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The political economy of violence in the Far North

What 800 Sahelians have to say

Cameroon National Report

***Perception study on the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism
in the border regions of the Sahel***

This research project has been carried out by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

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AN 'EPIC, UNUSUAL AND STRATEGIC STUDY'

This research project on perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism drivers in the cross-border regions of the Sahel has offered a unique opportunity to embark on a major and innovative study at the regional level regarding global issues such as armed violence, radicalization, jihadism and security. The project was undertaken without preconceptions and its multinational scope, through the study of frontier regions of countries in the Sahel, together with the decision to listen to the views and ideas of the region's own people and take account of their perceptions and representations, has contributed to the broad, generous and ambitious orientation of an exercise. In general, very little is known about how the populations most affected by armed violence, extremism and insecurity perceive and react to it. In fact, a dominant paradigm exists regarding these questions, which are generally seen from 'top-down' perspective by national and international institutions. These institutions opt for political, security, police and military responses to violent radicalism based on religion.

While perceptions and representations do not necessarily precisely reflect reality, they contribute towards conveying an idea of its depth, intensity, and texture: its sound, its tonality and its contrasts. Most often what is 'perceived' is a distortion, an exaggerated vision of what is, in fact, 'lived'. However, the characteristic distance between what is lived and what is perceived may also take an inverted form, with the latter offering an attenuated and filtered reconstruction of reality. The respondents express themselves, for the most part, in a sober manner in describing the misfortunes and the mortal dangers they have suffered. The responses of the 800 Sahelians who have been interviewed during this study reveal a practical rationality in the face of the challenges of radicalization, violence and insecurity, which is evinced by vulnerable individual actors whose circumstances are precarious and painful.

In addition to the difficulty and danger involved, readers of this report should be aware of the experimental nature of this enquiry, which was undertaken simultaneously in eight Sahelian countries. This wide area of research, studied in depth over a short period of time, has opened up ideas for action and reflection which have hitherto been disregarded or insufficiently considered. Thus, it has given access to fruitful lines of research and identified latent solidarity networks. It is agreed that this exploratory work should be furthered.

Over a period of between five and eight days, 59 researchers made round trips totalling some 24,000 kilometres, covering the frontier zones linking Senegal to Mauritania and Mali, the zones linking Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and those of the countries bordering on Lake Chad, namely Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon. A questionnaire was used to collect responses from 698 individuals in all, spread throughout these eight countries of the Sahel including, in descending order, 147 respondents in Mali (21 per cent of the regional sample); 120 in Nigeria (17 per cent); 100 in Niger (14 per cent); 88 in Mauritania (12 per cent); 74 in Senegal (10 per cent); 71 in Chad (10 per cent); 60 in Burkina Faso (8 per cent); and 38 in Cameroon (5 per cent). Supplementary in-depth interviews were carried out with more than 50 people during additional consultations.

Through these two stages of the inquiry process, the teams identified a pool of 80 key contacts who were subsequently invited to come to Abuja, Bamako, Dakar, N'Djamena, Niamey, Nouakchott, Ouagadougou and Yaoundé to compare and exchange their perceptions of the reasons for insecurity and violent extremism in their respective frontier zones. Interviews were also set up, to the extent this was possible, with those who sympathised with armed groups or with reformed group members. Lastly, national and international consultants were approached to produce case studies and conceptual analyses which were complementary.

The organisation of the research itself represented a substantial challenge. Problems arose from the recruitment of teams to administer the questionnaire (these were composed of teams of researchers and university personnel made up entirely of nationals from the countries concerned) as well as from the simultaneous initiation of research on the ground in all eight countries. Other issues were associated with the necessity to follow a protocol in relation to security; communication covering the entire group of researchers dispersed throughout the cross-border conflict zones; and the organisation of the transfer of the contact group of key respondents to the various capitals. Plans needed to be constantly revised to react to circumstances and various constraints. These included administrative considerations (permits and co-ordination with the authorities); political concerns (the post-election situation in Nigeria and the transition in Burkina Faso); security scares (Boko Haram attacks in the region of Lake Chad); financial difficulties (failed transfers, budget overruns); technical problems (electricity and internet failures); and even climatic and cultural obstructions (the rainy season and the onset of the month of Ramadan).

