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Anti-Americanism and Anti-British Sentiment in Greece (1955–1959)

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Abstract

This study investigates the development of anti-American and anti-British sentiment in Greece during the period 1955–1959, within the framework of the Cyprus Question and the broader geopolitical context of the early Cold War. It contends that the activities of EOKA, in conjunction with British colonial policy on the island, constituted the principal catalysts for a marked shift in Greek public opinion. Drawing upon contemporary press accounts, archival evidence, and intelligence reports, the analysis demonstrates how public discourse articulated growing hostility toward Britain as a colonial power and toward the United States as a perceived supporter of British policy. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of mass mobilization and the press in shaping these attitudes. While such sentiments emerged predominantly at the societal level, the Greek government maintained its Western orientation, revealing a divergence between domestic opinion and official foreign policy.

Keywords: Cyprus, Greece, anti-British sentiment, Balkans, EOKA.

1. Introduction

The Cyprus Question—constituting the principal catalyst of anti-American and anti-British sentiment in Greece during the formative stage of the Cold War—dominated Greek public opinion from the early 1950s until the Turkish invasion of 1974. The inauguration of this new phase of a protracted diplomatic dispute may be located in the so-called “plebiscite for union” of January 1950, which in essence represented a mass petition. A total of 224,747 Greek Cypriots, amounting to 95.7% of the island’s population, endorsed the call for *enosis* (union with Greece). Although the results of this initiative were received with relative coolness in Athens, it nevertheless became apparent that British colonial authority was entering a period of acute instability (Christodoulidis, 2012).

Very soon, the political dimension of the struggle for union gave way to a military one. Pivotal in this transformation was the establishment of the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) shortly after the plebiscite. Its leader, retired Colonel Georgios Grivas, was a controversial figure who, during the Axis Occupation of Greece (1941–1944), had founded the anti-communist paramilitary organization “X.” In the ensuing armed struggle, the future “Digenis” was compelled to cooperate with Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, a dynamic and ambitious forty-two-year-old cleric whose political aspirations extended well beyond ecclesiastical boundaries. As will be discussed in subsequent sections, the armed campaign launched under Grivas’s direction set in

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motion a series of developments that profoundly shaped the trajectory of the Cyprus issue (Novo, 2025).

It is worth underscoring that the turbulence of the 1950s was not confined to Cyprus alone. Alongside the plebiscite, the enthronement of Makarios III in 1950, and the activities of Greek Cypriot insurgents, equally consequential shifts were unfolding within the other political centers implicated in the Cyprus Question. In Athens, successive governments succeeded one another, while a younger generation of politicians, most notably Konstantinos Karamanlis, prepared to assume leadership from an older cohort—Nikolaos Plastiras passed away in 1953, while Alexandros Papagos died in 1955 (Veremis and Koliopoulos, 2006). In London, Winston Churchill's final administration dissolved on 7 April 1955, only days after EOKA initiated its first attacks. He was succeeded by Conservative leaders such as Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan (Bogdanor, 2023). Meanwhile, in Ankara, the government of Adnan Menderes entered a phase of escalating instability, culminating in the military coup of 1960 and the subsequent execution of the prime minister one year later (Ozdemir & Coskun, 2021).

Against the backdrop of this intricate and shifting political landscape, the present inquiry sets out primarily to analyze the various manifestations of anti-American and anti-British sentiment as articulated within Greek society during the years 1950–1959. Concurrently, it aims to address two interrelated questions: what were the deeper structural causes underpinning these attitudes, and in what ways did they condition Athens' diplomatic relations with the two principal Western powers?

2. Limitations of the research

The present inquiry is inevitably subject to several constraints that must be acknowledged at the outset. Foremost among these is the restricted accessibility of archival material, a limitation stemming from both institutional and political factors. The British Foreign Office has long displayed a marked reluctance to digitize or declassify documents pertaining to the Cyprus Question, resulting in a fragmented and uneven archival record. Similarly, the corresponding Greek services have imposed frequent bureaucratic obstacles, particularly regarding the consultation of postwar records. Such procedural barriers not only limit the range of primary materials available but also introduce a degree of asymmetry between British and Greek sources, which in turn complicates efforts to construct a balanced narrative.

To mitigate these constraints, the research adopts a compensatory strategy that emphasizes the triangulation of alternative sources. Chief among these are the declassified CIA archives, which offer valuable insights into the American perception of the Cyprus Question, as well as the contemporary press, whose reportage and editorial commentary provide an indispensable supplement to official documentation. Moreover, primary accounts such as the *Memoirs* of Georgios Grivas serve as critical substitutes for missing state records, offering first-hand testimony that—despite its inherent subjectivity—illuminates the motivations and internal dynamics of key actors (Grivas, 1961). Cross-referencing these sources with diplomatic correspondence and parliamentary debates helps to minimize the distortions that may arise from relying on personal or ideologically inflected narratives.

A further, and no less significant, restriction derives from the prohibition of the newspaper *Rizospastis* during the period under examination. As the central organ of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), *Rizospastis* could have furnished valuable perspectives on the intersection of the Cyprus Question with broader ideological and geopolitical struggles of the Cold War. Its absence limits the researcher's ability to fully capture the spectrum of anti-American and anti-British sentiment within Greek political discourse, particularly as articulated by the Left. Although secondary references to KKE positions can be gleaned from official party publications

after the paper's reappearance and from later retrospectives (*Rizospastis*, 4 November 2016), the lack of contemporaneous primary material necessarily restricts the depth of analysis regarding left-wing interpretations of the conflict.

Finally, the enduring politicization of the Cyprus Question—even seventy years after the initiation of the EOKA campaign—poses an additional and more intangible obstacle. The ongoing “memory wars” in both Athens and Nicosia continue to shape the parameters of public debate and scholarly inquiry alike. Competing national narratives, often centered upon the contested figure of Georgios Grivas and the moral legacy of EOKA, have given rise to a polarized historiographical environment. This polarization has, in turn, constrained the production of dispassionate scholarship, as historians navigate between state-endorsed interpretations, partisan commemorative practices, and public expectations. The predominance within popular historiography of works of questionable academic rigor—frequently marked by overt political agendas or apologetic tendencies—further complicates the researcher's task (Athanasiadis, 2015). In this respect, the study must remain acutely aware of its own position within this contested terrain, striving for analytical balance while recognizing the limitations imposed by the historiographical and political context.

3. Review of the literature

Cold War–era anti-Americanism has attracted the sustained attention of a broad range of scholars. Some have concentrated on the resentment provoked by U.S. interventions in Latin America (McPherson, 2009; McPherson, 2006), while others have chosen to focus on European perceptions of American hegemony (Stephan, 2005; Stephan, 2004; Muller, 2010; Lacorne, Rupnik, and Toinet, 1990). A more comprehensive treatment of the subject was undertaken by Max Paul Friedman in his *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012). Similarly, the collective volume *With Us or Against Us: Studies in Global Anti-Americanism* (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2005), edited by Denis Lacorne and Tony Judt, sought to map the phenomenon in a global perspective. Yet in neither of these works is the Greek case—or, indeed, that of any Balkan state—systematically examined.

The sole exception to this general neglect of the Greek experience in the international literature may be found in the doctoral dissertation of Donald Munn, which investigates what the author terms the “birth of anti-Americanism” in Greece, situating it chronologically in the period of the Colonels' Dictatorship (1967–1974) (Munn, 1980). Nevertheless, as the present study will demonstrate, the roots of the phenomenon must be traced back several decades earlier, above all to the reactions of the Athenian populace to American policy on the Cyprus Question.

In the Greek-language literature, the treatment of anti-Americanism remains strikingly limited. Aside from the works of Ioannis Stefanidis (*In the Name of the Nation: Political Culture, Irredentism and Anti-Americanism in Postwar Greece, 1945–1967*, Epikentro, Thessaloniki 2010) and Zinovia Laliouti (*Anti-Americanism in Greece, 1947–1989*, Asini, Athens 2016), scattered references may be identified in the writings of Evanthis Hatzivassiliou on postwar international relations (Hatzivassiliou, 2005; Hatzivassiliou, 2009), as well as in Sotia Triantafyllou's study of European literary hostility toward the United States (Triantafyllou, 2018). It is also noteworthy that, with only rare exceptions, Greek authors tend to downplay the role of EOKA's campaign as a catalyst of anti-American sentiment in the 1950s, concentrating instead on the strictly diplomatic dimensions of the period.

Moreover, the existing works offer virtually no sustained analysis of the ways in which, for Greek society, anti-Americanism intersected with anti-British sentiment. Indeed, in the case

of the latter, no monograph exists at all, and opposition to British policy is often subsumed wholesale under the broad and diffuse rubric of anti-imperialism (Taber, 1965).

4. Analysis

The liberation of Athens from German occupation forces in October 1944 generated an atmosphere of euphoria among the Greek people. In this context, thousands of citizens flooded the streets of the capital, expressing not only their enthusiasm at the departure of the occupiers but also their gratitude toward the advancing Allied armies. The photographic archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) even contains images of members of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) carrying Greek, Soviet, British, and American flags (ERT Archive, Petros Poulidis' Collection, 0000005102/1.1.48.51; ERT Archive, Petros Poulidis' Collection, 0000005101/1.1.48.50). What, then, transpired in the intervening years that led, by 1955, to British symbols being set aflame in the very center of Athens?

If British—and later American—support for the government during the December events (Dekemvriana) and the Civil War had estranged the Greek Left from the two major Western powers, this was not necessarily true of those situated within the Center or the Right. Moreover, although this latter segment of the population was undoubtedly disillusioned by the failure to secure Northern Epirus for Greece (Kontis, 1994), such frustration alone was insufficient to turn them against the very states whose intervention had proved decisive in ensuring their prior ascendancy within the country's political arena.

The principal cause of the subsequent transformation in public opinion must therefore be sought on the island that dominates the eastern Mediterranean—Cyprus. There, the Greek population remained under British administration but persistently aspired to union with Greece. As already noted, a kind of plebiscite was organized in 1950, which deeply unsettled London. Only a few months later, Archbishop Makarios III, a political and religious leader of markedly radical inclinations, ascended to the archiepiscopal throne. It was largely through his initiatives that EOKA was created, an armed irredentist organization placed under the leadership of retired Colonel Georgios Grivas (Novo, 2025).

EOKA commenced operations in dramatic fashion on 1 April 1955. In the early hours of that day, a series of bombings and commando raids shook the principal cities of Cyprus. Immediately thereafter, Grivas's first proclamation was issued, the British authorities announced their initial countermeasures, and the Greek press reacted with enthusiasm (Grivas, 1961).

Among the most prominent and historically significant Greek newspapers of the period was *Empros*, owned by the Kalapothakis family. Although its influence in the 1950s no longer matched that of earlier decades, its prestige remained unrivaled, and thousands of readers continued to trust its reporting. On 2 April, *Empros*, relaying dispatches from the BBC, referred to what it described as the “first patriotic uprisings” in Cyprus. For the time being, however, the newspaper restricted itself to enumerating the results of the attacks, refraining from further commentary beyond the implicit message contained in its front-page headline.

