



The case of Al-Shabaab in Kenya. Terrorism, space management and tourism

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Abstract.

This paper is part of a broader research and will attempt to clarify the relationship between two phenomena as complex and important on a global scale as tourism and terrorism, focusing on the analysis of the impact on tourism of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab in Kenya, where in recent years the tourist economy has become increasingly central to the country's economic development. The risk of kidnapping foreign nationals in Kenya in recent years has been high and terrorist attacks occur regularly, especially on the coast and in the two main cities of Nairobi and Mombasa. It will also examine the dynamics of the control of spaces conquered by terrorist groups and the destabilization activities carried out in Somali territory with spill-over effects in Kenya, where terrorism represents a very real threat to the country's security, a threat that the armed forces are often unable to contain.

From a methodological point of view, we will both develop a concise literature review on the new strand traceable to the geography of violence and the geography of justice and power (Lima 2015; 2020; Sabbag 2008), as well as a field survey through se-structured interviews with a 'convenience sample' and a biographic field research (local newspapers, Ministry of Defence) regarding both the activities of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group and the development and possible new trends of tourism in Kenya, will aim to understand the real impact of terrorism on the geographical area examined.

Keywords. Terrorism, tourism, control of the space, Kenya, Somalia

1. 1.Terrorist impacts on tourism activity

The tourist economy is one of the main sources of income for many countries in the world (Araña & León 2008), fosters job creation, with a consequent increase in income, infrastructural improvements, and a more general positive impact on economic development (Bac, Bugnar, & Mester 2015). These aspects have contributed to making the tourism sector a target for terrorist attacks, hindering its growth in some specific territorial contexts where terrorist infiltration is easier and more accessible (Pizam & Smith 2000). Recent history has shown how tourists (one could argue the vulnerability of tourists), at times, have become strategic targets; they are identified as a quick tool for the transmission of specific messages.

Goeldner & Ritchie (2009) pointed out the main reasons motivating terrorist attacks against tourist destinations, from which emerges the greater ease of access for terrorists by the strong tourist concentration. In general, the aspect that needs attention is related to the multi-scale impacts that a terrorist attack can generate; indeed, it is noted that an attack on a tourist centre is undoubtedly traumatic for the entire local economy, with strong repercussions on the country's international

attractiveness and consequent ideological opposition to tourist activity (Blake & Sinclair 2003). At the same time, it is noted how tourism itself prefigures a symbol from a terrorist point of view since it represents an effective means of communication through which to convey a message that is more ideological than political.

Tourists, defined by Richter (1983) as soft targets, are considered targets because they are representatives of their countries of origin; this would make the terrorist cause international, thus increasing power and legitimacy to make governments less powerful.

In territorial contexts in which "information was strictly controlled through the monopoly of state television and official newspapers" (Anghelone & Ungari 2016:16), a decisive role is played by social media (Bhattacharjee et al. 2017), through which attacks have been internationalized and globalized, considerably impacting tourist flows and security perceptions (Kapuściński & Richards 2016; Cesti & Monaci 2021). Thus, the potential threat posed by terrorism on tourism dynamics, both on domestic and international flows, emerges, albeit with differentiations: indeed, the impacts on domestic tourism are lower than on international tourism (Llorca-Vivero 2008).

The research by Llorca-Vivero (2008) shows how terrorist actions have a much more acute cost when they are concentrated in areas of the developing world rather than in countries with advanced economies, where the perception of risk is certainly more mitigated. This aspect has an overbearing impact on the local economy, with a general contraction in tourism employment and the relative allied industries, increasing the sense of uncertainty in the country with a consequent reduction in the expected return on investment, directly damaging an already fragile and fragmented economic system (Sandler & Enders 2008; Gaibullov & Sandler 2009; 2011). It follows from the above that economic capacity is related to a country's ability to resist and defend itself against terrorist attacks. The tourist destination attacked by terrorists will only be in a position to recover economically when the conditions exist to avoid incidents in the short term, thus increasing the perception of security for future tourists. "But we must also recognize that terrorism remains one of the most important challenges of the global tourism industry" (Bac, Bugnar, & Mester 2015:10).

2. The Al-Shaabab phenomenon and control of the space

Al-Shabaab, ('the Younger' in Arabic)⁴, is an Islamic rebel group based in Somalia. In the late 2000s it dominated the Mogadishu region, however a military movement

⁴ More precisely, Al Shabaab is defined as (Harakat Al Shabaab Al Mujahidin, Mujahidin =Youth Movement) and the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2022 called it 'the largest, richest and deadliest Al Qaeda affiliate in the world' (Bacon 2022).

led by the African Union (AU) and supported by Western partners and the USA led to its retreat from the main urban centres in Somalia.