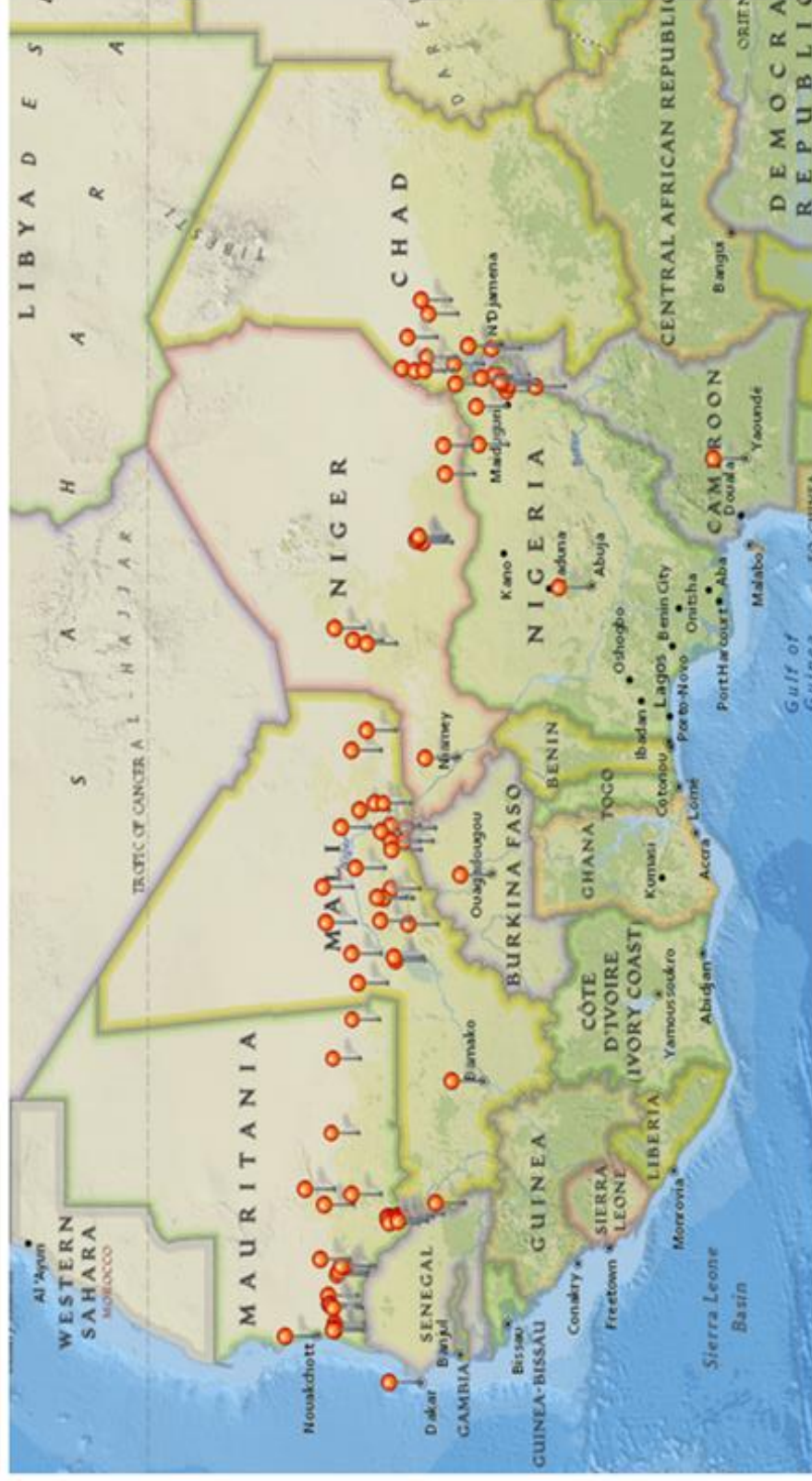
The decision to work with university researchers and interviewers of local nationality rather than with external consultants was a risk, but one which has paid off. The goal was to construct a team which had the most appropriate profile for a method of enquiry which was adapted to local realities; was able to suggest the best places to go; was able to select the most able interviewers; and, finally, was able to bring insight to the analysis of the results. The common methodology across the survey was the outcome of interactions with the eight national teams and thus emerged from a collective effort. The quality of the data and the analysis which has come out of the responses of the 800 Sahelian respondents is opening up a range of options for mitigating their vulnerability to violent extremism and enhancing the resilience of the populations concerned. The study has deliberately ignored the conventional taxonomy of the armed groups and the interpretation of religious motivation which is typical of political science approaches in order to concentrate on a conceptual framework which stays closer to the perceptions of the inhabitants of the cross-border regions themselves.

In the majority of the areas covered, however, the populations received the researchers favourably and opened up to them without any major problems throughout the entire critical phase: the research on the ground. In Mali, the locals were particularly appreciative of the courage of the researchers who had come to see them where they lived and had posed direct questions, going straight to the essential issues. In Nigeria, the teams were all the more favourably received because their respondents were conscious that no-one representing the authorities had ever seen fit to concern themselves with what the population had been suffering for years, since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurrection. It should be noted that, in certain sensitive cross-border areas, unusually, none of the teams were escorted by security forces or police during their work on the ground, despite the fact that the study had laid down no procedure on this issue. However, the teams were, themselves, supposed to announce their arrival and make contact with the public authorities and with the military command in the districts they proposed to visit. Both of these elements formed an important part of the approach since, in the view of those involved in the study it had an impact on the way the neutrality of the study was perceived by local inhabitants. Thankfully, no researcher was worried, even though they were at times in close proximity of security threats.

Amidst the observations, the results and the suggested avenues for further reflection, there are facts which might seem, at first sight, to be embarrassing, since it is evident that the perceptions of the individuals interviewed prioritise some striking truths which demand to be considered. However, within what the responders have to say and their ideas for change there is, above all, a demand for the reinforcement of the state, and a desire for normality and security indissociable from a

citizenship which is in the course of formation. The stories of the respondents, though sometimes tragic, also have the merit of not permitting the future to be previewed in a too deeply apocalyptic a manner. Those involved in this study have refused to analyse the situation using fear as an explanatory principle (the heuristic of fear), although by the end of this research it had become clear that radicalization is a durable phenomenon to which people will have to adapt and respond. At the very moment when the international community finds itself entrenched in a second “war against terror” in the Middle East, the questions dealt with here are not merely of local concern.

Burkina Faso - 6 interviews 1'500 km – 5 days	Cameroon - 6 interviews 1'500 km – 8 days	Mali - 8 interviews 8'000 km – 12 days	Mauritania - 6 interviews 2'500 km – 7 days
60 interviews Villages around 6 towns Languages: Fulfulde	38 interviews Villages around 6 towns Languages: Mandara, Fulfulde, Chad Arabic, Kotoko, Kanuri, Gamargu, Podoko, Matal, Mafa & Kapsiki	147 interviews Villages around 15 towns Languages: Fulfulde, Tamasheq, Hassaniya Arabic	88 interviews Villages around 16 towns Languages: Pulaar, Hassaniya Arabic, Wolof



Niger - 9 interviews 4'000 km – 6 days 100 interviews	Nigeria - 9 interviews 1'600 km – 7 days 120 interviews	Senegal - 6 interviews 2'800 km – 6 days 74 interviews	Chad - 9 interviews 2'000 km – 6 days 71 interviews	8 capital cities 8 focus groups 80 community leaders
Villages around 12 towns Languages: Hausa, Tamasheq, Fulfulde	Villages around 8 towns Languages: English, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo	20 villages Languages: Wolof, French	Villages around towns Languages: Chad Arabic, Kanembu, Buduma	

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SUMMARY

Study areas

Focusing on the Far North Region, the part of Cameroon most exposed to insecurity and violent extremism, this study emphasises the voices of people living in three departments near Lake Chad: Mayo-Sava, Mayo-Tsanaga and Logone-et-Chari. These departments provide examples of inter-ethnic and sectarian tensions, fragile security, and cross-border social and economic dynamics. Reporting on perceptions in Cameroon brings with it the challenge of explaining historical trends and contemporary variables which are associated with understanding the mechanisms of radicalization.