The newspaper's stance was revealed more explicitly on 9 April, when it published on its front page a pivotal article by the Cypriot lawyer Savvas Loizidis, under the evocative title “On 1 April Began the Liberation Movement of the Cypriots.” From the outset, the author departed from the prevailing rhetoric, which portrayed the events merely as isolated bombings, and instead insisted that what was unfolding on the island was a struggle of far-reaching significance.

Loizidis wrote, among other things:

On the night of 31 March to 1 April, the first bombs exploded in the principal cities of Cyprus—Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, and Famagusta—against British targets.

Thus nostalgia, the dream, the longing for freedom began to transform into action directed toward its conquest. Neither the Greek people nor world public opinion was surprised by this development. It constitutes the natural progression of liberation struggles everywhere and always. This martyred course has been followed by all Greek communities in reclaiming their freedom. It is inevitable that the Cypriots, too, will return to the embrace of the Greek family—not as fortunate recipients of a gift of freedom, but as true Hellenes who will achieve it through their own struggle and sacrifice. (Empros, 2 April 1955)

He went on to launch a scathing attack against the British, charging them with disregarding both Greece's contribution to the Allies' earlier victory and the Cypriot people's right to self-determination. On these grounds, he concluded: "It was therefore natural and inevitable that such cynical and brutal British intransigence should drive the Cypriot people to their present liberation struggle" (*Ibid.*).

Although more carefully crafted and stylistically coherent, Loizidis's article nevertheless reflected almost entirely the spirit of Grivas's first proclamation. The irredentist rhetoric imbued with historical references, the denunciation of Britain's rule over Cyprus as illegitimate under international law, and the emphasis on the Cypriots' right to armed resistance were among the common features of both texts. Extending his argument further, however, the Cypriot lawyer offered a remarkably perceptive analysis, predicting the mass popular character that the EOKA struggle would ultimately assume.

The adoption of these views by *Empros* demonstrates that Grivas had, to some degree, succeeded in his aims from the very outset of his organization's campaign. An indicative measure of the impact of the ideas expressed in this article may be found in the fact that Loizidis was elected to the Greek Parliament in 1956 as a candidate of the National Radical Union (ERE).

In a similar vein, the majority of newspapers published in Athens and the provinces aligned themselves with this position, thereby reinforcing the mobilization of Greek public opinion in favor of the demands advanced by EOKA. It is also noteworthy that the Greek population at large appeared to have already formed the conviction that an extensive armed movement was imminent in Cyprus. Indeed, *Kathimerini*, a widely read newspaper under the ownership and editorial direction of the dynamic Eleni Vlachou, hastened from the very outset (2 April 1955) to emphasize that "enslaved Cyprus finds itself in a phase of insurrection," since, according to its editorial staff, the disturbances had erupted across the entirety of the island and engaged a substantial segment of its population (*Kathimerini*, 2 April 1955).

Whereas *Empros* and *Kathimerini* at the time expressed views broadly representative of the political Right—although the former was not organically tied to this camp—the stance of *Eleftheria* proved particularly significant. This relatively new newspaper, founded during the period of Occupation (1944) by Panos Kokkas, positioned itself from its inception within the political Center, voicing predominantly moderate anti-monarchist perspectives. In light of these origins, it might appear somewhat paradoxical that *Eleftheria* initially adopted a radical position with respect to EOKA's earliest operations.

More specifically, in early April 1955, *Eleftheria* articulated criticism directed both at the British authorities and at the political Left. With respect to the former, its editorial stance was particularly uncompromising, frequently invoking the prior failures of colonial forces to suppress peoples seeking self-determination. For instance, on 3 April 1955, an article entitled *The Great Voice* concluded with the following assertion:

And the time shall come when the hard-faced rulers of London, who through their cynicism have shattered all illusions of the Greeks, shall realize that they cannot hold Cyprus by force, just as they were unable to retain India, Burma, or Egypt. They shall then be compelled to grant her freedom and, in time, will be ashamed of

the disgraceful and contemptible acts they now commit, whether in the diplomatic or sovereign domain. For the demand for national liberty is irresistible. (Eleftheria, 3 April 1955).

From this excerpt—and indeed from the broader body of articles published in the newspaper throughout 1955—several observations may be drawn concerning the general stance of the Greek Center toward EOKA's struggle. Firstly, the political groups affiliated with this milieu interpreted the attacks of 1 April as the inception of an anti-colonial struggle with broader implications. Secondly, much like their colleagues at *Empros*, the contributors to *Eleftheria* employed a rhetoric that recalled the sacrifices of the Greeks during the Second World War, simultaneously alluding to the ingratitude of the Allies, and in particular the British. Finally, they underscored the right of the Cypriot people to determine their own future free of coercion imposed by the Great Powers.

Although these grievances were directed primarily against Britain, they nevertheless influenced public sentiment with regard to the leading Western superpower, the United States. Yet intelligence agencies appeared reluctant to acknowledge seriously the development of anti-Americanism in Greece. Indicatively, in June 1955, CIA officials contributing to the drafting of a program on the economic dimension of the country's defense policy stressed that: "Greece and Turkey regard the United States as the principal source of support in building military strength and economic development, goals which they identify as of the highest importance" (CIA, CIA-RDP63-00084A000100040006-6, 6 June 1955). A few months later, in September 1955, a report by the same agency not only emphasized the uniformly anti-communist orientation of Greek public opinion but also asserted that it was preoccupied exclusively with domestic concerns (CIA, CIA-RDP80B06076R004200110031-2, 23 September 1955).

Meanwhile, the Greek government under Konstantinos Karamanlis expressed acute concerns that both the operations of EOKA and the intensification of anti-British sentiment endangered the Western orientation of the country. Particularly vocal was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and close associate of the Prime Minister, Evangelos Tositsas Averoff, who did not conceal his indignation toward Grivas. For him, only the government possessed the authority to manage national issues such as the Cyprus Question, and no other actor should be allowed to impose constraints. More broadly, Athens found it difficult to conceal its dissatisfaction with the growing internationalization of the Cyprus issue, treating with suspicion any discourse that risked undermining its alliance commitments (Stefanidis, 2010).

The wave of anti-British and anti-American sentiment arguably reached its apex in the spring of 1956. Responsibility for this development lay primarily with the British government, which imprudently fell into EOKA's strategic trap: rather than decisively eliminating the Greek insurgents by leveraging its numerical superiority, it opted instead to implement a campaign of intimidation against the Greek Cypriot population. This course of action inevitably intensified the internationalization of the Cyprus Question, while simultaneously encouraging numerous volunteers to join Grivas's organization (Varnavas, 2004).

Within this context, one of the most controversial decisions undertaken by the British authorities was the imposition of the death penalty by hanging upon two EOKA members, Michalakis Karaolis and Andreas Demetriou. Almost immediately, a substantial segment of the Greek populace took to the streets, participating in massive demonstrations. These demonstrations, unsurprisingly, did not escape the attention of Washington. Commenting on developments in Greece, CIA officials noted in March 1956 the following:

Any further mass demonstration in Greece is likely to be directed against Turkey and the United States, as well as against Britain, particularly since communist agitators will probably attempt to give them a broader anti-Western character. The government's anger toward London and the necessity of maintaining [its]

popular support may perhaps impel it reluctantly to take measures to restrain the general public (CIA, CIA-RDP79T00975A002400460001-4, 11 March 1956).

The tension soon reached a climax. On 9 May 1956, one day prior to the scheduled execution of the two EOKA members, thousands of Athenians assembled in Omonia Square. Prominent among their banners and chants were slogans directed against the “indifferent”—as they termed them—United States, and, of course, against Britain. From this central location in the capital, demonstrators attempted to march toward the British Embassy in Kolonaki but were blocked by police forces. Some, however, reached the vicinity of the American intelligence offices, where they inflicted extensive damage. In response, police opened fire on the crowd, resulting in the deaths of three individuals (*Eleftheria*, 10 May 1956).

On the following day, 10 May 1956, all of Greece mourned the loss not only of Karaolis and Demetriou but also of the three demonstrators and a policeman. This situation, as might be expected, further inflamed public opinion, with many accusing the Karamanlis government of passivity toward London. As anti-British and anti-American sentiment intensified, Averoff conceded in October 1957, from the parliamentary rostrum, that the conduct of foreign policy ought to be harmonized with the prevailing domestic climate within the country (Stefanidis, 2010).

Yet despite attempts at conciliation, both the conduct of the police during the demonstration of 9 May 1956 and, more broadly, the Karamanlis government’s handling of the Cypriot struggle continued to attract criticism. Characteristically, commenting on Anglo-American differences of opinion regarding the Oman Question, Thanasis Papakonstantinou wrote caustically in *Eleftheria*:

The dramatic events in Oman are weighty and most revealing. For, first, they demonstrate once more that the methods of the English colonialists inevitably lead to international crises and bloody confrontations. And second, they reveal that the United States, so sensitive to the susceptibilities of its ‘ally England’ when it comes to the Cyprus Question and to a servile Greece, forgets its delicacy when its own interests are at stake, and does not hesitate to enter into open conflict with its sinful ally for the sake of oil (*Eleftheria*, 24 July 1957).

Beyond its critique of the Greek government, such commentary captured, albeit indirectly, the view held by a large portion of the Greek population regarding the posture of the two great Western powers. In relation to Britain, the prevailing image among Greeks was that of a ruthless colonial power. Conversely, the United States was charged with exhibiting a biased alignment in favor of London and with displaying a complete unwillingness to uphold the principles of international law. This latter view was embraced even by much of the press sympathetic to the political Right, most notably by *Kathimerini* (Laliouti, 2016).

The Zurich–London Agreement (February 1959), a triumph of pragmatism and of the desire of the parties involved to reach a compromise, ultimately brought EOKA’s campaign to an end. It did not, however, signify the simultaneous cessation of anti-British and anti-American sentiment. The intensity of this feeling was vividly encapsulated in a brief exchange between Grivas and the British editor of the Cypriot newspaper *Times of Cyprus*, shortly before the EOKA leader’s departure from the island. Seizing the opportunity, Digenis did not fail to reproach the British once more, asserting that during the Second World War they “did not fight (...) for the freedom of peoples, but in order to hold them in bondage and oppress them” (Grivas, 1961).

5. Conclusions

The emergence of an anti-British and anti-American current in Greece during the period 1955–1959 demonstrated, above all, that the Western bloc was not entirely monolithic. It

was, after all, unprecedented for Greek insurgents—such as those of EOKA—to engage in direct action against states that had traditionally been regarded as Greece’s allies. This development appeared all the more paradoxical given that Athens had openly aligned itself with the anti-Soviet camp, had been materially supported by the United States during the Civil War, and owed its liberation in 1944 to the advance of the Allied forces. The Cyprus Question thus placed severe strains upon Greek society, turning it against both London and Washington.