However, the terrorist group has appeared quite resilient and continues to remain the main security challenge in Somalia. It continues to manage control of a large southern part of the state with terrorist attacks against international forces and civilians in the region. At the same time, the threat of Al-Shabaab has continuously prompted the AU to review its withdrawal from the region, further complicating the partners' counterterrorism operations (Klobucista et al. 2022).

The origins of the Al-Shabaab movement lead back to Somalia, one of the poorest countries in the world, which for many decades has had no regular government and has been the scene of political upheaval. Analysts believe that the forerunner of Al-Shabaab was the AIAI (or "Unity of Islam"), a Salafist terrorist group that contributed to decades of severe political and social instability after the fall of Said Barre's regime (1969-1991) with the outbreak of civil war (Anderson & McKnight 2015).

In the early 2000s, a split among AIAI members led to the genesis of a political front, with the younger members wanting to create a "Greater Somalia" under the control of an Islamic fundamentalist government; this pushed the latter into an alliance with the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)⁵. Al-Shabaab and the ICU have taken control of the capital from the local Somali government, a victory that fueled fears of a spread of jihadist violence to neighbouring Ethiopia, a country with a Christian majority, so much so that it invaded Somalia at the end of 2006, ousting the ICU from Mogadishu⁶.

But, in the opinion of analysts, the intervention radicalized Al-Shabaab, which mainly withdrew from the Capital in late 2011, following offensives by African Union Mission Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali forces. It retreated to the southern part of Somalia (Figure 1) where it began to organize guerrilla as-salts, including bombings and assassinations, against Ethiopian and later Kenyan forces with even territorial⁷ claims (Goldbaum 2018).

⁵ The Courts originated as part of clan power in Mogadishu; they serve specific sub-clans belonging to the *Hawiye* clan (of nomadic origin, it is, along with the *Darood* clan, the largest and most powerful in Somalia) and are supported by the Hawiye middle class in the capital (Deforche 2013).

⁶ At the request of Somalia's transitional government, a large part of the ICU fled to neighboring countries.

⁷ The action was supported by the United States and the African Union. Some experts that it was during these years that the group turned into a full-fledged insurgency, gaining control of large chunks of territory in central and southern Somalia. The UN Security Council in early 2007 authorized the African Union to lead a peacekeeping force in Somalia, AMISOM, with a mandate to protect the country's transitional government, which had just returned to power in Mogadishu. Uganda was the first nation to send forces to Somalia under AMISOM and maintains the largest contingent of the regional force, with over 6,000 soldiers. Other military forces come from Burundi,

The leadership of Al-Shabaab⁸ declared fealty to al-Qaeda in 2012 (Kumar Sen 2016)⁹. There have also been numerous reports that Al-Shabaab may have forged links with other militant groups in Africa, such as *Boko Haram* in Nigeria and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, with bases in the Sahara Desert (Bruton 2013). Al-Shabaab, although it has several factions within with different



Fig. 1. A map of Somalia divided into areas of control by actors including Al-Shabaab. Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/it/Guerra_civile_in_Somalia.

Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. In total, AMISOM comprises about 20,000 soldiers. In 2019, the UN Security Council voted to withdraw additional troops, with the intention of handing over security responsibilities to Somali troops by 2022. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused AMISOM's deployment to be extended until 2022/2023.

⁸As of 2014, Ahmed Umar, also known as Abu Ubaidah, is the current leader of al-Shabab. He was nominated in 2014, after his predecessor, Ahmed Abdi Godane, was killed in a US drone attack.

⁹ Please refer to 'Somalia's Al-Shabab join Al-Qaeda' available on the internet at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa16979440>

objectives¹⁰, as a whole continues to pursue its main goal: to establish an Islamic state in Somalia and an opposition to the Western-backed Somali government. Also, the group has plans to unite Somali-inhabited areas in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia under an Islamist government by crossing the border itself. Therefore, it can be said that it aims to control large portions of rural territory in central and southern Somalia and it should be noted that its level of penetration and influence has further permeated Somali society.

To better control the territory in Southern Somalia, Al-Shabab set up the Hisba, a kind of religious police force with the function of enforcing the population's compliance with Sharia precepts. Very severe punishments (stoning and amputations) are foreseen and inflicted on possible adulterers. The group prohibits cooperation with Non-governmental Organization, blocking aid deliveries even during the severe famine of 2017 that forced some 800,000 people to flee their homes, (Ploch Blanchard 2020)¹¹. Also in 2017, Mogadishu suffered its heaviest terrorist attack to date (more than five hundred dead and over 300 people injured). Terrorist attacks at the capital of Somalia have continued in the following years, such as the attack in December 2019 that killed around 80 people, or the 2021 attack against the UN and AMISOM headquarters.