State and citizenship, religion and identity

Ethnic diversity in Cameroon's Far North is polarized around two groups, the Fulani and the Kirdi. Society is also affected by the impact of religion from the second wave of Islamisation in the 19th century and during colonialism. Regarding "its identity dimension, religion in Cameroon remains a matter of ethnicity"¹. National identity is coping with a structural crisis. The post-colonial order created a structure of territorial fragmentation, especially between the north and south, as well as solidarity mechanisms which are the basis for a patronage system managed by the elite. The positioning of the elite, partisan competition, election issues and access to state finance have all weakened the region's cohesion, which is marked by cyclical ethnic hegemony. For two centuries, the instruments of political power have passed from hand to hand, "wandering from one ethnic group to another, according to the influence of Islam and the state"².

Inter-communal and cross-border relations

There is a tangle of ethnic groups and cross-border nationalities across the region and this relativizes the significance of the border. The stigmatization of the Kanuri community, suspected of complicity with Boko Haram, is indicative of the climate of inter-ethnic tensions prevailing in the area. The Far North, the region most exposed to violence, has been largely abandoned by public policy. Already weakened by bad governance, the presence of Boko Haram has increased the population's precariousness as prices for basic products have soared with the violence. The economic and financial dimensions of the border are most noticeable around Lake Chad. The need for a certain degree of ungovernability against a background of generalized insecurity (crime and trafficking) is not surprising given the desire of some local people to hold onto the profits of the various transactions.

Radicalization: clues and process

Although radicalism is perceived as being primarily guided by economic interests, it is part of a crisis in religious socialization. Itinerant religious training (in the form of the "Mahajirs") is highlighted as a critical dimension of this crisis. Places where religious knowledge is transmitted are poorly controlled and have become a disciplinary framework for humiliation and training in violence which is likely to fuel Boko Haram. In addition, the disintegration of frameworks which are designed to foster integration have resulted in a crisis in societal relations and the development of radicalization. Social constraint, organised by gender and generation, becomes unbearable in a context of cronyism. Finally, communities are squeezed between two mechanisms of violence which fuel radicalization: the terror of Boko Haram and the violence of the state's response to an exceptional situation. Both promote religious tensions whose intensification is dangerous.

¹ Maud Lasseur, "Cameroun: les nouveaux territoires de Dieu", *Afrique contemporaine*, 215, 2005/3, p.95.

² Antoine Socpa, "L'hégémonie ethnique cyclique au nord Cameroun", *Afrique et développement*, Vol XXIV (1 and 2), p.57.

The role of women and young people

Young people and women are traditionally considered 'social juniors'. Many young people, in situations of social distress and humiliation, have joined radical groups and the community offers no way for them to return. Women are, at the same time, objects of reward for extremist engagement, victims and producers of violence.

Avenues for reflection

Taking up the challenge of countering radicalization requires the building of a comprehensive response. The study suggests that it could be structured around three areas:

- Empower exposed zones: provide needed institutions for the border region around Lake Chad;
- Develop a national strategy to counter radicalization based on a comprehensive approach (i.e., security, governance and development);
- Build an argument against radical discourse which is ethnically neutral and free of ideology.

INTRODUCTION

From Maroua, six interviewers travelled for eight days in an almost 1,500km round trip conducting 38 interviews in 18 towns on the Cameroonian border with Nigeria, Chad and Niger. Ten resource people identified by this survey were then invited to Yaoundé to meet and exchange perceptions of the insecurity and violent extremism in their respective border areas. Analysis of the results presented in this report is supported by information collected in the field and from contributions by national experts on the subject.

The month of July 2015 marked a turning point in Islamist armed violence in Cameroon. On 12 July, a suicide bomb exploded in Fotokol, a border town facing the Nigerian city of Gamburu which had already lost around 100 of its inhabitants in an attack on the 4th February 2015. Ten days later, in Maroua – the regional capital of the Far North and headquarters of the Cameroonian army's operation against the radical Islamist group Boko Haram – two suicide bombs exploded in the fabric market and immediate vicinity: 13 people died and 32 were wounded. President Paul Biya denounced the cowardly, odious nature³ of these unprecedented acts. The government banned the full veil and begging/selling by children, ordered the search of vehicles, the closure of areas and the strengthening of surveillance, carried out police raids and made a number of arrests. On 26 July, the Pont Vert district in Maroua, which is mainly populated by Muslims, was hit by another bombing near a bar (with 20 people killed and nearly 80 injured⁴) and fear gripped the country. Cameroon has struggled to adapt its previous focus on protecting vital security interests to one of “profiling” terrorists organized in a shifting base of local jihadists, covert sympathizers by day, and fighters by night – a base that is virtually invisible and highly porous⁵. The violence was a surprise: Cameroon had never been subject to such attacks, although the country had been accused (by Nigerians) of serving as a rear base and secure zone for Boko Haram to refuel in terms of weapons and food⁶.

To appreciate perceptions of insecurity and violent extremism in the time of Boko Haram, the roots of radicalism must be examined. It is common to highlight the underdevelopment of Cameroon's Far North. Yet, few studies have focused on the socio-religious side of the radicalization process – the political dynamics incorporating social positions and the dividing lines between the elites, the methods of recruitment of these elites, and the role of these elites in the repetition of violence. Nor are the sources of the political economy which produce insecurity and radicalization fully considered in other reports. It is for this reason that this report takes account of the deep complexity of relations between the state and society in Cameroon.

Mayo-Tsanaga

In Mayo-Tsanaga, the situation is defined by sensitive inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations, hostage-taking and the significant activity of self-defence groups. The objective of the study was to observe the relationship between Christians and Muslims following the violence in this area between December 2014 and February 2015,⁷ and to analyse the risk of sectarian conflict. Mayo-Tsanaga is an

³ Press release from Paul Biya, signed by the General Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 13 July 2015.

⁴ “Le Cameroun meurtri par un nouvel attentat-suicide portant la marque de Boko Haram”, *Libération*, 26 July 2015.

⁵ Description by Guillaume Larabi of terrorism in the Sahel (in, *Principes de contre-rébellion au Sahel. Vers une synergie régionale?* Graduating dissertation, École supérieure internationale de guerre, Yaoundé, July 2015).