What, however, were the deeper causes of this anti-British and anti-American sentiment? The answer is to be sought primarily in the press clippings of the period, as well as in the slogans voiced by demonstrators. According to these sources, both major Western powers pursued a unilateral and inflexible policy, one that disregarded the right of peoples to self-determination as well as the very international norms that these same powers had once proclaimed. Such a stance precipitated the radicalization of many Greeks, who in numerous instances expressed their opposition through violent means.

Finally, it is worth underscoring that negative attitudes toward the United States and Britain were in large measure a phenomenon “from below.” That is, the Greek government itself sought desperately to reach a compromise on the Cyprus Question while simultaneously striving for closer alignment with Washington. Consequently, Athens’ diplomatic relations with the two leading Western powers remained largely intact. This reality, however, inevitably diminished the popularity of Karamanlis and his associates on the domestic front.

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Atlantis, Racism, and Nazism: A Parable Turned Pseudo-Science

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Abstract

This essay examines the allegory posed by Plato, the story of Atlantis. The story of Atlantis is a cautionary tale warning against government hubris and the dangers of moral decay. Warning became history in the 19th century when figures such as Donnelly proposed the idea of Atlantis being real. Atlantis was distorted further in the 1930s and 40s by Heinrich Himmler in his quest to justify Nazism and the Holocaust. Here I explore the shift from allegory into science and finally into a twisted excuse for the eradication of an entire race of people. I gathered research on the initial myth posed by Plato, then the shift in the narrative during the science heavy 19th century. To bolster my research, I looked into historical figures such as Donnelly, Himmler, and Hitler to get a full picture. I include research from historical texts such as, *Timaeus* and *Critias*, and Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*. Secondary sources include scholarly analysis of the 19th century and Nazi ideology. Such works include those by Kurlander and Goodrick-Clarke. This essay is a synthesis of the above sources and more with the goal of understanding and examining the evolution of the story of Atlantis and its use.

Keywords: Atlantis, Nazi, Plato, Holocaust, pseudoscience.

1. Introduction

Atlantis was a legendary, advanced island kingdom described by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato as a utopian society that ultimately sank into the ocean. While Plato presented it as a historical account, most scholars view Atlantis as a philosophical allegory, myth, or satire, not a factual place. In the nineteenth century, Atlantis was viewed as a pseudo-science and was used to undermine ancient people of color (Blackmore, 2023). During the 1930s-40s, it was used as a pseudo-science to justify the persecution and attempted extermination of the Jewish people (Goodrick-Clarke, 2019). This is how the parable of Atlantis was so violently turned on its head and used for evil, which is exactly what Plato warned against in his original dialogues.

Plato first presents Atlantis in his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* to discuss advanced topics such as ideal societies, morality, and the dangers of hubris in a captivating and entertaining way. In these dialogues, he contrasts Atlantis's materialist, corrupt, and hubristic nature with Plato's contemporary depiction of Athens and its virtuous and just upholding of divine law. Plato accomplishes this by having the people of Atlantis lust after power and materialistic wealth, which causes them to lose favor with the gods. Jowett translates Plato's unfinished *Critias* to say, "When the divine aspect of the Atlanteans diminished and was overtaken by human nature, they began to act improperly. Those who could perceive true happiness saw them as debased, while others

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viewed them as glorious even as they were consumed by avarice and unjust power.” On the other hand, the people of Athens uphold the teachings of their gods, eventually allowing them to overcome the seemingly superior Atlantean invasion with divine intervention. This is a satire used to urge the people of Athens to stay on the right path of virtue and to warn them of the dangers of materialistic lust and hubris. Furthermore, in his aforementioned dialogues *Timaeus and Critias*, he describes Atlantis as an advanced city “past the Gates of Heracles” (the Strait of Gibraltar), meaning off the coast of Portugal (Plato, 4th century BCE). He also describes its grandeur as “an island larger than Asia Minor and Libya combined.” These facts emphasize Atlantis’ evident power and how central it was, making Athens’s overcoming of the threat seem more improbable and shows ancient Greeks how virtue is important.

During the nineteenth century, Atlantis became more of a pseudo-science accepted as a true fact. Many “scientists” and scholars believed that Atlanteans were precursors to humans, holding all knowledge. There was one main theory held by these amateurs: Atlanteans fled the sinking continent and settled in a multitude of different ancient civilizations. This explains the ingenuity of these ancient peoples, as they found it impossible to believe they could have achieved it themselves (Donnelly, 1882). One such amateur scientist was Ignatius Loyola Donnelly, a United States congressional representative and writer, now widely known for being a pseudo-scientist (The Nation, 2024). He believed in the aforementioned theory as well as its sinking due to shifting waters, a theory that ignores modern geological understanding, highlighting his lack of knowledge and the ignorance of the time. Many people who believed that ancient people of color were unsophisticated and primitive used Atlantis to explain away the feats of these cultures, specifically the architectural accomplishments (Donnelly, 1882). This shows the evolution of the mythical continent of Atlantis from a cautionary parable to a justification for prejudices against ancient minorities who didn’t fit Europe’s widespread idea of sophistication and skill in the nineteenth century.

One significant justification of prejudices against a minority comes from a man named Heinrich Himmler. Himmler used the idea of an ancient Atlantean race to help fuel his and many others’ hatred and prejudice against the Jewish people of the 1930s. Himmler is the man widely accepted as the architect of the Holocaust, who used outlandish claims to justify his persecution, forced sterilization, and extermination of the “lesser” Himmler was second only to Adolf Hitler and was the leader of the SS and Gestapo in Nazi Germany. Himmler was obsessed with the people of Atlantis and used Nazi resources to find traces of them, namely in Tibet (BBC 2021). He used this idea of the Atlanteans moving to create what is commonly referred to as the Aryan Race, a superior race of people categorized as tall, athletic, fair-skinned, blonde with blue eyes, and possessing elongated skulls (Seidel, 2018). Hitler details the racial hierarchy in his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, this book shows what his goals for Nazi Germany were along with many of his own beliefs. Hitler goes on to say the Nordics perfectly fit his idea of an ideal person, furthering the pedestal he sat his people on. He even goes as far to say Jews are the parasites of society (Hitler, 1925). This description of the ideal Aryan is the opposite of how Jewish and Romanian people stereo-typically looked and were viewed at the time. Himmler used this idea of the master race to justify his rationalization of white supremacy, and antisemitism as well as the persecution of Jewish people. The concept of the *herrenvolk* stems from the nineteenth-century pseudo-science of Atlantis. Himmler claimed that prior to the flood and destruction of Atlantis, the Atlanteans fled to Tibet (BBC, 2021). Himmler believed he would find the origins of his master race in the remote largely untouched Himalayas. He and many other Nazi leaders believed if you measured someone’s head size you could determine what race they were. In short, relevant racist beliefs of the time lead to Himmler’s, and Hitler’s belief that they needed to enact the final solution and commit mass genocide against who they believed were less than.

This previously mentioned “scientific expedition” to Tibet along with Alfred Rosenberg’s book *The Myth of The Twentieth Century* were all key factors in bolstering the

credibility of the mythical Atlantean, Aryan, or Nordic people (they're all synonyms and commonly used interchangeably). Rosenberg was a Nazi theorist who was accused and was put to death for war crimes he committed, at the Nuremberg Trials. He also held many important positions in the Nazi government and wrote a book entitled, *The Myth of The Twentieth Century*. In this book Rosenberg details "the myth of the blood" which in summary is saying the "Aryan" race is the precursor to all culture. Rosenberg also claims that all of history is the battle between the superior Aryan race and lesser races. In summary he is saying that the ancestors of Nazi Germany were in a constant battle with other minor races, and the case of the Holocaust would be no different in his eyes. This branches into his idea of "alien blood" and how the Aryan or Atlantean blood was being tainted along with German culture by Jews. He and other Nazi theorists used pseudo-scientific, vague concepts of race to demonize Jews and other groups they deemed undesirable. Using this twisted pseudoscience induced view on race he believed that the blood of the Germans were being tainted, and the only way to "clean" Germany was by enacting the final solution and restore their racial integrity by removing the Jewish population from Europe (Rosenberg, 1930). He founded the Institute for the Investigation of the Jewish Question and declared in 1939 that the "Jewish question" would only be solved when all Jews had left Germany. Rosenberg's book being deemed as credible and used as propaganda pushed out by the Third Reich validated many prior antisemitic and white supremacist beliefs. This book was a best seller within the Third Reich along with Hitler's previously mentioned manifesto, *Mein Kampf*.

In short, the parable of Atlantis was first posed by Plato to warn against the dangers that come with lusting after power and material possessions, emphasizing how virtue is the only thing that can combat this hubris. Had people like Himmler and Hitler listened to Plato and not to pseudo-scientists of the 19th century, they would have been forewarned of the danger of their actions before it happened. Plato's parable and the events that occurred during the World Wars (one and two) are almost one and the same. An advanced group of people, the Germans and Atlanteans, fall victim to their own hubris, causing them to fall from grace and be halted by morally upright, "less" powerful people, the Allies and the people of Athens, who receive help from a powerful group that changes the tide of conflict: the American people and the gods. Moreover, the pseudo-science of Atlantis in the nineteenth century has influenced history by overshadowing logical findings of the time and by providing other explanations to justify the genius of ancient peoples. It has legitimized acts of violence through racism in events such as the Holocaust and persecution of other "inferior" groups. This is important to learn about, especially in the current political climate of our world that grows more tense every day. Coupling this with the media we consume, the ideology of people around the world can easily be swayed. If the people in power could see that they could easily fall into the cyclical pattern of what happened in the parable of Atlantis and the World Wars, they will hopefully think twice about what they decide to do, because it will affect the world.

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Zoomorphic and Avian Imagery in Early Medieval Temple Architecture: A Study of the Harihar Temple at Osian

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Abstract

The Harihar (Vishnu) Temple at Osian, Rajasthan, represents an important example of early medieval Indian temple architecture, distinguished by its rich sculptural program and symbolic complexity. This study examines the role of animal and avian imagery within the architectural framework of the temple, focusing on six representative sculptural motifs documented through detailed analytical sketches. These include a stylized mythical avian figure with a spiral motif, confronted water birds (Hamsa motif), a composite mythical beast emerging from ornamental scrollwork, an animal mask integrated into an architectural corner bracket, a lion-like creature in a dynamic crouching posture, and a simplified quadruped motif forming part of a decorative frieze. The analysis reveals that animal and bird sculptures at the Harihar Temple were deliberately designed to serve multiple functions beyond ornamentation. They acted as symbolic guardians, conveyors of cosmological concepts, and visual elements contributing to architectural rhythm and spatial hierarchy. Symmetrical motifs like the confronted Hamsas emphasize balance, harmony, and spiritual purity, particularly at transitional or sacred architectural zones. The study also highlights the coexistence of elaborate and simplified zoomorphic forms, demonstrating an intentional balance between narrative emphasis and repetitive decorative efficiency. Through sketch-based documentation and iconographic interpretation, this research underscores the sophistication of early medieval sculptors in integrating symbolism, structure, and aesthetics. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the symbolic language embedded in Gurjara-Pratihara temple architecture and reinforce Osian's significance as a major center of artistic and religious expression in early medieval India.