In June 2023, Al-Shabaab struck Mogadishu, causing civilian and military victims and numerous injuries as the attack occurred in a restaurant near a hotel known as a meeting place for politicians and Somalis from the diaspora visiting the country (Sironi 2023). The attack took place in the presence of the UN military mission¹² which has a multi-dimensional mandate (military, police and civil) with the aim of securing the territory and strengthening Somali institutions in various sectors, so that they can as soon as possible fully assume their proper function in a sovereign state. The peacekeeping force should gradually decrease its presence and end its mandate at the end of December 2024.

The regional impact of Al-Shabaab is invasive as it has not only in Somalia but throughout the Horn of Africa region. In addition, in 2010, it carried out a vigilant outside Somalia, with a series of suicide attacks that killed 74 people in Kampala, Uganda.

¹⁰ There is a deep divide between the group's leaders the nationalists, who largely seek to oust the central government, and militants with transnational objectives. Bronwyn Bruton, an al-Shabab expert at the Atlantic Council, says the people who still call themselves al-Shabab are increasingly committed to the idea of sharia,' he told CFR. "The unifying idea of al-Shabab is opposition to the Western-backed government."

¹¹ The credibility of the terrorist group was undermined when it refused Western food aid to combat the drought and famine of 2011, thereby losing the support it had obtained by promising security to the local population.

¹² Decided by the UN Security Council on 31 March 2022 with resolution 2628 (2022), until 31 December 2022 last year it numbered 18,586 men, the sum of the contingents sent by some countries in the region, namely Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti (Sironi 2023).

There have been many bombings and attacks against neighbouring Kenya (see Section 3). From the 2013 attack on a shopping centre in Nairobi, the Garissa University bombing (the largest terrorist attack in Kenya since the 1998 attack on the US embassy in Nairobi), and many more minor attacks alternated with actions with a high propaganda effect.

After Somalia, the country that has suffered the most attacks is Kenya, since punishing Kenya by terrorizing the Kenyan civilian population means putting pressure on them to be hostile towards the Kenyan military operations in the Somali conflict and obtaining international visibility to recruit and raise funds for the terrorist group¹³. The funds are largely used by the jihadist group to recruit possible new fighters from Somali citizens living in other states, especially the United States. The Al-Shabaab offensive in Kenya, in addition to highlighting the progressive internationalization of the terrorist group and its willingness to systematically strike targets outside Somali borders, highlights two serious critical issues afflicting the government in Nairobi. The first concerns the domestic front and refers to the problem of the difficult coexistence between different ethnic groups and the discrimination of minority groups concerning the power elites. Kenya is home to over 2 million Somalis, some thousands of whom have national citizenship. Unfortunately, many of them populate the dilapidated slums of the big cities or, worse, the refugee camps in the North of the country.

Socially, economically, and politically, the situation of the Kenyan Somali diaspora is dramatic, considering the high number of unemployed, the lack of adequate parliamentary representation, the absence of an integration strategy, and the hostile attitude of other ethnic groups. The destitution and subordination of the Somalis, combined with the programmatic failures of the Kenyan government, constitute a social gap into which criminal and terrorist organizations fit. It is no coincidence that Somalis represent a flourishing recruitment pool for Al-Shabaab. The recruitment of Kenyan foreign fighters provides Al-Shabaab with more fighters than other nations, consisting of Muslims opposed to the Western presence in the area. There is an ease of establishing terrorist cells in Kenya, worthy of note is the al-Hijra organization, considered the offshoot of Al-Shabaab in Kenya¹⁴. Al-Hijra employs innovative propaganda tools in Swahili to mobilize support for the cause of the

¹³ Counterterrorism experts say al-Shabaab has benefited from several sources of income over the years, including from other terrorist groups; piracy; kidnapping; and extortion of local businesses, farmers and aid groups, among others. The group also profits from smuggling sugar across the Kenyan border.

¹⁴ Al-Shabaab have 7-9 thousand armed men and their penetration into Kenya is deep. A large community of Somali migrants lives in Garissa, the target of the attack. The clandestine recruitment centers are also active further south in Mombasa, a city with a strong Muslim presence, which together with Malindi is one of the two "capitals" of tourism. (Gikandi 2019).

conflict in southern Somalia and, as of 2012, the 'holy war' against the government in Nairobi (Anderson & Mcknight 2015). This organization leverages the perceived sense of marginalization in the Somali-Kenyan north-eastern provinces and Muslim communities along the coast, historically pitted against a central government dominated by ethnic Kikuyu and Christian ruling groups (Puddu 2018).