⁶ See, in particular, www.naij.com/60843.html which reports that “Nigeria's President now blames Cameroon for Boko Haram insurgency”.

⁷ Christian churches and villages (like Badjwel) have been destroyed, with many people displaced and refugees registered. Calm has now started to return and people have also started returning to the area. In the mid-term, this could have the consequence of increasing the risk of generating land conflicts and inter-faith reprisals.

area which is located on the opposite site of the border to the Nigerian towns of Mubi and Kerawa. This location makes trade and smuggling the most important activities, alongside the growing of cotton and subsistence farming. With a high population density, this zone is mostly populated by Mafa, Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri communities. The localities of Mabass, Bourha, Koza and Mokolo were selected for analysis for this study.

Mayo-Sava

The decision to analyse the Mayo-Sava department was due to predominance of Islam, with its people maintaining important family ties with Nigeria. Many of its young people have joined Boko Haram. Considering this area allows for an analysis of the perceptions in the local Muslim community about the extremist movements and their effects on inter-ethnic relations and the radicalization of the young. Located on the slopes of the Mandara Mountains, the Mayo-Sava department is a major point of transit between Cameroon and Nigeria, through the border post of Banki (Amchidé, on the Cameroon side) which is close to one of Boko Haram's strongholds in Nigeria (i.e., the west side of the Mandara Mountains and the Sambisa forest). This is one of the main settlements of Cameroon's Kanuri community, who are generally stigmatized. The Kanuri cohabit with the Mandara, Hausa and Fulani. Studying this area also allows for the consideration of the intra-ethnic tensions among the Kanuri, whose historic relationship to Islam is in crisis due to Boko Haram extremism. The towns of Mora, Kolofata and Amchidé were selected for analysis as part of this study.

Logone-et-Chari

Logone-et-Chari department has some similar features to Mayo-Sava. However, its uniqueness lies in its long history of sectarian violence between the Chadian Arabs and Kotoko, which had lasting political and social effects. Many of its young people have also joined Boko Haram. This area is close to the borders with both Chad and Nigeria where a war economy of sorts has formed. Its people, predominantly Muslim, are highly vulnerable to violence coming from Nigeria. Boko Haram has attacked Arab villages on Lake Chad because of the mobilization of Arab elites in support of the national war effort. Inter-ethnic relations between the Kanuri and the Chadian Arabs have suffered as a result. The other ethnic groups are essentially Kotoko, Mbororo, Fulani, Musgum and Hausa who make a living from trade and smuggling, agriculture, livestock and fishing. In addition, the department has the reputation of being weakly administered (due, in particular, to its lake location). A tradition of local resistance to the state has meant that the establishment of vigilante groups has rarely flourished. This is also an area marked by the strong predominance of illicit trafficking, criminal gangs, and the circulation of small arms. Cases of statelessness and multiple nationalities have been reported. In addition to the town of Maroua in the Diamaré department, the following areas were included in the study: Mora, Kolofata, Koza, Mozogo, Moskota, Nguétchéwé, Kuyapé, Kousséri, Makary and Darack.

The analysis of this unprecedented collection of perceptions from the population in the border areas of the Sahel who are most vulnerable to, and most concerned with, security is structured around four considerations which are indicative of the complexity of the subject of the study. In this report, the perceptions are first placed in the context of the state and citizenship, religion and identity (Section I), before being examined in relation to inter-communal relations and cross-border issues (Section II). These two initial stages contribute to the understanding of the process of radicalisation and its measurement (Section III), before the report puts into perspective the part played by women and young people (Section IV). The report concludes with avenues for further reflection. While this report is based on the results and observations in the eight national reports within the international study, it is not to be regarded as a substitute for them.

STATE AND CITIZENSHIP, RELIGION AND IDENTITY

Points to remember:

- Ethnic diversity in Cameroon's Far North is polarized around two groups, the Fulani and the Kirdi. Society is also affected by the impact of religion from the second wave of Islamisation in the 19th century and during colonialism. Regarding "its identity dimension, religion in Cameroon remains a matter of ethnicity"⁸.
- In Cameroon, national identity is coping with a structural crisis. The post-colonial order created a structure of territorial fragmentation, especially between the north and south, as well as solidarity mechanisms which are the basis for a patronage system managed by the elite.
- The positioning of the elite, partisan competition, election issues and access to state finance have all weakened the region's cohesion, which is marked by cyclical ethnic hegemony. For two centuries, the instruments of political power have passed from hand to hand, "wandering from one ethnic group to another, according to the influence of Islam and the state"⁹.

"But look at the consequences of the Kokoto-Arab conflict. Each community has pulled back. Friendships have been scattered. We stop at hello." (Comment by the head of an NGO based in Kousséri)

1. The state, its founding heterogeneity and the crisis in national identity

A former German colony, Cameroon's territory was dismantled in 1919 with Germany's defeat in the First World War. Its western part passed to the British whereas the eastern part was put under French rule. The colonial powers had given financial support to the country. In the post-colonial order, different actors sought to control the remains of this financial support through social struggle, or even open conflict. These struggles initially concerned the drawing of borders – artificial ones – which have long hampered national and inter-state cohesion. In this sense, the case of northern Cameroon is striking. In the 1961 referendum held under the auspices of the United Nations, the southern British-controlled territory opted for attachment to Cameroon as part of a federation. Yet, to the displeasure of authorities in Yaoundé, northern Cameroon pronounced itself overwhelmingly

IDENTITY IN CAMEROON

In the hollow of the Gulf of Guinea, at the junction between West and Central Africa, Cameroon is considered a 'paradise for ethnologists' where it is still possible to undertake the primordial quest of anthropology, that of comparing human societies.

Ethnic groups: Of the country's 250, the main ones are: Bété-Fang (Eton, Ewondo/Bene, Boulou, Fong, Manguissa): 19.6%; Bamiléké-Bamoun: 18.5%; Douala-Loundou-Bassa: 14.7%; Fulani: 9.6%; Tikars: 7.4%; Mandaras: 5.7%; Makas: 4.9%; Chambas: 2.4%; Mboums: 1.3%; Hausa: 1.2%.

