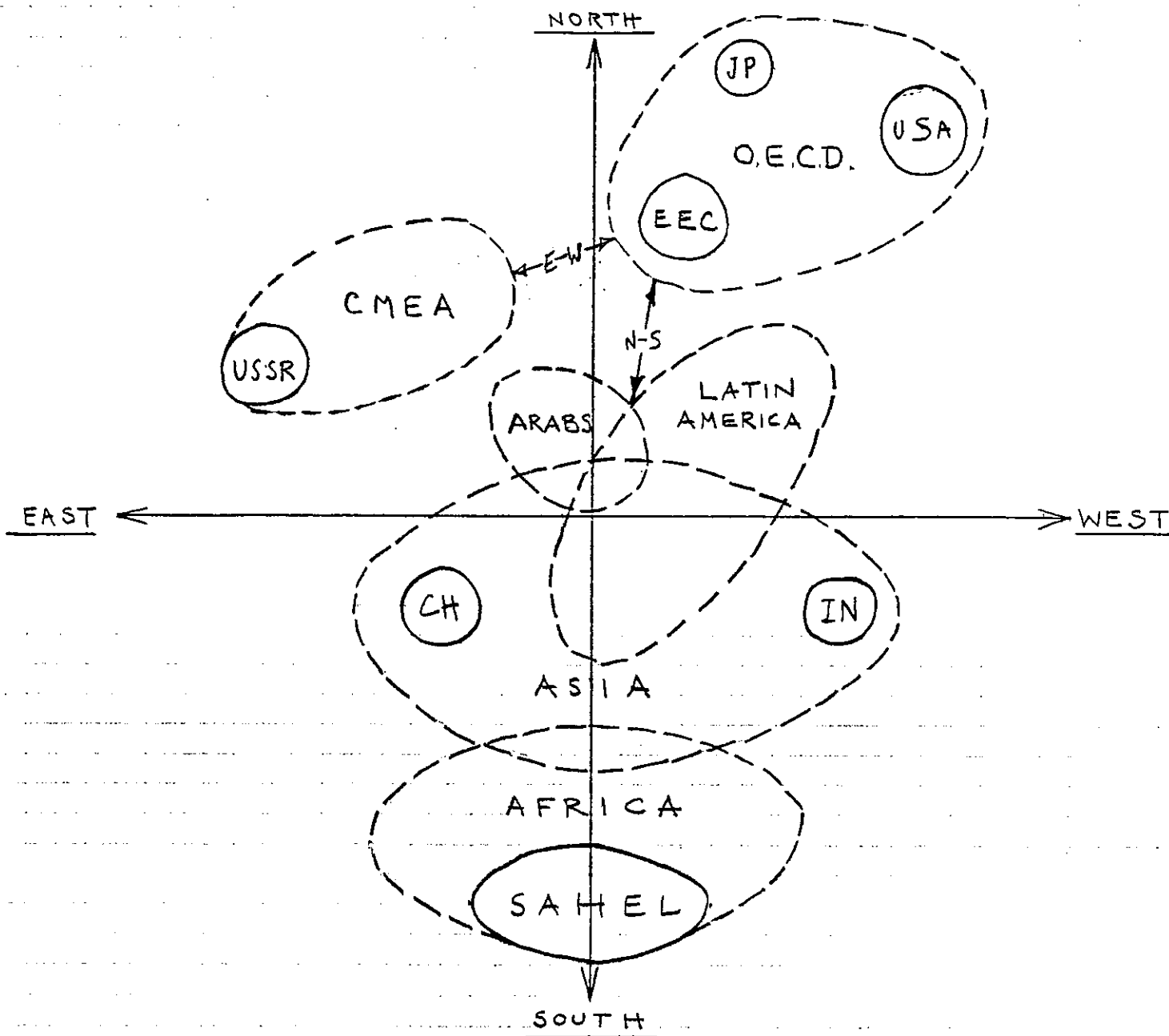
The overall prognosis, therefore, is worsening natural and social problems, resulting in severe economic and political

crises. Under the circumstances, the prospects for development are rather pessimistic. Formidable institutional, historical, and ecological constraints militate against any rapid or radical progress. Until the turn of the century, most key indicators will unfortunately continue to register systemic deterioration and environmental marginalization.

We have translated this picture in geopolitical terms as shown in the next field diagram. Keeping the same parameters as those of the diagnostic diagram in the first section, our prognosis for the next twenty years shows the relative changes in the power-wealth configuration of the world at the turn of the century. This projection of trends does not hold great surprises. Barring the occurrence of nuclear war, the world will undergo periodic cycles of East-West tension and entente within a greater structural multi-polarity. The NIC's (New Industrialized Countries) and NAC's (non-aligned countries) will increase and prosper, thus strengthening the center-middle class of the international system. Many of the Afro-Asian countries, however, will remain behind, and therefore continue the proleterization of some regions of the world, including the Sahel. Accordingly, the Third World will become more diverse and will tend to divide into several continental sub-groups. yet, one striking constant in this picture is the unchanged relative position of the Sahel, which will remain at the bottom of the international hierarchy.

# TURN-OF-CENTURY

## PROGNOSIS



GLOBAL

GEOPOLITICAL

CONFIGURATION

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## CONCLUSION

This study cannot conclude with the pessimistic prognosis of the previous chapter. Whole regions and peoples cannot be simply written off as hopeless. In any case, as we have shown, history evolves in cycles, so that downturns sooner or later reverse themselves. Without falling into the trap of historical inevitability, we can say that given a modicum of "good luck" as well as "good will", the current problems of the Sahel are temporary.

Our fundamental conclusion that the Sahel is not sufficiently endowed with natural and social resources to sustain a self-generating development, is a qualified statement. It means that unless the dominant social structures and processes are modified, we can see very little hope in breaking the vicious circle in which the Sahel is caught. How to bring about the necessary modifications is, of course, the question of the century.

In the decades ahead, some agonizing political decisions will have to be taken, if the Sahel problematique is to be brought under control. Unfortunately, from our point of view, this will require more political will than either Sahelian or other governments have shown so far. It is for this reason that we cannot see any real solutions in the near future. More time will be needed, along with the prolongation of human misery, before the ecosystem restabilize itself at another viable level.

Given the enormity and complexity of the problems, there is little that governments can do, even if they have the necessary

means at their disposal, which the Sahel states do not. Yet, public policy does make a difference, even if marginally in alleviating or worsening the situation. Wise decisions, rather than stupid ones, can save thousands of human lives, and this alone is worth the search for political wisdom.

This search, however, will lead us into a long road; which we cannot take presently because it would require to begin another study. For now, we have completed all that was promised to be done in the introduction of this situation study. The policy-planning needed to correct the situation will have to be undertaken in a subsequent project.

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