A further element to consider is that international tourist flows are increasing in Kenya, furthermore, Nairobi is a headquarters of the United Nations, also hosting embassies and many international NGOs. A further aspect is represented by the fact that the Constitution ensures a high degree of freedom of the press, which is uncommon in the region, also favouring the presence of not only local but also international newspapers (CCTV, CNC World, BBC, and Al-Jazeera) (Cannon & Ruto Pkalya 2020).

It should be considered that over time, the number of fighters for Al-Shabaab has steadily grown, according to several reports from the years 2020 and 2022, the group regularly forces civilians, especially women and children, to join. In other cases, affiliations take place voluntarily or as a result of financial compensation. Al-Shabaab's control of space is quite dynamic. The group has a habit of abandoning an area before launching an offensive, however, it is often found that UN-backed forces are unable to hold the recaptured territory and the militants usually return.

Control of the territories that border Kenya and Somalia is crucial for Al Shabaab's financial supply. In the decade 2007-2018, the organization built much of its fortunes on the occupation, in 2007, of the strategic port city of Chisimaio, through which much of the contraband trade between Kenya and Somalia transits. The loss of Chisimaio in 2012 did considerable damage to the finances of the movement, which was forced to shift the focus of its activities along the cross-border land route, thus coming into conflict with Somali-Kenyan traffickers who have always operated in the area (Puddu, 2018). In more recent years, according to Monitoring Group¹⁵ estimates, Al-Shabaab continues to benefit heavily from the illegal trafficking of wood and carbon through the port of Chisimaio, however indirectly. In addition, significant sums of money would reach the organization in the form of extortion from traders and migrants through an intricate customs system along minor roads in the hinterland.

The group has withdrawn from the urban centres of Kismayo and Barawe, making the city of Jilib its effective capital. While maintaining control over large areas in the south and centre, recent years have been characterised by an increased presence in northern Somalia. And, at the end of 2021, it took possession of the territory of the Balad District. Balad is about 35 km from Mogadishu and is an

¹⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council, p. 5

important hub between the Somali capital and the Somali regional state of Middle Shabelle. Although it has lost control of most cities, it still dominates in many rural areas (Figure 1).

Al-Shabaab's area of operations now extends from the forests of eastern Congo to the coasts of Yemen and has its headquarters in southern Somalia. The group's military and geopolitical capabilities have evolved to the point of representing a concrete threat not only to the stability of national governments but also to the economic interests of Western countries.

Al-Shabaab continues to be the most active group in Africa, the victims of the Somali movement correspond to 42% of the total relating to the insurgency of all Islamic militant groups active in Africa (Savini 2019).

Today the movement is broad and transversal, open to different Somali clan groups, as well as transnational forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. Furthermore, the entry of foreign fighters has also strengthened Al-Shabaab in regional and global jihadist campaigns, expanding its strategies, such as the introduction of suicide attacks.

The fact that most emerges and connects the different contexts considered here is the radicalization of the jihadist struggle and its substantial "a-territoriality". The latter is the element that characterizes the jihad both in its terrorist configuration which acts globally, overcoming the border constraints of Western states, for which all Western states feel like potential victims, and in what is being attempted to assert politically, as in the case of ISIS and Boko Haram (Ricci 2015), and which projects itself into an "imperial" political perspective, without admitting borders and producing what has been defined as geographical uncertainty, referable above all to the comparison with the West.

The Al-Shabaab militia is today one of the largest terrorist groups operating on the African continent, with a complex organization and different faces, which struggles to be understood and addressed by traditional anti-terrorism strategies. Forceful actions are not effective because they do not address the roots of the formation and, above all, of the expansion of these groups that are continually able to reorganize themselves and recruit militants and resources. Last but not least, military intervention alone is not capable of defeating the transformist ideology behind the extremism of this matrix.

3. Terrorist impacts on tourism in Kenya.

The tourism sector is one of the main sources of income for Kenya's economy, with revenues comparable to those derived from the country's main exports, namely tea and products from agriculture, as well as remittances from the diaspora (Beigut

2018). To pursue the goals of Vision 2030¹⁶, the Kenyan government has identified tourism as the key tool, ranking it first in the national economic strategy.

The local government is aware of the specific weight of the business sector, considered one of the most important assets in its long-term national development plan (Vision 2030). With this in mind, a plan has been developed to boost air connections by launching a marketing campaign within the National Tourist Board platform. The specific objective is to implement the arrival of tourists from historically non-traditional countries, including those from Asia and other African countries. With this in mind, it was decided to invest strongly in security, adopting a national strategy in 2016 to counter terrorism.