Religions: Catholics: 34.7%; Traditional religions: 26%; Muslims: 20%; Protestants: 17.5%

*Sources : Mohamad Z. Yakan, "African peoples and nations by country: Cameroon", in *Almanac of African Peoples & Nations*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), pp.37-39; Jean-Claude Barbier, "Les groupes ethniques et les langues", in *Encyclopédie de la République unie du Cameroun*, (Douala: NEA, 1981), p.239.*

⁸ Maud Lasseur, "Cameroun: les nouveaux territoires de Dieu", *Afrique contemporaine*, 215, 2005/3, p.95.

⁹ Antoine Socpa, "L'hégémonie ethnique cyclique au nord Cameroun", *Afrique et développement*, Vol XXIV (1 and 2), p.57.

in favour of union with the Nigerian Federation. The authorities formally protested and accused Britain – in a white paper¹⁰ – of organising electoral irregularities and violating the Trusteeship Agreement¹¹. The conflict shifted to the issue of the maritime border and the border with the Lake Chad area where the determination of sovereignty involves some 33 locations¹². The tangle of extremely fluid ethnic and nationalist issues in this area is sometimes settled by international law¹³. Historically, the borders between Cameroon and Nigeria are primarily administrative boundaries.

Cameroon's history produced the framework for an authoritarian political system¹⁴. Several dynamics intersect. On the one hand, the conditions of independence (for which some groups paid a heavy price¹⁵) undermine national cohesion and call for authoritarian investment into creating a national identity. On the other hand, the violence of pacification which followed and served to neutralize the pockets of nationalist resistance remains a source of trauma and shapes the perception of the state¹⁶. There are many divisions across Cameroonian society which worsen the inadequate sharing of any sense of common national destiny. Irredentist claims¹⁷ fuel the acceleration of a process built on long procrastination, particularly concerning the transfer of resources and skills. And so, territorial divisions and cleavages, as well as inequalities and disparities of all kinds, are perpetuated.

A political territory fractured between the north and south

One of the crucial features of Cameroonian politics is the north-south divide. The successive passage of power from north to south has been accompanied by tribal involvement in the distribution of state monies (control is not permanently sustainable in such an ethnically diverse context). The political elites of disadvantaged regions take advantage of the abandonment of their localities to ensure and perpetuate their own intermediary role between state power and the territories. Thus, is built a generalized system of cronyism, marked by the arbitrary grabbing of state resources under the hegemony of a few families. In the north, 'Wadjo' identity (a Fulani term for 'Northerner', as opposed to 'Gadamayo' for someone from the south) creates, in the same way as other such identities, community interests which carry the obligation of solidarity. These interests are, in part, objectively determined by an unequal socio-economic structure, internalized by the people and ritualized in behaviour towards the grabbing of benefits, especially power, wealth and honours.

¹⁰ Republic of Cameroon, *La position de la République du Cameroun à la suite du plébiscite des 11 et 12 Février 1961 dans la partie septentrionale du territoire du Cameroun sous administration du Royaume Uni de Grande Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord*, Paris, 1961.

¹¹ Anicet Oloa Zombo describes this in *L'affaire du Cameroun septentrionale. Cameroun/Royaume-Uni*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

¹² In particular, see Mohammed Salah, "La Commission mixte Cameroun/Nigéria, un mécanisme original de règlement des différents interétatiques", *Annuaire français de droit international*, 51, (2005), pp.162-184.

¹³ The decision by the International Criminal Court on 10 October 2002 is a compromise between the confirmation of Cameroon's sovereignty on the peninsula and the taking into account of the rights of the Nigerian people of the peninsula with a delay of 60 days. It authorizes Nigeria to maintain its civil administration and a police force necessary to maintain public order for a period of two years in a zone representing around one-fourth of this territory and sheltering Nigerian villages. Cameroon was invited to apply a special transitory regime to Nigerians living in Bakassi, giving exemption for five years to customs and immigration laws. The Greentree Accords (New York) confirmed this special regime.

¹⁴ Bourmaud D., "Aux sources de l'autoritarisme en Afrique: des idéologies et des hommes", *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 13, (2006), pp.625- 641.

¹⁵ Mbembe A., "Mémoire historique et action politique", in Bayart J.P., Mbembe A., Toulabor C., *Le politique par le bas en Afrique noire*, (Paris: Karthala, 2008), pp.129- 190.

¹⁶ Bayart J.F., *L'État au Cameroun*, (Paris: FNSP, 1985).

¹⁷ This concerns movements launched by the Southern Cameroon National Council in the English-speaking part of the country and the Movement for the Liberation of the Mandara Mountains (later, Movement for the Liberation of the Cameroon People) in the north.

The divide between the south and the structurally disadvantaged¹⁸ north (a composite category comprising three regions: the Far North, North and Adamawa) is one of the sources of of Amadou Ahidjo's political power. He has awarded a number of strategic positions – administrative, political and military – to northern nationals. Economically, through various incentives (including the granting of import licenses), he has promoted the creation of a business and trade middle class, mainly Fulani. This was previously dominated by the Kanuri and Hausa.

Northern influence clearly declined with the arrival of Paul Biya in power and the hectic shift of power towards the 'Gadamayo'. This shift went hand in hand with an intensification of the north-south socio-economic and political divide.

2. Fragmentation of identity between religion and ethnic group: fluidity and contingency

A sense of harmony among communities has been undermined by insecurity. Two-thirds of the respondents in this study feel that society is more divided than ever.

Islam as legitimizer for Muslim Fulani domination

In a society that is not "indifferent to gods and prophets"¹⁹, religion organises social life. The 19th century jihad led by Usman Dan Fodio brought a second wave of Islamization to the Fulani; it was a founding moment in this group's ethnic domination of northern Cameroon. From then on, the Fulani have stood beside the Kanuri, whose conversion began in the 11th century with the Kanem Empire. From the late 18th century, the rise of the Fulani was accompanied by a transition which corresponds somewhat to the passage from 'Arab' Islam, originating in eastern Sudan, to 'Berber' Islam. In this context, the ethnic factor is a political product and an explanatory variable which actually offers little clarification in relation to inter-ethnic tensions. Inter-ethnic clashes abound, with communities fighting "for a school, a pool of water or a voter registration card"²⁰. The many tribal clashes between Chadian Arabs and Kotoko in Logone-et-Chari, but also between Fulani and Kirdi, and between Fulani and Gbaya, have been largely instrumentalized by political elites since Independence. These conflicts are based mainly on the issue of socio-political and economic inequality²¹.