Keywords: Harihar (Vishnu) Temple, Osian, Rajasthan, animal and avian sculpture, sacred animal motifs.

1. Introduction

The Sachiya Mata Temple at Osian, located in the Jodhpur district of Rajasthan, represents one of the most significant religious and architectural landmarks of early medieval India. Situated on the eastern fringe of the Thar Desert, Osian functioned historically as a flourishing urban and religious center, often described as an “oasis” amidst the arid landscape. The temple complex stands as a compelling testimony to the cultural synthesis, religious pluralism, and architectural excellence that characterized the region between the 8th and 12th

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centuries CE. Constructed initially in the 8th century under the patronage of Maharaja Utpal (Upal) Dev of the Parmar dynasty and subsequently expanded during the 12th century, the Sachiya Mata Temple exemplifies the Gurjara-Pratihara architectural tradition. Built primarily of sandstone, the temple features intricately carved arches, elaborately ornamented pillars, sculptural panels depicting Hindu deities, and a prominent central shikhara. The temple complex also includes subsidiary shrines such as the Chandi Ka Mandir and the Amba Mata Mandir, reflecting continued religious patronage and architectural development over several centuries. What distinguishes the Sachiya Mata Temple from many contemporary monuments is its unique religious history, marked by the convergence of Hindu and Jain traditions. Originally associated with the worship of Chamunda, a fierce goddess who accepted animal sacrifices, the site underwent a profound transformation following the influence of Jain Acharya Ratnaprabhasuri (also known as Vijay Ratna Prabhasurji). Jain narratives describe how the goddess adopted non-violent forms of worship and emerged as Sachiya Mata, a vegetarian protector deity aligned with Jain ethical principles. This transformation played a crucial role in the emergence of the Oswal Jain community and highlights the dynamic negotiation of religious identities in early medieval Rajasthan. Beyond its religious importance, the temple provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural, political, and artistic milieu of the period. The sculptural program of the temple—featuring images of Vishnu, Lakshmi, Varaha, Durga, and other deities—illustrates theological inclusivity and artistic sophistication. As a living monument, the Sachiya Mata Temple continues to attract pilgrims, scholars, and tourists, reinforcing its enduring relevance in Rajasthan's spiritual and cultural landscape.

1.1 Historical background

During the 8th century CE, Osian formed an important part of the Gurjara-Pratihara Empire, one of the dominant political powers of northern India. The Pratiharas were notable patrons of temple architecture, and Osian flourished under their rule as a religious and commercial hub. The temples erected during this period exhibit exceptional craftsmanship and stylistic maturity, reflecting the high standards of early medieval architectural practice. The artistic idiom developed at Osian later influenced temple construction across Rajasthan and adjoining regions. Following the decline of Pratihara authority, Osian came under the control of the Chauhan dynasty. By the late 12th century, particularly during the reign of Chauhan king Kumar Singh, Osian had expanded into a sprawling and prosperous city. Literary sources and archaeological evidence suggest that the town supported a vibrant population, including a strong presence of Oswal Jains, merchants, artisans, and temple functionaries. At its zenith, Osian reportedly housed more than a hundred temples, underscoring its importance as a sacred landscape. This prosperity was abruptly disrupted in 1195 CE when Turkish forces passed through the region. According to the *Upkeshgachchaprabandh*, the city suffered extensive destruction during these invasions. Temples were damaged, and the population—particularly the Oswal Jain community—was forced to migrate to safer regions. Although Osian never regained its former urban stature, its temples survived as enduring witnesses to its past glory.

1.2 Architectural and sculptural importance of Harihar (Vishnu Temple)

The architectural heritage of Osian is best understood through a detailed examination of its major temple complexes, particularly the group of Harihar temples, which collectively illustrate the religious pluralism and sculptural sophistication of the period.

Harihar Temple No. 1: Located outside the present village, Harihar Temple No. 1 is a remarkable example of early medieval temple design. Although the sanctum is now empty, the lintel prominently features Vishnu mounted on Garuda, symbolizing divine protection. Below

Vishnu are sculpted representations of the Navagrahas, indicating the cosmological concerns embedded within temple iconography. The door jambs are richly decorated with floral motifs, serpent couples (Naga-dampati), and the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna with their attendants—elements traditionally associated with purification and auspicious entry. One of the most striking sculptural details is the depiction of a woman wringing water from her wet hair, a motif that reflects both artistic realism and aesthetic sensitivity. The exterior walls of the temple present a vibrant pantheon: Yama riding his buffalo, Ganesha as the remover of obstacles, Trivikrama with his raised left leg, Surya seated with a crescent moon behind his head, and Agni riding a ram.

The rear wall features Indra mounted on his elephant Airavata, alongside the composite deity Harihara, symbolizing the unity of Vishnu and Shiva. Flanking Harihara are Trishulpurush and Nandi on one side, and Garuda on the other, reinforcing sectarian harmony. Additional sculptures include standing Surya, seated Shiva on Nandi, Kuvera as the god of wealth, and a four-armed Mahishasuramardini. The latter, closely resembling Mathura examples though lacking a beard, emphasizes regional stylistic variations. Two damaged Dikpalas further underscore the temple's comprehensive cosmological program. The middle niche displays Narasimha, Vishnu's ferocious incarnation, while a multi-faced Brahma appears nearby. The upper register narrates episodes from Krishna's life, including his birth, Putana Vadh, Kalia Daman, Govardhanadhari Krishna, and the slaying of various demons, demonstrating the narrative richness of Osian's sculptural tradition.



Figure 1. Harihar Temple

Mini-Temples Surrounding Harihar Temple No. 1: Four subsidiary shrines encircle the main temple (Figure 1), reinforcing its Panchayatana layout. Although one shrine is now destroyed, it once housed sculptures of Kankali Mahishasuramardini and Shringar-Durga. The twelve-armed Shringar-Durga, seated on a lion and engaged in self-adornment, is particularly noteworthy, with parallels found at Abhaneri and Roda, dating to the 8th century. Another shrine

contains standing Surya and a refined depiction of Revanta, Surya's son, shown on horseback. The shrine to the right and rear displays Vishnu and Garuda-seated Vishnu. In front of the main temple, dancing Ganesha and seated Kuvera symbolize joy and prosperity, while a meditating Buddha statue to the left reflects Osian's remarkable religious inclusivity.

Harihar Temples No. 2 and No. 3: Harihar Temple No. 2 continues the sculptural narrative with panels depicting scenes from Krishna's life, alongside Ashta-Dikpalas, Ganesha, Trivikrama, Vishnu, Harihara, Surya, Shiva, Mahishasuramardini, Narasimha, and Brahma. Notably, this temple features a depiction of *Kalyan Sundar*, the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, comparable to similar representations at Kaman, Kannauj, and Ellora. Harihar Temple No. 3 follows a similar iconographic program, reiterating themes of Vaishnava devotion, Shaiva symbolism, and mythological storytelling. The repetition across temples suggests a coherent artistic vision and a well-established workshop tradition in Osian.

Temples No. 4 and No. 5: Temples No. 4 and No. 5 maintain the stylistic continuity seen in earlier structures. Temple No. 4 is distinguished by a standing Vishnu sculpture crowning the structure, while Temple No. 5, located near the *bawadi* (stepwell), features Dikpalas, Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, and Mahishasuramardini. Their proximity to water structures further highlights the integration of sacred architecture with urban planning. Osian's temples collectively represent a pinnacle of early medieval Indian art, architecture, and religious synthesis. Despite the city's destruction in the late 12th century, its sculptural wealth continues to offer invaluable insights into the political, cultural, and spiritual life of the period. Like Khajuraho, Osian stands as a monumental archive in stone—yet with an even earlier lineage—affirming its significance as one of India's most important ancient temple towns.

1.3 Review of literature

The Sachiya Mata Temple and the Osian temple complex has been sustained due to its architectural merit and religious significance. Early archaeological surveys by Cunningham (1871) and later systematic documentation by the Archaeological Survey of India highlighted Osian as an important temple town of western India, noting the presence of over a hundred temples during its peak period. These studies emphasized Osian's strategic and commercial importance along ancient trade routes connecting Marwar with Gujarat and Central Asia. Art historians such as Percy Brown (1959) and Stella Kramrisch (1976) examined the temple within the broader framework of early medieval Indian temple architecture, identifying the Sachiya Mata Temple as a refined example of the Gurjara-Pratihara style. Their analyses focused on structural elements such as the use of sandstone, corbelled domes, sculpted toranas (arches), and iconographic programs that blend Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Shakta themes. Jain historical traditions and inscriptions have been extensively discussed by scholars like Jain (1990) and Cort (2001), who explored the role of Acharya Ratnaprabhasuri in transforming local religious practices. These works underline the significance of non-violence (ahimsa) in reshaping ritual traditions at Osian, particularly the abolition of animal sacrifice and the redefinition of Chamunda as Sachiya Mata. Such narratives are crucial for understanding the interaction between Jain monastic movements and local cults during the early medieval period. Regional historians including Sharma (2002) and Tod (revised editions) provided contextual insights into the Parmar dynasty's patronage of religious institutions. They highlighted Maharaja Upal Dev's role in temple construction and religious reforms, situating the Sachiya Mata Temple within the political history of Marwar. Ethnographic studies further note the continuing reverence of Sachiya Mata as the kuldevi of the Parmar and Oswal communities across Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. More recent studies have adopted an interdisciplinary approach, integrating archaeology, art history, and religious studies to interpret the temple as a site of cultural convergence rather than

sectarian dominance. These works emphasize that the Sachiya Mata Temple is not merely an architectural monument but a living symbol of Rajasthan's pluralistic spiritual heritage.

2. Material and methods

The present study was carried out on 21 December 2025 with the objective of analyzing the use of avian and zoomorphic imagery in early medieval temple architecture, with special reference to the Harihar (Vishnu) Temple located near the Sachiya Mata Temple, Osian, Jodhpur district, Rajasthan. (Latitude: 26° 25' 48" N, Longitude: 72° 32' 60" E). The study adopted a qualitative, descriptive, and iconographic research approach commonly used in art-historical and archaeological investigations. Primary data were collected through on-site visual documentation of sculptural elements depicting animals and birds integrated into the temple architecture. Care was taken to ensure that no physical disturbance, alteration, or damage was caused to the temple structure or its sculptures during documentation. High-resolution photographs of relevant sculptural panels, friezes, brackets, and reliefs were captured under natural lighting conditions to record form, placement, surface texture, and weathering patterns. Subsequently, detailed analytical sketches were prepared based on the collected images. These sketches were used as primary analytical tools to examine stylistic features, symbolic motifs, compositional balance, and degrees of abstraction in the avian and animal forms. Comparative analysis was conducted by correlating the observed motifs with established iconographic traditions of early medieval Indian temple art. Secondary sources, including published literature on Gurjara-Pratihara architecture and zoomorphic symbolism, were consulted to support interpretation and contextual understanding.