The specific weight of tourism is evident from the data, it is noted that in 2017, it contributed about 9.7 per cent of the country's GDP to the Kenyan economy. In the same year, travel and tourism accounted for about 9% of total employment (Buigut 2019).

Kenya's increased international air connectivity, as well as the presence of major tourism facilities, has helped to generate benefits for the state, especially in comparison to East African competitors. The main tourist flows came from Europe (especially the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy) and the United States, although there was an increase in the number of tourists from Asia (particularly from China) and also from other African countries (Rwanda and South Africa) in the pre-pandemic phase.

Figures provided by the World Travel and Tourism Council show that the tourism sector will contribute about 4.9 % of Kenya's total economy in 2021, a considerable increase from the previous year, when due to the COVID-19 pandemic it had dropped to 3.9 percent, a far cry from the record in 2019, when it constituted 7.7 % of the total national economy.

The tourism phenomenon in Kenya has a rather recent origin. While it should be recognized, in the history of tourism in the country, those exploratory trips can be traced back to the 'big game' hunting of wildlife in the savannah, practiced by European elite classes as early as 1800. As indicated by Jommo, it is therefore evident that, in its early stages of tourism, Kenya represented a kind of European democracy (Jommo 1987).

Since the 1980s there has been a substantial increase in tourist flows, with considerable sectoral expansion; however, the political instability and ethnic clashes that raged in Kenya in the two years 1992-1993 (Bellucci 2010) generated a significant reduction in tourist movements. Another fundamental biennium is that

¹⁶ Introduced in 2008 by Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki, Vision 2030 represents a set of goals to be pursued in order to accelerate the country's transformation into a rapidly industrialising middle-income nation by 2030. (Vision 2030 -Layout 1 (vision2030.go.ke)).

between 1997 and 1998 when the terrorist attack against the American Embassy in Nairobi and a series of violent events led to a drastic reduction in tourist demand with obvious repercussions on the local economy.

Since the 2000s, the tourism sector has regained strength, contributing to the country's economic development (KNBS 2016), thanks to the growing demand for both wildlife and beach tourism, the latter driven by private investments along the Kenyan coastline that have favoured an increase in domestic beds, by improving and strengthening the accommodation offer.

As explained in the previous section, Kenya, following the African Union Mission for Somalia, has become a major regional target of Al-Shabaab (Battiston 2018), with numerous kidnappings perpetrated on Kenyan soil on international tourists (Beigut & Amendah 2015). In the first phase, terrorist attacks have focused on foreign interests on Kenyan soil, exploiting the fact that Kenya is the most advanced country in East Africa, effectively attracting foreign investment. Therefore, both because of the political-strategic role assumed by Kenya in the Horn of Africa and because the country is seen as an expression of foreign interests of the Western world, there has been an exponential growth in attacks (Figure 2), causing direct repercussions on the tourism sector (Appiah Afriyie 2019).

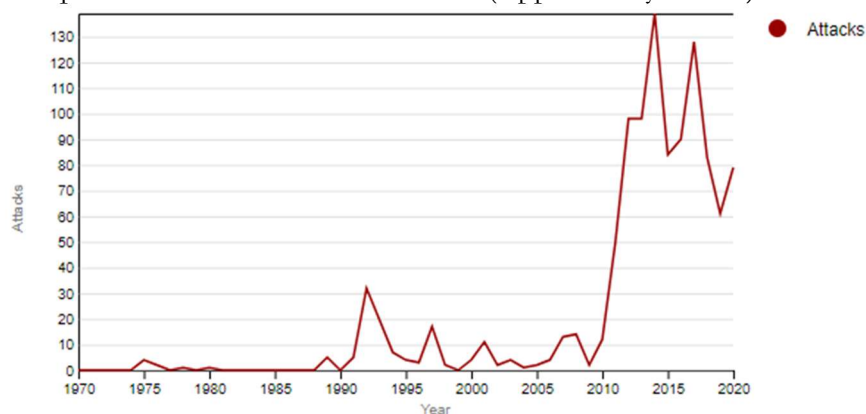


Fig. 2. Historical evolution of terrorist attacks in Kenya. Source: Global Terrorism Database - START.umd.edu

The data shown in Figure 2 illustrate the change in international arrivals in Kenya between 2010 and 2021. Between 2011 and 2017, there was an average of 60 attacks carried out by different groups, each of varying magnitude. It is almost certain that more than half of them were perpetrated by Al-Shabaab. The 2002 attack on the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, the attack on the Westgate shopping center in Nairobi in 2013, and the attack on the *University of Garissa*¹⁷ in 2015 are considered 'high-

¹⁷ Garissa, located in north-eastern Kenya, is about 140 km from the Somali border and hosts the Kenyan military base from which 'clean-up' expeditions against terrorist groups on the

intensity' attacks: 148 victims, mostly students. Then in 2019, another attack in Nairobi at the DusitD2 hotel and office complex killed 21 people. Other terrorist attacks in Kenya include one against the Kenya Defence Forces peacekeepers in El-Adde, Somalia, Camp Simba, and Lamu in 2020, and a series of ambushes mainly in Mandera, Garissa, and other counties in the northeastern and coastal regions.