Sectarian tensions perpetuated by a neo-patrimonial state

It should be remembered that, during the colonial period, religious conflicts between Muslims, Christians and animists were instrumentalized by the Germans as a violent means to control the territory. With the Christianization of the pagan communities (after the 19th century jihad), which intensified with colonization (after the arrival of the Germans, 1899-1901), churches took a protecting stand in favour of some populations (mainly non-Muslims) against which slavery was still practiced. To establish colonial rule, it was necessary to counter the powerful religious leaders or *Lamibés* (traditional leaders; at that time, Fulani). This was done, in particular, by relying on other

¹⁸ Rogissart J., *Les problèmes du sous-développement du Nord-Cameroun. Étude sur le problème des voies de dégagement*, (Paris: Fondation nationale de science politique, 1962).

¹⁹ Max Weber, *La science comme vocation*, (Paris: Plon, 1959), cited by Micheline Milot in "Religion et intégrisme ou les paradoxes du désenchantement du monde", *Cahier de recherche sociologique*, 30, (1998), p.6.

²⁰ Antoine Socpa, "Le problème Arabes Chadian-Kotoko au Cameroun: Essai d'analyse rétrospective à partir des affrontements de janvier 1992", *The African anthropologist*, 9(1), (2002), pp.66-83.

²¹ Bah Thierno and Saïbou Issa highlight the same issues concerning Lake Chad ("Relations inter-ethniques, problématique de l'intégration nationale et de la sécurité aux abords sud du lac Tchad", in Paul Nchoji Nkwi and Francis Nyamjoh (eds.), *Equilibre régional et intégration nationale au Cameroun: leçons du passé et perspective d'avenir*, Monograph 1, pp.280-288).

Muslims. The Germans met fierce resistance from the animist populations (the Kirdi) until they left the region at the end of World War I. The French, however, preferred peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Kirdi (they appreciated the latter group as more devoted to work than the Fulani²²). Only Mahdism²³ – a denomination with anti-colonial ambitions and opposed to the power of the *Lamibés* and the religious brotherhoods inspired by the marabouts – was fought by France. France also built on the Kirdi's diverse efforts to resist Islam. Between 1920 and 1930, the Kirdi were the prime targets of Christian missions in the context of Muslim-Christian-animist polarization designed for mutual subjugation²⁴. Maud Lasseur shows that the evangelization of the region was based on the will to contain Muslim expansion. This gave northern churches a “conquering and proselytizing mentality”²⁵ and created very deep divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

France promoted an education system incorporating a small element of Arabic. The colonials' “ethnic choice” of the Fulani (but also the Kotoko) had serious consequences: the first President after Independence, Ahmadou Ahidjo, himself of Fulani origin, instigated “a policy of favoritism for the Foulbé in professional promotions, recruitment in administrative exams, commercial activities [which] induced a wave of forced or voluntary Islamization among many Kirdi elites”²⁶. He also favoured the Kotoko, for example, Ousmane Mey²⁷, whose descendants remain in government. Symbolic violence was also reflected in the fact that nationals of other communities (including Tupuri and Moundang²⁸) have sometimes had to deny their own identity and adopt Fulani names in order to fit into quotas of administrative examinations or take advantage of economic and fiscal incentives.

THE PRESIDENTS OF CAMEROON

1. **Ahmadou Ahidjo**: Born on the 24th August 1924 in Garoua in the North into a Muslim Fulani family. He became Head of State in 1960 and retired in 1982, officially due to his health, ceding power to his constitutional heir, Paul Biya. After the coup attempt of the 6th April 1984 which was attributed to him, Ahidjo was forced into exile. He died in Dakar on 30 November 1989.

2. **Paul Biya**: Born on the 13th February 1933 in Mvomeka'a in the South into a Catholic family of the Boulou people. He became Head of State, following the resignation of Ahmadou Ahidjo, on the 6th November 1982 and is still President.

Ahidjo's withdrawal from politics translated into a denominational stampede (with the abandonment of Islam) and the emergence of the elites of other ethnic groups in the region against the Fulani. A conservative, proselytizing, even radical, Christianity rose. Ethnic communities, like the Musgum, turned inward and to their religion as one respondent commented:

“The Musgum, because they are Christians, when you become Muslim, they chase you out of the village.”

Having begun, the decline of hegemony intensified with the failed coup on 6 April 1984 against Paul Biya which was attributed to the Fulani political and military elite. Chadian Arabs, long neglected in favour of the Kotoko, were promoted to high political and administrative functions, as were the Kirdi (i.e. the Tupuri branch of the Kirdi, like Dakolé Daïssala or Ayang Luc who replaced Bello Bouba Maïgari, a Fulani close to the former President, as Prime Minister). Suspicion lingered about the loyalty of northern citizens to the regime of Paul Biya. No doubt it was this suspicion which brought

²² Antoine Socpa, op cit., p.67.

²³ A movement (the Mahdia) founded by Mohamed Ahmad Ibn Abdallah (1844-1885) in Sudan in the second half of the 20th century calling for religious renewal based on morality and justice.

²⁴ Jean Marc Ela, *L'Afrique des villages*, (Paris: Karthala, 1982).

²⁵ Maud Lasseur, idem.

²⁶ Idem, p.71.

²⁷ Friend and confidant of Ahidjo, former Governor of the North.

²⁸ Symbolic violence is basically a quest for self-esteem (Kees Schilder, *Quest for self esteem. State, Islam and the Mundang ethnicity in Northern Cameroon*, Research series, African studies, (Leiden: 1994).

the Beti elite to put forward the idea of a “Northern plot to destabilize the regime”²⁹ with the complicity of France.