3. Result

The temple complex of Osian, Rajasthan, represents one of the most significant centers of early medieval Indian temple architecture, renowned for its rich sculptural vocabulary and stylistic maturity. Among its many monuments, the Harihar (Vishnu) Temple stands out for its extensive use of animal and bird motifs integrated into architectural elements such as friezes, brackets, lintels, and corner projections. These zoomorphic and avian sculptures are not merely decorative embellishments but form an essential part of the symbolic and functional language of the temple. In early Indian temple architecture, animals and birds served multiple roles—as guardians, cosmic symbols, narrative devices, and ornamental rhythm-makers. Their representations often embodied philosophical ideas such as protection, balance, movement, and the interconnectedness of nature and divinity. At Osian, these motifs reflect a synthesis of Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta, and regional folk traditions, characteristic of the Gurjara-Pratihara artistic milieu between the 8th and 12th centuries CE.

This study examines six sculptural representations of animals and birds from the Harihar Temple, documented through high-quality analytical sketches (Sketches I–VI). These sketches allow for a detailed examination of form, symbolism, erosion patterns, and architectural placement. By focusing on stylized avian forms, confronted water birds (Hamsa motifs), composite mythical beasts, animal masks on architectural brackets, lion-like guardian figures, and simplified quadruped motifs, the paper aims to understand how faunal imagery functioned within the temple's visual and spiritual framework. The objective of this research is to analyze the iconographic significance, artistic treatment, and architectural role of animal and bird sculptures in the Harihar Temple and to highlight their contribution to the broader tradition of early medieval Indian temple art.

3.1 *Stylized mythical avian creature with spiral motif (Sketch–I)*

This high-quality sketch represents a stylized avian or semi-mythical creature carved in relief, characterized by a prominent curved beak, raised crest, and a distinctive spiral motif forming the body or tail. The sketch effectively captures the sculptural depth of the original stone carving through fine pencil shading, emphasizing erosion marks, surface granularity, and chiseling patterns. The avian head is shown in profile, with a hollowed eye cavity that suggests both symbolic abstraction and age-induced weathering. The spiral element is particularly significant, as it is a recurring motif in early Indian and Indo-Islamic architectural ornamentation, often symbolizing continuity, cosmic movement and life force. In this depiction, the spiral appears to merge organically with the creature's body, blurring the boundary between animal form and ornamental geometry. This fusion indicates that the carving was not intended as a naturalistic representation but as a symbolic or guardian figure integrated into architectural design (Figure 2).

The sketch artist has skillfully rendered the layered stone courses surrounding the animal, reinforcing the architectural context of the relief. The horizontal banding suggests that the carving formed part of a frieze or cornice, possibly adorning a temple, stepwell, or fort structure. The soft tonal gradation in the sketch conveys the sandstone's porous texture, while darker strokes accentuate recesses and shadowed contours. From an iconographic perspective, such avian forms may represent protective spirits, mythological birds like the *Garuda* in stylized form, or regional folk-symbolic creatures. The absence of explicit wings reinforces its ornamental rather than narrative role. The carving's placement within a repetitive architectural sequence suggests it contributed to rhythmic visual continuity rather than serving as a standalone icon. This sketch stands as an excellent documentation of a symbolic architectural animal motif, capturing both artistic intent and material decay. It offers valuable insight into traditional stone craftsmanship, where symbolic abstraction, structural integration, and aesthetic harmony converge.



Figure 2. (Sketch–I & Original Creature)

3.2 *Confronted pair of water birds (Hamsa motif) – Sketch II*

This sketch depicts a symmetrical composition of two confronted water birds, likely *Hamsas* (sacred swans), whose elongated necks curve inward to form a heart-like or floral central motif. The high-quality rendering carefully emphasizes bilateral symmetry, a hallmark of classical Indian architectural ornamentation. The birds' bodies are softly contoured, with subtle textural variations suggesting feather patterns and stone erosion. The *Hamsa* holds deep symbolic significance in Indian philosophy, representing purity, wisdom, and spiritual discernment. Its ability to separate milk from water metaphorically associates it with knowledge and enlightenment. In architectural contexts, paired *Hamsas* often symbolize harmony, balance, and cosmic duality. The sketch effectively preserves this symbolic essence through its precise

structural alignment and mirrored forms. The artist has used controlled shading to differentiate raised surfaces from recessed backgrounds, lending the drawing a sculptural realism.

The birds' beaks and necks converge toward a central vertical axis, which may represent a stylized lotus stem or sacred axis (*axis mundi*), reinforcing the spiritual connotations of the motif. Weathering details—such as chipped edges and softened contours—are delicately indicated, highlighting the antiquity of the carving. The surrounding stone layers are sketched with minimal distraction, allowing the viewer's focus to remain on the symbolic interaction between the two birds (Figure 3).

Architecturally, such motifs were commonly placed on lintels, friezes, or temple walls, where they functioned as auspicious symbols guarding sacred spaces. The sketch succeeds in translating the original relief into a refined monochrome study, suitable for academic analysis and heritage conservation records. This artwork stands as a visual testament to the integration of spirituality, symmetry, and craftsmanship in historic stone architecture.



Figure 3. (Sketch–II & Original Creature)

3.3 Composite mythical beast emerging from ornamental scrollwork – Sketch III

This sketch illustrates a composite mythical animal emerging from dense ornamental scrollwork, blending zoomorphic and vegetal elements into a single cohesive form. The creature's head appears lion-like, with a powerful jaw and rounded eye cavity, while the surrounding scrolls resemble stylized foliage or waves, suggesting motion and vitality. The artistic rendering excels in capturing the interplay between solid mass and decorative fluidity. Pencil strokes vary in intensity to articulate depth, giving prominence to the animal's head while allowing the ornamental background to recede. This compositional hierarchy reflects the original sculptor's intent to balance narrative symbolism with decorative continuity.

Such hybrid forms are common in medieval Indian architecture, especially in temple friezes and palace ornamentation. They often function as protective figures (*vyalas* or *yalis*), believed to ward off negative forces. The sketch preserves this protective aura by emphasizing the creature's assertive posture and forward orientation. The eroded stone texture is meticulously conveyed through uneven shading and broken outlines, underscoring the carving's age and exposure to environmental elements (Figure 4). This realism enhances the sketch's documentary value, making it suitable for archaeological reference. The integration of animal and scrollwork also reflects a philosophical worldview where nature, mythology, and architecture are inseparable. The sketch captures this synthesis elegantly, offering insight into the symbolic language of historic stone artisans.

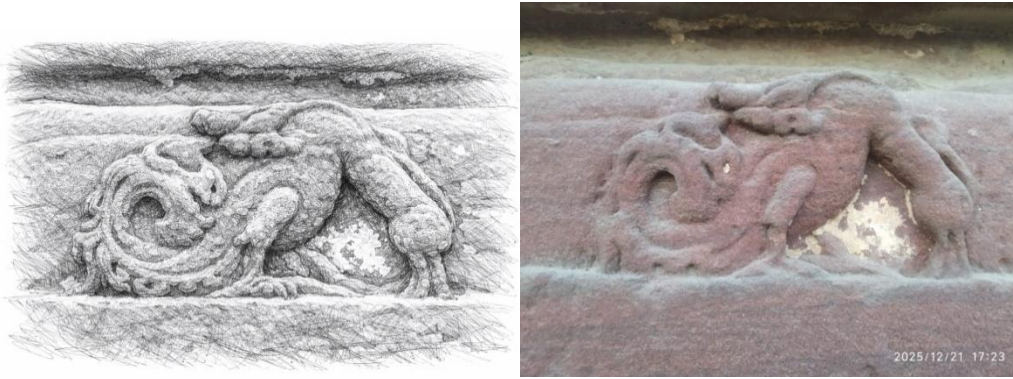


Figure 4. (Sketch–III & Original Creature)

3.4 Architectural corner bracket with animal mask and scroll motifs – Sketch IV

This sketch documents a complex architectural corner element featuring an animal mask integrated with swirling decorative motifs. The carving appears to serve both structural and ornamental purposes, likely functioning as a bracket or capital. The animal face—possibly leonine or mythical—emerges from layered scrollwork, creating a dramatic visual focal point. The sketch's perspective effectively conveys the three-dimensionality of the corner placement. Shading is strategically applied to emphasize depth, recesses, and overhangs, allowing the viewer to understand the carving's spatial relationship within the structure (Figure 5).

Animal masks in architecture often symbolize guardianship and authority. Their placement at corners or junctions reinforces structural symbolism, marking transitions between spaces. The sketch preserves this intent by highlighting the mask's forward projection and expressive contours. Surface erosion, chipped stone, and softened edges are carefully rendered, lending authenticity and historical context. The drawing serves not only as an artistic interpretation but also as a precise architectural record.



Figure 5. (Sketch–IV & Original Creature)

3.5 *Lion-like mythical creature in dynamic crouching posture – Sketch V*

This sketch portrays a powerful lion-like creature in a dynamic crouching position, with a spiraled mane and muscular limbs. The posture suggests readiness and controlled aggression, typical of guardian figures in temple architecture. The artist has skillfully rendered anatomical strength while maintaining ornamental stylization. The spiral mane connects the animal to cosmic symbolism, while the crouched stance implies vigilance. Shading techniques emphasize musculature and depth, creating a convincing sense of volume despite the monochrome medium (Figure 6). Such figures often served apotropaic functions, guarding sacred or royal spaces. The sketch successfully conveys this protective symbolism while documenting the carving's artistic sophistication.

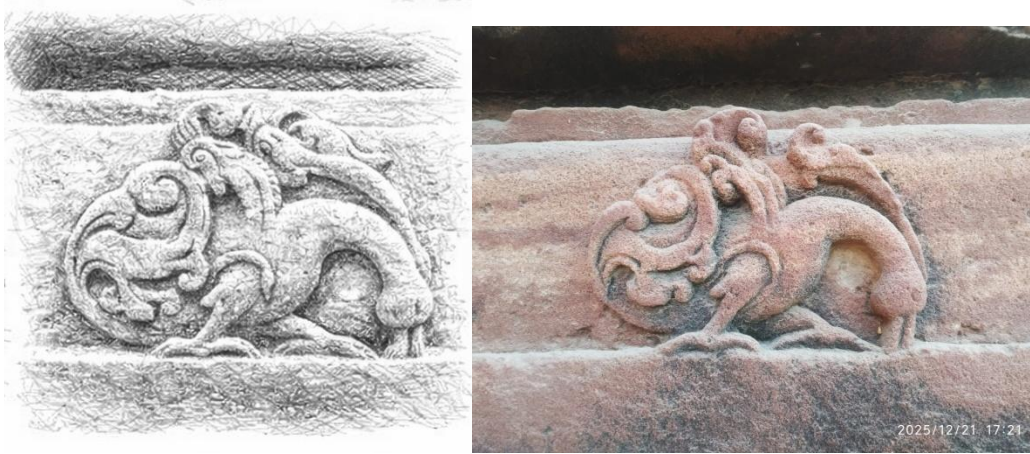


Figure 6. (Sketch–V & Original Creature)

3.6 *Simplified quadruped motif in architectural frieze – Sketch VI*

The final sketch depicts a simplified quadruped animal rendered in a minimalistic style. Unlike more elaborate figures, this carving emphasizes form over detail, suggesting it was part of a repetitive frieze sequence. The sketch highlights this simplicity through clean outlines and restrained shading (Figure 7). Despite its simplicity, the animal conveys motion and balance. Its integration into horizontal stone bands underscores its decorative role within architectural rhythm. The sketch effectively captures the understated elegance of utilitarian ornamentation. This drawing is particularly valuable for understanding how repetition, symbolism, and efficiency coexisted in traditional stone architecture.