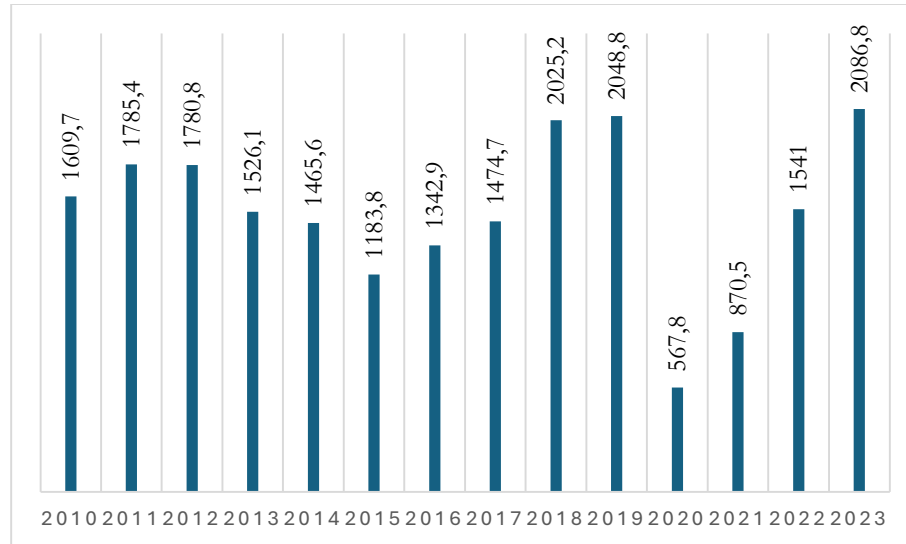


Fig. 3. International arrivals in Kenya 2010-2023 (in 1,000s). (Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics).

Steven Buigut, in his article *"How Kenya's tourism industry has felt the impact of terrorist attacks"* (2019), presents some reflections on the impact of terrorism on the tourism sector, noting a consistent decline in conjunction with terrorist events. Essentially, this has led to an annual reduction in tourism revenues of approximately 1.5 million USD. These economic losses underestimate the potential long-term effects. In fact, they contribute not only to a negative impact on the destination's image, but also to the loss of opportunities generated by the tourism industry's broader economic network.

Until 2016, more than 35% of international arrivals came from five countries (UK, USA, Italy, Germany, and France), the same group of countries that experienced the greatest contraction in tourism demand, by 26.2%, 3.2%, 17%, 6% and 48.7% respectively (Buigut 2018). It is evident how risk perception has pre-

Somali border depart. Garissa had already suffered a double attack in 2012 against the Christian community in Garissa. Two attacks occurred almost simultaneously in the city's Catholic cathedral and in a church belonging to the African Inland Independent Church denomination, during the usual Sunday mass.

potentially affected, partly due to constant warnings in these states against travel to Kenya.

Tourism growth and development in the country are, therefore, directly proportional to Kenya's ability to guarantee security for its population, also acting, almost consequentially, on the destination's tourism demand (Araña & León 2008; Bardwell & Iqbal 2020).

As an illustration of this, it is noted how the decrease in considerable terrorist incidents has contributed to the increase, since 2018, of the tourism sector, which has resumed considerable growth after the attacks of 2013 and 2015, recording growth rates of 17% per year.

Therefore, countering the destabilization generated by the Al-Shabaab-led attacks is important to contribute to the security of the country, which must also occur through the adoption of a better territorial justice policy (Lima 2015; 2020; Sabbag 2008).

4. Field Survey

The analysis carried out for this work falls within the field of social sciences, adopting a distinctly social-geographical approach. The methodology employed includes field research, aimed at understanding motivations, opinions, and trends that may not be evident from purely numerical data. The fieldwork was conducted in a context that did not always allow for the use of face-to-face interviews; therefore, the research was carried out through a semi-structured questionnaire (Figure 4). We considered this the most suitable tool for gathering subjective information regarding awareness of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab and its related impacts.

Additionally, the fieldwork was reinforced by participant observation (Clifford 1992). This form of observation is used when knowledge of the social phenomenon under investigation is affected by limiting factors.