While it is true that Ahidjo’s power was not the power of the Fulani, nor is the power of Biya that of the Beti, hegemonic alliances – what the political scientist Jean-François Bayart calls “sociological constellations” – were increasingly at work as the regions were, in turn, overvalued or neglected with cash positions and institutional sinecures redistributed in the process. This tribal prism came from the colonial polarization of political identities against the backdrop of a policy of regional balance, as illustrated in a 1970 Presidential campaign speech by Amadou Ahidjo: “Equilibrium between ethnic groups and regions to the disadvantage of none; equilibrium in social justice so that divisions based on wealth do not succeed tribal divisions; equilibrium between cities and rural areas, agriculture and industry, manual workers and civil servants, so that economic development is made with national solidarity; equilibrium between adults and youth, between the past and the future”. All this constitutes the basis for an extensive and devastating cronyism which permanently compromises the correct functioning of the country’s institutions.

²⁹ This is the case in the declaration of the elite of the Lékié (a region in the centre) which launched a much criticized appeal against “the accomplices of Boko Haram, mainly in the Northern regions”.

INTER-COMMUNAL AND CROSS-BORDER DYNAMICS

Points to remember:

- There is a tangle of ethnic groups and cross-border nationalities across the region and this relativizes the significance of the border. The stigmatization of the Kanuri community, suspected of complicity with Boko Haram, is indicative of the climate of inter-ethnic tensions prevailing in the area.
- The Far North, the region most exposed to violence, has been largely abandoned by public policy. Already weakened by bad governance, the presence of Boko Haram has increased the population's precariousness as prices for basic products have soared with the violence.
- The economic and financial dimensions of the border are most noticeable around Lake Chad. The need for a certain degree of ungovernability against a background of generalized insecurity (crime and trafficking) is not surprising given the desire of some local people to hold onto the profits of the various transactions.

"I'm from Wandala. So, from a Mandara family. To me, the Mandara of Cameroon and Nigeria are the same people... For now, I am comfortable in Cameroon. It seems that even the Chief of the Kerawa has left Cameroon to go to Nigeria. I am both Cameroonian, Nigerian and Mandara. I have Nigerian papers. If things go wrong, then I will get Cameroonian papers for my children". (Comment by the traditional ruler of Kerawa)

"Is there security? No, we are not safe. Today, if someone tells you that there is security, he is lying to you". (Comment by a motorcycle driver, Kousséri)

1. The tangle of cross-border ethnic groups and nationalities

1.1 The cross-border space: fluid and ever changing

Violent extremism grows in a specific territorial framework: the space where states are powerless to assert complete and exclusive control over the territory. This powerlessness derives from the geophysical characteristics of the borders concerned, including the fact that the boundaries on the ground are, in places, particularly random. This explains why the fluidity of cross-border trade also promotes the fluidity of violent extremist activities.

"The Mayo-Sava is largely open to Nigeria. Amchidé belongs to the district of Kolofata, and Banki is part of Borno State in Nigeria. Amchidé is commonly called Banki". (Comment by a respondent, Mora)

"Chad says that the whole river belongs to it. I heard a story that said that 10 metres along the river is for Chad and the rest is for Cameroon. But no, we do not have problems with them". (Comment by a boatman on Lake Chad, Kousséri)

The border is more idea than reality. It is something people live with as a surprise or an obstruction, even as an obstacle to their development, at least in part. This representation concerns the cross-border populations transferred after 1961 from Cameroon to Nigeria (following the self-determination referendum in British Cameroon); the populations moving across borders because of

the transfer of authority between Cameroon and Nigeria (following the judgment of the International Court of Justice in the so-called Bakassi case); and migrant populations (refugees, nomads). Different mutations in territorial status have had an impact on human situations in which frustrations about identity have crystallized, and on the temptation to multi-membership, which is a reality for many people.

The following comments reflect this fluidity in nationality:

“[In Djambal Bahr], there are children who were born here... in the days, before Independence. Like us. We have Cameroon birth certificates, Cameroonian nationality, everything! And those who came after Independence, are new. (...) Someone who has his birth certificate here takes the card [identity] here. Someone who has his birth certificate on the other side goes there to get his identity card. But to cross here, there is no problem. You leave, you come back ... Even us, we go, we come, like anybody else. For that, there is no problem”. (Comment by a fisherman, Logone-et-Chari)

This situation poses a problem for the states in relation to controlling the people on their territory: nationals, foreigners, residents, refugees, displaced people, cross-border people, pastoralists following their herds, caravan traders and other cross-border middlemen. The human flow makes it hard to track down extremists. It is clear there is a confrontation between legal, territorial, state borders v. borders which are historic or traditional, or which relate to sociological factors or ethnic identity. It's as if old solidarities, affinities and allegiances, buried – but not destroyed – under the domination of modernizing constructions are having their brutal revenge.

The idea of the ‘border-region’ is better suited to the socio-political reality of the territories considered in this study, for fluidity is one of their main features. This idea could guide a new approach given the failure of all neighbouring states to ensure the security of their common borders, which abandons large sections of territory to fall prey to violent groups.

1.2 Ethnic mistrust and stigmatization

While the government receives gestures of support from the ‘driving forces of the nation’ which flood it and are almost daily propagated by the pro-government daily *Cameroon Tribune*, some denounce the clandestine destabilization of the ‘haven of peace’ that is Cameroon. As Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle analyses, “in times of crisis [...], such theories draw on the well of available enemies and help explain, anticipate and reduce uncertainty. They also help prevent reflection, and any action over long months, about what is happening in the Far North [...] The growth in recruitment of young Cameroonians, the absence of the state and the mistrust of its few agents who are there, the illegitimacy of the elites have all, up to now, passed in silence in any commentary about the exceptional violence in the territory”³⁰.

The majority of respondents in the study (86.8%) feel that radicalism attracts a particular category of the population and that one must be particularly wary of certain ethnic groups. The Kanuri community is at the forefront of remarks, although many refused to comment. For example, an official from Kerawa said:

“If I were Kanuri, I would not escape like that. Nigeria’s problems come from the Kanuri, Mandara and Mafa and Gamargou (...) One morning, they just started killing

³⁰ Marie Emmanuelle Pommerolle, “Les violences dans l’Extrême-nord du Cameroun: le complot comme outil d’interprétation et de luttes politiques”, Dossier conjonctures, *Politique africaine*, to be published.

people. They killed many people ... It was the Kanuri who started killing people. At first, it was the Kanuri... If I go back there, I will not accept that foreigners come to the village, like the Kanuri and others... They have no land with us. Even before that, the Kanuri lived on the Cameroon Kerawa side. They moved in with us to trade."