Figure 7. (Sketch–VI & Original Creature)

4. Results and discussion

The analysis of the six sculptural sketches from the Harihar (Vishnu) Temple demonstrates a highly refined and purposeful use of animal and avian imagery that integrates symbolic meaning with architectural design. These motifs are not merely decorative but function as visual expressions of cosmology, protection, and aesthetic order within early medieval temple architecture. The stylized mythical avian figure with a spiral body (Sketch I) reflects abstract symbolism rather than naturalistic depiction, using geometric forms to convey ideas of cosmic movement, continuity, and eternal life. The confronted pair of water birds or Hamsa motif (Sketch II) emphasizes symmetry, harmony, and spiritual balance, reinforcing the sanctity of temple spaces through its association with purity and cosmic order. The composite mythical beast emerging from ornamental scrollwork (Sketch III) illustrates the seamless fusion of animal and vegetal elements, symbolizing protection and the interconnectedness of nature and mythology. Similarly, the animal mask on the architectural corner bracket (Sketch IV) highlights the dual structural and symbolic role of zoomorphic imagery, marking spatial transitions and asserting guardianship. The lion-like crouching creature (Sketch V) conveys vigilance and strength, reinforcing its apotropaic function, while the simplified quadruped motif (Sketch VI) demonstrates how repetition and restraint contribute to architectural rhythm and visual harmony. Collectively, these sculptures reveal the sophistication of symbolic planning in the Harihar Temple's artistic program. Collectively, these results indicate that animal and bird sculptures at the Harihar Temple were carefully planned components of a symbolic architectural system rather than isolated artistic expressions.

5. Conclusion

The animal and bird sculptures of the Harihar (Vishnu) Temple at Osian represent a vital dimension of early medieval Indian temple art. Through a combination of realism, abstraction, and symbolic stylization, these faunal motifs fulfilled multiple roles—as guardians, cosmic symbols, and ornamental devices enhancing architectural rhythm. The six analyzed sketches demonstrate a remarkable consistency in artistic intent, reflecting the Gurjara-Pratihara emphasis on harmony between structure, symbolism, and aesthetics. The integration of avian, aquatic, terrestrial, and mythical creatures reveals a worldview in which nature and divinity were deeply interconnected. The presence of both elaborate and simplified animal forms suggests a hierarchical approach to decoration, balancing narrative emphasis with repetitive ornamentation. Moreover, the careful rendering of erosion and weathering in the sketches underscores their value as documentary tools for heritage conservation and archaeological study.

In conclusion, the animal and bird sculptures of the Harihar Temple are not peripheral decorations but essential conveyors of meaning, embodying protection, continuity, and spiritual order. Their study enhances our understanding of Osian's artistic legacy and contributes to broader discussions on symbolism and architectural integration in early medieval Indian temples.

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Reframing the Trajectory of Vulnerability: A Historical Analysis of Multidimensional Insecurity and Development in Cameroon (1960–2023)

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Abstract

Since independence in 1960, Cameroon, once widely characterized as an “oasis of peace” in Central Africa, has experienced a gradual yet profound expansion of multidimensional insecurity that increasingly challenges national stability and development. This study adopts a historical and qualitative approach, triangulating archival materials, policy documents, and digital datasets to examine the evolution, drivers, and interconnections of security threats over six decades. The findings demonstrate a marked intensification and diversification of insecurity across six principal domains: criminal, cross-border, food, sociocultural, economic, and environmental. The analysis shows how early post-independence internal conflicts have transformed into complex contemporary crises, including violent extremism in the Far North, separatist conflict in the Anglophone regions, and structural economic fragilities rooted in the late-twentieth-century downturn. By mapping these overlapping dynamics, the article argues that insecurity in Cameroon now operates as an interconnected system rather than a set of isolated challenges, with significant implications for sustainable development, governance, and human security.

Keywords: Cameroon; multidimensional insecurity; historical analysis; human security; sustainable development; conflict dynamics.

1. Introduction

Often described by the epithet “*Africa in miniature*,” Cameroon has, since independence in 1960, navigated an increasingly complex and evolving landscape of insecurity. Over the past six decades, the country’s security architecture has been shaped by a dynamic interplay of threats spanning criminal, cross-border, food-related, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. These pressures have exerted profound effects on national stability, institutional resilience, and long-term development trajectories. The multidimensional nature of insecurity in Cameroon is well documented in existing scholarship; however, the majority of studies examine these dynamics within specialized analytical silos. Some focus primarily on criminality and cross-border threats, particularly along the northern and eastern frontiers;¹ others

¹ Kenfack Nanfack and Saha (2022); Essomo Belomo (2007); Etoga (2021); Souman Zanminy and Njupuen Njiembokue (2021); Saibou Issa (2006), primarily examining criminal and cross-border insecurity.

analyse food insecurity and nutritional vulnerability in Sudano-Sahelian regions;² still others explore socio-cultural tensions, economic fragility, or environmental stressors.³ While this body of literature has generated valuable insights, few works provide a comprehensive, longitudinal historical analysis that integrates these dimensions into a unified interpretive framework.

This article addresses that lacuna by advancing a holistic historical assessment of plural insecurity in Cameroon between 1960 and 2023. The analysis is organized around three interrelated thematic axes: (1) criminal and territorial threats, including internal, cross-border, and food-related insecurities; (2) structural socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities; and (3) environmental insecurity as an emergent threat multiplier. Methodologically, the study adopts a historical-qualitative approach based on triangulation of archival sources, documentary materials, and digital reports drawn from both national and international datasets. This multi-source evidentiary strategy enables a historically grounded and analytically balanced evaluation of shifting security dynamics across time.

By tracing the interconnections among these forms of insecurity, the article argues that contemporary insecurity in Cameroon should be understood not as a collection of discrete sectoral crises but as an interconnected system of mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities. Such an integrated perspective is essential not only for historical interpretation but also for informing policy frameworks aimed at fostering sustainable peace, strengthening institutional resilience, and promoting inclusive development.

2. The dynamics of criminal and cross-border insecurity (1960–2023)

Cameroon has experienced multiple forms of insecurity, most prominently criminal, cross-border, and food-related threats. Rather than emerging as isolated phenomena, these forms of insecurity have evolved historically through shifting political, economic, and regional dynamics that have shaped their intensity, geographic distribution, and societal impact. This section analyses the historical trajectory of these threats, emphasizing major turning points, regional patterns, and their implications for population welfare and national development. The discussion is organized around two interrelated dimensions: criminal and cross-border insecurity on the one hand, and food insecurity on the other.

2.1 Criminal and cross-border insecurity in Cameroon (1960–2023)

The historical trajectory of criminal insecurity in Cameroon reveals a transformation from localized post-independence unrest into complex and increasingly transnational systems of violence and illicit activity. In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1960, the nascent state confronted major internal security challenges linked primarily to the insurgency of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC). Former UPC militants, driven underground following the movement's prohibition by colonial authorities, formed clandestine networks that contributed to the diffusion of organized criminal activity.⁴ While these early conflicts were fundamentally political and ideological in origin, they generated zones of weakened state authority in which rural banditry and illicit economies took root. Despite the establishment of auxiliary forces and

² Njupuen Njiembokue, Habiba (2021); Fofiri Nzossie (2016); Voumo Azobou (2022); Meyounyo Adjou (2025); Ngah Ateba (2022), analysing food scarcity and nutritional vulnerability.

³ Lémouogué, Brain Asong (2026); Kamdem; Etoa Oyono; Mekinde, focusing on socio-cultural insecurity; Mohamed (2016) and Messi on economic insecurity.

⁴ C. Kenfack., « Les supplétifs camerounais face aux menaces sécuritaires, 1955–1971 », *Revue Della/Afrique*, 9(4), 2022, pp. 24.

community self-defense groups across several localities, criminal insecurity persisted and gradually intensified.⁵

Urban centers soon became key theatres of criminal activity. In Douala, for example, insecurity manifested in diverse forms, including bank robberies, market arson, *feymania* (confidence fraud), vandalism targeting commercial establishments, pharmacies, schools, private residences, and public buildings, as well as armed assaults and organized banditry.⁶ Certain neighborhoods, such as Ntala, Nkol Ndongo, and Madagascar in Yaoundé, and Ndokoti in Douala, acquired reputations as high-risk zones, illustrating the spatial concentration of insecurity within specific urban environments.⁷

By the late 1990s, criminal violence had escalated in both scale and symbolic significance, affecting not only ordinary citizens but also state officials and foreign residents. A series of high-profile incidents between 1999 and 2000 underscored the growing boldness of criminal actors. In July 1999, the spouse of the head of the European Union delegation in Yaoundé, Mrs S. Nagel, was robbed twice within a single week.⁸ In December of the same year, a French businessman was assassinated in Douala. On the nights of 12–13 and 13–14 January 2000, both the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN) and the Ministry of Defense were burglarized, while Pierre Midjo, former Director of Presidential Security and General Delegate for National Security, also suffered a break-in during this period. On 7 March 2000, the Dutch Consul General and his spouse were attacked, followed three days later by an armed assault on the United States Ambassador in Yaoundé.⁹ The assassination of Magistrate Louis Ndzé, President of the Mfou Courts, further signaled the extent to which insecurity had begun to threaten the institutional foundations of the state. Collectively, these incidents undermined both domestic perceptions of safety and Cameroon's international image as a stable polity.

Beyond urban centers, insecurity along national borders intensified as a result of porous frontiers and instability in neighboring states. The Far North Region experienced recurrent attacks linked to Boko Haram, while road banditry proliferated in the East and South Regions. Kidnappings for ransom became increasingly frequent in the East and Adamawa Regions, and the North-West and South-West regions witnessed rising criminality associated with secessionist conflict, armed banditry, and political violence. Urban environments simultaneously faced growing challenges related to firearms circulation, cybercrime, narcotics consumption, and organized criminal networks. These developments demonstrate that criminal and cross-border insecurity in Cameroon evolved not only quantitatively but structurally, becoming more diversified, geographically dispersed, and institutionally disruptive.