The investigation was conducted with privileged actors operating in the field and with university students, as they represent the nation's future and without whom the fieldwork would not have been possible.

The primary aim of the investigation was to bring out the local population's perspective, distinguishing the data by gender and education level, and seeking to obtain information on the different ways the terrorist phenomenon is perceived in relation to the professional roles of the respondents.

The fieldwork led to the identification of a convenience sample (Etikan 2016), consisting of both individuals born in Kenya and people born in other countries who, for personal or professional reasons, live in Kenya.

Questionnaire Number _____

This questionnaire is intended for a scientific investigation to analyses and understand how the impacts of terrorist activities in Kenya have affected day-to-day life and how much it has changed perceptions of security.

Interviewed _____

Age _____ Gender _____

Education level _____

Profession _____ Origin _____

1) Socio-professional mobility:

	Stato Country	Area
Work location		
Current residence		
10 year ago		
Place of birth		

2) Are you familiar with the Al-Shaabab terrorist organization (have you heard of it? read about it?)?

a) Yes ☐

b) No ☐

If yes, for how long? How did you find out?

3) Has the perception of security changed following the terrorist attacks in Kenya?

4) Have your habits changed as a result of the terrorist attacks?

5) Have your travels changed as a result of the terrorist attacks? In which manner?

6) In your opinion, what role has the government taken with regard to the terrorist problem?

Repressive
Did not play a role
Control
Don't know

Fig. 4. Questionnaire submitted to the sample of interviewees (elaboration by the Authors).

5. Commentary on the interviews

The diversity and heterogeneity of the interviewees highlight how difficult it is to categorize individuals. In our case, we believe it is important, first and foremost, to consider the object of analysis — that is, knowledge of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab — and, consequently, the way in which the local population perceives and experiences space in relation to this. As previously mentioned, conducting fieldwork was not easy, particularly in administering the questionnaires, due to various factors. One possible reason is the respondents' mistrust, possibly linked to the female gender of the researcher. In fact, the research was conducted in December 2022 and January 2024 by a white female researcher on a predominantly male convenience sample, revealing broad difficulties that can be included within gender issues, even more so if the area of investigation is located in a highly complex context. The differentiation of employment status affects knowledge of Al-Shabaab.

Analysing the data of the questionnaire (figure 5), it emerges that the knowledge of the terrorist phenomenon and its impacts is higher for those working in the tourism sector, probably due to the perception of a greater risk connected to the sector itself, even though it should be pointed out that only three male tourism workers noted an increase in the perception of risk. On the contrary, all the other privileged witnesses, in response to question number three, highlighted how this perception has not changed or has increased little in recent years.

Of extreme relevance are the answers to question number five, which seeks to understand whether or not mobility and travel have changed since the terrorist attacks. Here again, the differentiation between tourism workers and students emerges in the answers. The latter emphasizes that their routines have not changed, while male and female workers in the tourism sector show a small but significant influence related to the Al-Shabaab phenomenon (figure 6).

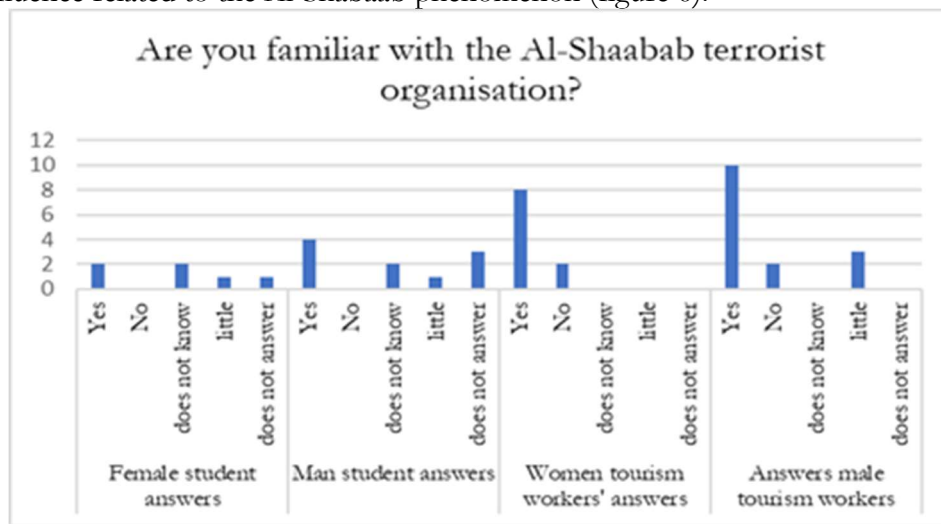


Fig. 5. Results to the question on knowledge of the Al-Shabaab terrorist phenomenon