From 2014 onward, insecurity intensified dramatically in Cameroon's northern frontier zones. The Far North, North, and East Regions became operational spaces for armed groups originating from neighboring countries, particularly rebel militias from the Central African

⁵ During this period, the *maquis* zones in the West and Littoral regions required heavy mobilisation of the national gendarmerie and armed forces, establishing an early pattern of state-centred security management.

⁶ H. Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun : Quelles stratégies pour le maintien de l'activité dans les régions du Nord, de l'Extrême-Nord, du Nord-Ouest, du Sud-Ouest et de l'Est du pays? » *Revue Espace Géographique et Sociétés Marocaines*, 47/48, 2021, pp. 114–116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸ P. Essomo, « L'ordre et la sécurité publique dans la construction de l'État au Cameroun » PhD thesis, University Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, 2007, pp. 422–423.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Republic and Chad.¹⁰ Terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings and improvised explosive device explosions targeting markets, churches, and mosques, inflicted severe human and material losses. Boko Haram kidnappings beginning in 2013 included the abduction of seven French nationals in Dabanga and a priest in Nguetchewé, with ransom demands reportedly reaching 5–7 million CFA francs.¹¹ Population displacement further reshaped local demographics as refugees from Nigeria settled in localities such as Zelevet, Mafa, Zamay, Tourou, Kewara, Amchidé, Fotokol, and Mogode.¹² Armed confrontations between insurgents and state forces resulted in thousands of casualties and the depopulation of numerous border villages. Between 2013 and 2014 alone, approximately 353 deaths and 52 injuries were recorded, followed by roughly 1,759 deaths across 115 attacks between June and December 2014.¹³ These figures illustrate the scale and severity of insecurity affecting northern Cameroon.

In the South and East Regions, cross-border insecurity has taken the form of persistent “road bandit” activity along the Cameroon–Central African Republic–Chad tri-border zone since the 1980s. These armed groups employ ambushes, raids, and hostage-taking as strategies of territorial control and economic extraction.¹⁴ Kidnappings for ransom have become particularly prevalent in the Adamawa and East Regions, frequently resulting in executions of villagers, herders, and children when ransom demands are resisted or unmet. Saibou Issa characterizes such victims as “refugees of banditry,” highlighting the forced displacement generated by criminal violence.¹⁵

The Anglophone crisis represents another major turning point in Cameroon’s security landscape. Beginning on 11 October 2016 with protests by lawyers and teachers against the perceived “francophonization” of educational and judicial institutions, the movement rapidly escalated into armed confrontation.¹⁶ Despite governmental responses, the conflict destabilized local governance structures and produced nationwide repercussions. Public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, gendarmerie posts, and police stations, was destroyed; students, political figures, and clergy were killed; and traditional leaders and schoolchildren were abducted.¹⁷ Numerous villages were burned, and the conflict continues to disrupt livelihoods and social cohesion across affected regions.

Across other parts of the country, criminal violence has included assassinations of senior officials, kidnappings of minors, ritual killings reported in Mimboman and Dschang, bank robberies, taxi assaults, organ trafficking, and the theft of vehicles and motorcycles accompanied by executions in cities such as Yaoundé, Douala, and Bertoua. Attacks on eco-guards in protected areas further illustrate the expansion of insecurity into environmental governance zones.¹⁸ Urban

¹⁰ Y. Souman, « Regard croisé sur la situation des réfugiés suite aux exactions de Boko Haram à l’Extrême-Nord Cameroun. *International Multilingual Journal of Science and Technology (IMJST)*, 5(3), 2020, p. 831.

¹¹ G. Njiembokue, « Insécurité alimentaire et stratégies d’adaptation dans les régions de l’Extrême-Nord et de l’Est du Cameroun », PhD thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 195.

¹² Souman, « Regard croisé sur la situation des réfugiés... » p. 833.

¹³ Njiembokue, « Insécurité alimentaire et stratégies d’adaptation... » p. 196.

¹⁴ I. Saibou « La prise d’otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad : Une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier ». *Polis/R.C.S.P/C.P.S.R.*, 13(1–2), 2006, p. 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁶ R. Mates, « Cameroun : Analyse de la littérature sur la crise sécessionniste anglophone ». In S. Jisa, S. Miscoiu, et al. (Eds.), *Raconter les politiques conflictuelles en Afrique - Regards croisés*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2021, pp. 43–52.

¹⁷ Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun... » p. 117.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

centers continue to experience elevated levels of organized crime, drug abuse, gender-based violence, and generalized insecurity. Taken together, these developments reveal a long-term pattern in which criminal and cross-border insecurity has become increasingly systemic, affecting governance, social stability, and national development over more than six decades.

2.2 The nexus of conflict and food insecurity in Cameroon (1960–2023)

Food and nutritional insecurity in Cameroon has historically been shaped by a complex interplay of structural, environmental, and security-related factors. In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1960, the Cameroonian state undertook several policy initiatives to address chronic food insecurity, which already posed a significant challenge for the newly sovereign nation. Central to these efforts was the delineation of agro-ecological zones and the territorial organization of agricultural production.¹⁹ This policy framework promoted agricultural specialization between the northern regions, dominated by savannah ecosystems, and the southern forested zones. In parallel, the state encouraged the creation of public agro-industrial enterprises, designed both to harness regional agro-climatic potential and to stabilize food supply to urban centers.

Several state-owned enterprises emerged during this period, including the Cameroon Sugar Corporation (SOSUCAM) in 1964 (forest zones), the Cameroon Palm Plantations Corporation (SOCAPALM) in 1968 (Littoral region), the Yagoua Rice Expansion and Modernisation Company (SEMRY) in 1971 (Logone Plain), and the Wheat Development Corporation (SODEBLE) in 1975 (Adamawa Plateau).²⁰ These initiatives initially strengthened national food systems and mitigated urban food insecurity. However, persistent challenges in management, financing, and institutional oversight gradually undermined these structures, contributing to the resurgence of vulnerability in both rural and urban populations.

The structural fragility of Cameroon's food systems was further exacerbated by the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, which diminished agricultural productivity and reduced household purchasing power. Subsequent decades witnessed the compounding effect of security-related crises. Boko Haram attacks in the Far North, armed conflict in the North-West and South-West regions, and widespread road banditry, later transforming into kidnappings for ransom in the Adamawa and East regions, disrupted agricultural production, trade routes, and local livelihoods.³ Refugee inflows into the East, Adamawa, and Far North, along with growing populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these regions and others such as the West, Littoral, and Centre, further heightened community vulnerability.

Environmental and natural factors compounded these human-induced stresses. Recurrent climatic shocks, including droughts and floods, alongside crop losses caused by pests, locusts, grain-eating animals, and pachyderms, repeatedly undermined agricultural output.²¹ While vulnerability varies regionally, food insecurity has become a nationwide phenomenon. Empirical data indicate a sharp deterioration in recent years, with national food insecurity rates rising from 12.8% in 2019 to 20.4% in 2020.²²

¹⁹ J. Nzossie, « Les déterminants de l'offre alimentaire vivrière dans le Nord-Cameroun » PhD thesis, University of Ngaoundéré, 2013, p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ G. Habiba, « Le Programme Alimentaire Mondial (PAM) et la lutte contre l'insécurité alimentaire dans les régions septentrionales du Cameroun (1968–2018) » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 3.

²² M. Voumo, « État des lieux du suivi de la sécurité alimentaire au Cameroun » Master's thesis, University of Liège, 2022, p. 26.

According to the Harmonized Framework (Cadre Harmonisé) workshops of October 2021, approximately 34.2% of Cameroon's population, representing 9,088,528 individuals, experienced moderate to severe acute food insecurity. Of these, 6,645,418 were classified as "under pressure," while 2,430,110 were in "crisis" or "emergency" phases.²³ Overall, more than 2.7 million people faced acute food insecurity corresponding to phases 3 to 5 of the Harmonized Framework classification. Food insecurity remains more pronounced in rural areas (9.6%) than urban areas (6.7%), with marked regional disparities. The 2017 GC/FAO/WFP report identified the Far North (17.9%), North (14.6%), East (10.3%), West (7.3%), Adamawa (7.1%), and South (6%) as the most affected regions, with severe food insecurity particularly acute in the Far North (4.1%), North (3.7%), and West (3.3%).²⁴ Similarly, the 2011 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis revealed that 9.6% of rural households experienced food insecurity (2.2% severe; 7.4% moderate), compared to 6.7% of urban households (0.7% severe; 6% moderate).

Nutritional outcomes reinforce the severity of Cameroon's food insecurity. The country ranks among the 36 most affected by chronic malnutrition globally, with nearly 44% of chronically malnourished children in the CEMAC region residing in Cameroon. In 2006, 30.4% of children under five suffered from chronic malnutrition, rising to 33% in 2011 before a slight decline to 31.7% in 2014. Acute malnutrition affected 5.2% of children under five in 2014, compared to 6% in 2011, while 14.8% were underweight in 2014. The northern regions and the East remain disproportionately affected across all forms of malnutrition.

Persistent structural constraints continue to exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Limited access to safe and sufficient water, insufficient school feeding programs, restricted financial support for new agricultural development, and constrained access to agricultural inputs collectively undermine household resilience and national food security. These structural weaknesses, compounded by insurgencies, banditry, and refugee inflows, create a self-reinforcing cycle in which insecurity and food scarcity exacerbate each other.

Understanding the evolution of food and nutritional insecurity from 1960 to 2023 is therefore critical for comprehensively assessing the multidimensional nature of Cameroon's insecurity and its impact on human well-being and development. This historical perspective highlights that food insecurity is not merely a result of climatic or policy failures, but is deeply intertwined with broader security and socio-economic dynamics, a pattern that will be further examined in the subsequent analysis of socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities.

3. Structural vulnerabilities: Socio-cultural and economic insecurity in Cameroon (1999–2023)

While insurgency, food scarcity, and criminal threats pose immediate dangers, they are compounded by deeper, structural vulnerabilities that have evolved over decades. Understanding why specific regions and populations are disproportionately affected requires a chronological examination of sociocultural, economic, and environmental insecurity. This perspective reveals both long-term trends and critical turning points that have intensified vulnerability in the 21st century.

²³ Action contre la Faim, « Le premier Plan National de Réponse : un outil de prévention et d'action contre l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Cameroun », 2024, assessed 20 March 2024, Cameroun : un outil contre l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle.

²⁴ Rapport final d'audit institutionnel et organisationnel du comité de gestion de l'assistance de la FAO et du PAM (GC/FAO/PAM), novembre 2017, p. 27.

3.1 Sociocultural insecurity in Cameroon

Over the past three decades, Cameroon has witnessed a rapid and multidimensional rise in sociocultural insecurity, reflecting structural vulnerabilities that undermine social cohesion, livelihoods, and human development. One of the most visible manifestations of this insecurity is the persistent employment crisis. Underemployment increased from 70.6% in 2010 to 77% in 2014, representing a rise of 6.4 percentage points.²⁵ Approximately 90% of the working population is employed in the informal sector, highlighting the country's limited capacity to generate sustainable, productive, and decent employment. Mechanisms for job creation, skills development, self-employment support, and youth integration into the labor market remain insufficient.

Beyond employment, sociocultural insecurity is reinforced by persistent deficiencies in education, health, housing, and cultural promotion, particularly amid the growing influence of Western cultural models. Recurrent crises linked to ethnic, linguistic, and political differences have further weakened social cohesion, impeding peaceful coexistence across communities.

In education, national progression rates declined notably in 2017 due to disruptions caused by the North-West and South-West crisis.²⁶ For example, primary completion fell from 76.7% in 2016 to 72.1% in 2017.²⁷ Educational infrastructure remains severely deficient: many nursery, primary, and secondary schools lack latrines, potable water points, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds, and canteens.²⁸ In conflict-affected regions such as the Logone-et-Chari and Mayo-Tsanaga divisions of the Far North, at least 170 schools closed between 2014 and 2015 due to terrorist and secessionist attacks.²⁹ Chronic teacher shortages further compound these educational challenges.

In the health sector, Cameroon faces persistent structural deficits, including limited qualified personnel and inadequate infrastructure. Childhood diseases remain a major concern: in 2018, infant mortality stood at 48 per 1,000 live births, while under-five mortality reached 79 per 1,000.³⁰ HIV prevalence was estimated at 3.4%.³¹ Recurrent epidemics, such as measles, yellow fever, and poliomyelitis, continue to afflict the population, alongside endemic diseases including malaria, cholera, meningitis, tuberculosis, and an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and cancer.

In 2015 alone, Cameroon recorded approximately 7,000 measles cases with 32 deaths across 15 district health centers.³² Diarrheal diseases affected 20% of children under five, of whom 25% required hospitalization; only 5.2% received treatment with oral rehydration salts and zinc.³³ Fever affected 25.6% of children and 52.3% of pregnant women. Vitamin A deficiency affected 35% of children aged 1–5, particularly in the North (62.7%), Far North (47.7%), and Adamawa (40.5%)

²⁵ Rapport de la Stratégie nationale de Développement 2020-2030 pour la transformation structurelle et le développement inclusif (SND30), janvier 2020, p. 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁸ Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun... », p. 119.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, 31 août 2015, p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*

regions.³⁴ Similar deficiencies exist in health personnel and technical equipment, limiting the effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

Access to potable water represents another critical dimension of sociocultural insecurity. In 2014, only 49% of the national population had access to safe drinking water, with rural areas disproportionately affected.³⁵ Challenges include delays in borehole construction, dilapidated distribution networks, service interruptions, and poor water quality.³⁶ UNICEF reports that 21% of households rely on unimproved water sources, while 21% of water supply facilities are non-functional, predominantly in rural areas.³⁷ Poor water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions account for 13.4% of diseases nationally.³⁸

The water and sanitation sector is heavily reliant on Official Development Assistance (ODA), accounting for over 80% of external funding.³⁹ Key partners include UNICEF, WHO, GIZ, the Global Water Partnership (GWP), and UNOPS. Collectively, these sociocultural vulnerabilities, spanning employment, education, health, and access to essential services, exacerbate Cameroon's broader insecurity landscape and interact with economic and environmental risks to undermine long-term social stability.

3.2 Economic insecurity in Cameroon (1980–2023)

Cameroon's economic insecurity has deep roots in the crises of the 1980s, when the depreciation of the US dollar and the collapse of major export commodity prices, initially affecting Europe, reverberated across Africa and significantly impacted Cameroon.⁴⁰ Facing mounting fiscal and macroeconomic pressures, the country entered into an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1987 and adopted a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) under the strict conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions.⁴¹

By the early 1990s, the consequences of these reforms became increasingly evident. Unemployment surged, with 57.7% of the population without formal employment, while wages fell by 19.2%.⁴² Public investment projects were suspended, domestic public debt went unpaid, numerous enterprises closed, and large-scale layoffs became common. The 50% devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 further eroded purchasing power and amplified inflationary pressures.⁴³ Collectively, these developments marked Cameroon's transition from relative post-independence economic stability to prolonged systemic insecurity, generating cascading socio-political and humanitarian challenges.

In the decades that followed, successive governments sought to restore macroeconomic stability through structural reforms and policies designed to correct imbalances and stimulate growth. Despite these efforts, poverty remained entrenched. Nearly 40% of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵ Rapport de la Stratégie nationale de Développement 2020-2030, p. 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Rapport final d'Agence japonaise de coopération internationale (JICA), février 2018, p. 24.

³⁸ Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, p. 19.

³⁹ Rapport final d'Agence japonaise de coopération internationale (JICA), février 2018, p. 26.

⁴⁰ L. Embolo, « Le Cameroun sous les fourches caudines du FMI après les journaux : 1988–2006 » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2023, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² S. Guillaumont, S., & S. Guillaumont-Jeanneney, « La zone franc, les institutions de Bretton Woods et la conditionnalité ». *Revue d'Économie Financière*, pp. 443–457.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 443–457.

households lived below the monetary poverty line, while more than 56% of children experienced at least two deprivations in basic needs.⁴⁴ Poverty was particularly pronounced in rural areas, rising from 52.1% in 2001 to 55% in 2007. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly, victims of abuse or exploitation, indigenous populations, socially marginalized individuals, refugees, orphans, and internally displaced persons, remain disproportionately exposed to economic insecurity.⁴⁵

These structural economic challenges are reflected in global human development metrics. The 2010 Human Development Report ranked Cameroon 131st out of 179 countries, underscoring the persistent material vulnerabilities facing a significant portion of the population.⁴⁶ Overall, the trajectory of Cameroon's economic insecurity illustrates how global shocks, structural adjustment, and limited state capacity have interacted over four decades to create a context of chronic economic precarity, which in turn exacerbates sociocultural and environmental vulnerabilities across the national territory.

3.3 Environmental insecurity in Cameroon (20th–21st century)

Cameroon has faced persistent environmental insecurity affecting the entire national territory since the twentieth century.⁴⁷ This insecurity manifests through multiple phenomena, including pollution, floods, droughts, bushfires, deforestation, and ecological degradation linked to agricultural practices, as well as the exploitation of fuelwood, timber, and mineral resources. Environmental stressors not only compromise livelihoods but also act as significant threat multipliers, intensifying existing socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities.

Pollution represents one of the most pervasive dimensions of environmental insecurity. Urban centers such as Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam are particularly affected by water pollution caused by the uncontrolled discharge of waste and wastewater into rivers and drainage networks. Solid waste accumulation overwhelms municipal systems, while oil dumping and vehicle-related contamination exacerbate the problem. With rapid urbanization and population growth, these forms of pollution have become increasingly widespread, presenting severe public health and ecological challenges.

In addition to pollution, Cameroon is highly exposed to climatic hazards, particularly recurrent droughts and floods. These phenomena are most pronounced in the northern regions, including Adamawa, North, and Far North, but also affect other parts of the country. Droughts often trigger bushfires and destroy agricultural crops, while floods wash away farmlands, disrupt livelihoods, and displace communities. In Garoua, especially in the floodplains locally known as “yarés,” flooding is a recurring threat. Between 2010 and 2014, successive floods in localities such as Lagdo, Maga, Yagoua, Gobo, and Kousseri led to significant population displacement, creating an urgent need for identification and registration of affected populations by public authorities and civil society organizations.⁴⁸

Ecological degradation from bushfires further exacerbates environmental insecurity. While all regions are affected, Adamawa, Centre, East, and West are most exposed. In 2015 alone, more than 80% of pastureland in the Adamawa region was destroyed by uncontrolled fires.

⁴⁴ Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, 31 août 2015, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ M. Popadem, « Les politiques de protection de l'environnement et de lutte contre la famine des ONG internationales au Cameroun (1992–2012) » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Similarly, agricultural expansion has contributed to deforestation, soil depletion, and habitat loss. The unsustainable search for fuelwood and the exploitation of mineral resources, including gold, cobalt, aluminum, iron, and diamonds, pose additional threats, particularly in the East and South regions. These activities often result in complete destruction of vegetation and intensify ecological vulnerability.⁴⁹

Overall, environmental insecurity in Cameroon is the cumulative result of anthropogenic pressures and natural hazards. Pollution, climatic shocks, bushfires, deforestation, and unregulated resource extraction have persisted across decades, undermining agricultural productivity, human health, and social stability. The country's experience illustrates how ecological degradation is both a direct source of risk and a multiplier of broader socio-economic and cultural vulnerabilities.

4. Conclusion

The historical trajectory of Cameroon from 1960 to 2023 illustrates a shift from post-colonial political instability toward a complex and interwoven landscape of multifaceted insecurity. Contemporary challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North, the Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, systemic economic precariousness, and widespread environmental degradation, cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, they form a mutually reinforcing web, in which weaknesses in governance, economic structures, and social services amplify the impact of external and ecological shocks. Even the relative stability of the 1970s, once seen as a period of state-led prosperity, now appears in retrospect as fragile, masking latent vulnerabilities that have persisted into the twenty-first century.

Sociocultural insecurity remains a central driver of instability. Persistent underemployment, the proliferation of informal labour, deficiencies in education and health infrastructure, and recurrent cultural and linguistic tensions have undermined social cohesion and constrained human development. These vulnerabilities have been compounded by recurring crises and targeted attacks on social infrastructure, which have disproportionately affected peripheral and historically marginalized regions. Economic insecurity similarly continues to shape the daily lives of millions. Structural adjustment programs, currency devaluation, and the progressive withdrawal of the state from productive sectors have left a large portion of the population living in poverty, with rural communities, women, children, and other vulnerable groups most exposed. Environmental insecurity further exacerbates these dynamics, as pollution, deforestation, floods, droughts, and unregulated resource exploitation create both immediate and long-term threats to livelihoods and territorial stability.

Addressing these overlapping crises requires a multifaceted and proactive approach. Strengthening the nexus between security and development is essential, ensuring that interventions in conflict-affected areas go beyond military responses to include investments in education, health, and infrastructure that restore the social contract. Institutional reform and anti-corruption measures must go beyond symbolic prosecutions, focusing on digitalization, transparency, and the empowerment of independent oversight bodies to ensure public resources serve collective, rather than private, interests. Climate adaptation and resource governance are equally urgent; integrated water management, regulation of artisanal mining, and early-warning systems for floods and droughts are crucial to prevent environmental shocks from triggering humanitarian crises. Finally, promoting genuine national dialogue, particularly around the linguistic and cultural divides, is necessary to build inclusive governance and ensure that decentralization translates into tangible improvements for citizens in peripheral regions.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

In conclusion, the multifaceted nature of insecurity in Cameroon demands an equally multidimensional response. By tackling structural weaknesses in governance, economic opportunity, and environmental management alongside immediate security threats, Cameroon can not only stabilize its present situation but also safeguard its “Africa in miniature” identity and secure a sustainable, peaceful future for its diverse population.

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