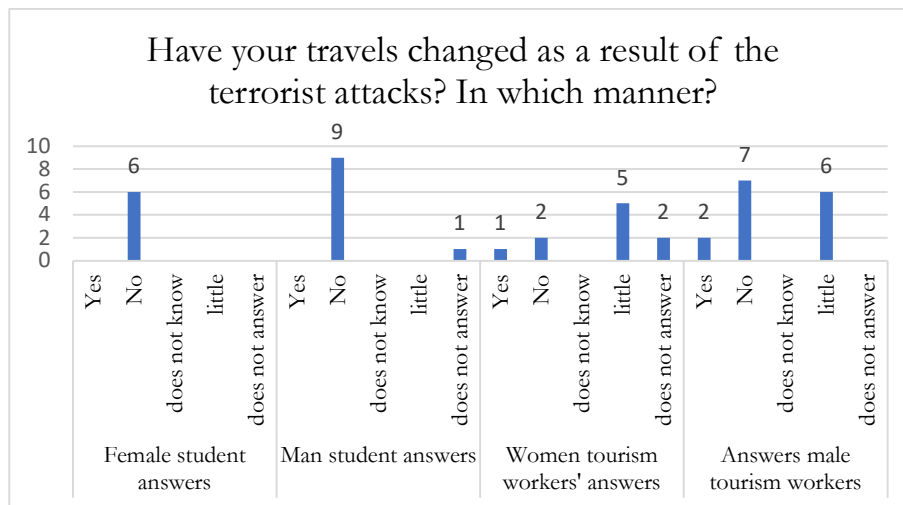


Fig. 6. Answers to the question of changes in travel as a consequence of the terrorist attacks.

To conclude, we show the data of the qualitative survey concerning the opinion of the study sample on the role of the central government in the management of the terrorist phenomenon. This is a complex question that could imply multiple answers and opinions; however, it was thought to be useful to understand, implicitly, the perception of the security of the territory (figure 7).

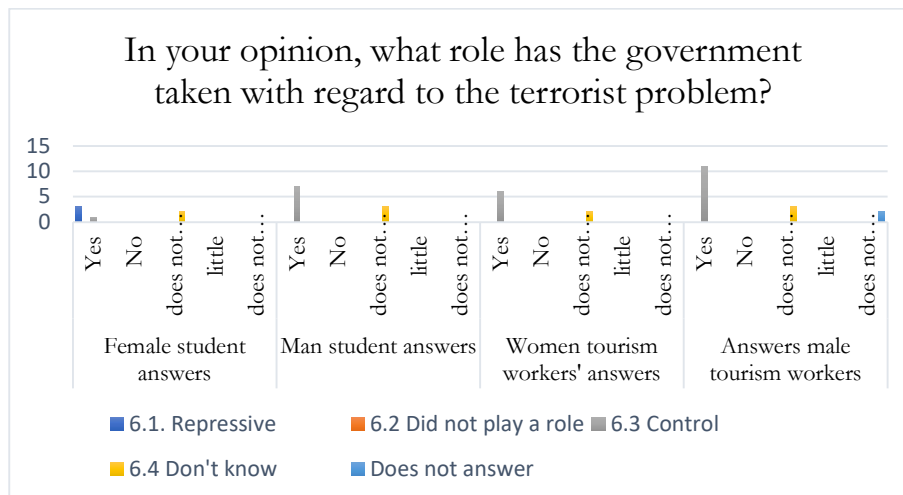


Fig. 7. Respondents' answers on the perception of the role played by local government vis-à-vis the terrorist phenomenon.

6. Concluding remarks.

Jihadist terrorism is the violent manifestation of a growing religious radicalization

involving a marginal part of Muslim society. Terrorism is the violent expression of an objective problem is the spread of the jihadist ideology; an ideology that moves on an extremely effective communal level and involves an important number of subjects that can represent a serious and concrete threat to security: it fuels the phenomenon of radicalization. In the long term, Kenya sees its competitiveness as a tourist destination compromised. It is observed that the number of tourists willing to travel is steadily decreasing; as a result, tourism operators are turning to other competing countries in the region with similar offerings, such as Tanzania.

In the final analysis, it is worth noting how Kenya is developing a strategy, also post-COVID-19, to develop responsible tourism with the active involvement of the local population, especially in the rural areas, (Bertolotti 2020) who are often in contact with Al-Shabaab militants to convey and promote a message and a concrete idea that the territory must be protected from an environmental perspective but also from the perspective of security from terrorism. The Kenyan Ministry of Tourism has put in place policies in tune with Vision 2030 to direct the sector to maximize the existing potential to improve the economic livelihoods of the increasingly active population.

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