This suspicion is particularly present among Chadian Arabs. A traditional chief of this community, met in Mora, explained it by going back to the days of the road-cutters (gangsters who specialised in robbing vehicles) who were identified as Kanuri:

"They are all bad. If they are not bad, would they kidnap the wife of Amadou Ali and His Majesty the Sultan of Kolofata?" In relation to the possibility of an inter-ethnic dialogue to ease tensions, he added, *"Who will agree to go to a meeting to be bombed...? Only Kanuri are in the ranks of Boko. It must be said that they are the Boko Haram."*

The traditional Chief, however, recognised that tensions are aggravated by the atrocities of the Islamic sect Boko Haram. He maintained that his Kanuri friend from Banki was murdered because he was close to a Chadian Arab:

"They killed him because of our friendship. This carpet on which we are seated, it was he who gave it to me. He was a great trader. They cut his throat. He was killed just because he was weaving ties of friendship with a Chadian Arab. He was a respected and respectable man. Now, if I tell you that I trust a Kanuri, it would be a lie."

Returning to the enlistment of Cameroonians in the Islamic sect, a few Kanuri respondents acknowledged that their community is strongly represented in the Islamic sect.

"It started in Maiduguri, Nigeria. That's what caused this. At the time of Rabah, there, it was the Arabs who caused this, because Rabah was a Chadian Arab. Now, again, Mahamat Youssouf is a Hausa. He collaborated with the Kanuri and enlisted all of them. It was a Hausa who started and took the Kanuri". (Comment by the Chief of Magdémé)

The Kanuri community, feeling stigmatized, has increasingly turned inward. Accusations are also leveled against elites of Kanuri origin, like Deputy Prime Minister Amadou Ali³¹. Indeed, some media have called the kidnapping of his wife a diversionary tactic. If, in Mayo-Sava department, the Kanuri are considered to be the main supporters of Boko Haram, in Logone-et-Chari, they have an ally:

"Initially, it was the Kanuri who were fighting, for the cause of Islam, they said. They got rich from it. Now, the Gamargou have followed in the footsteps of the Kanuri". (Comment by a Chadian Arab respondent)

Some Kanuri even conceal their origins, as this respondent from Mora noted:

"You find a Kanuri, you ask him, and he will tell you he is not Kanuri. He will tell you he's Mandara. But one can identify them from their scars. Whether they are Moura, Vamé, Mandara Kanuri or Musgum, except for the Bourza."

³¹ In the Mayo-Sava department, accusations have also been made by his main rival, the President of the National Assembly – Cavaye Yeguie Djibril – who has called the northern elites accomplices of Boko Haram.

Inter-ethnic relations between Chadian Arabs and Kanuri risk permanent tensions, as this respondent in Kousséri insisted:

“Even if Boko Haram ends, this problem will remain a problem between the Borno and Arabs. Because the Arabs are really involved. They also say that Arabs were involved in arms trafficking. This war between the Arabs and Kanuri will be serious.”

The little sociological relevance of the border is important to understanding the specifics of security.

2. The Far North, that sad border

“Our village doesn’t have electricity, so we cannot keep up with the news to better understand what we should do. Often, we cannot get the Cameroonian stations, only those in Nigeria and that information is in Hausa”. (Comment by a displaced man from Mozogo)

2.1 A structural abandonment by public policies

The region is, in itself, indicative of the north-south divide due to the profound lack of basic social services. The Far North has the highest poverty rate in the country (about 66%). Correlations can be established with the low level of education, a literacy rate estimated at 28.3% (one of the lowest in Cameroon); a primary school completion rate estimated at 46%; the fact that 53% of the country’s children who do not attend school are in the Far North region; the fact that the region had 93 kindergartens and 1,775 primary schools in 2008; the country’s lowest student/teacher ratio in primary and secondary education. In the area of health, the region has two regional hospitals, 28 health districts (of which six are not connected to the electricity grid), 243 sites designated for health services (although health centres have not yet been built on 40 of these sites). By comparison, these figures are well below the national average. In the regional report on progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, overcrowding and a lack of drinking water are listed as the main causes of bad health.

“We draw water from the ponds. In case of illness, we go to Kolofata hospital”. (Comment by a respondent)

“There are eight pumps but everything is spoiled. Nothing works. We dug wells.” (Comment by a male respondent, Magdémé)

Access to electricity is also below the national average.

“There has never been electricity here. In Logone-et-Chari, it is only in Waza and Kousséri”. (Comment by a respondent, Kousséri)

Indeed, urbanization is quite low in the region, with only 24% of the population living in urban areas³². Amenities are few. The road network is largely underdeveloped. It took the researchers involved in this study around 10 hours to get from Maroua to Kousséri – cities which are only 161 kilometres apart. The trip also remains dangerous because of raids by Boko Haram.

The situation in the Far North consequently indicates the fragility of public policy. This is expressed in terms of the difficulty of ensuring state authority over the whole region, especially at the borders,

³² UNDP, *Human Development Report: the role of human capital*, (2015), p.50.

and ensuring human security. This profound underdevelopment is the same as the vast majority of the Sahel, “a huge and dormant territory, coupled with the traditions of nomadism and cross-border dynamics that make governing it especially complicated”³³. This lack of development in the Far North raises broader questions about state redistribution schemes.

Relegation accentuated by terrorism

“Before the war, one could do so many things, but the war came and ended our activities. The majority of people traded rice, goods, since things came here first before leaving for Nigeria. The border was nothing. It was enough to cross a fence to be in Nigeria. This is not even a border, just two posts lined up like this. There is no river here, as in Kerawa”. (Comment by a respondent)

People, unhappy and desperate, express their demand for public action on socio-economic development which provides the basis of a sense of national cohesion weakened by violent extremism. As expressed by almost all of the respondents in the study (94.7%), the climate of insecurity has exacerbated the region’s second-class status. They argue that economic activity has been severely affected by Boko Haram’s insurgent activities. The cost of all essential commodities, imported largely from Nigeria, has exploded (in particular, sugar, rice, flour and fuel³⁴). Insecurity on the main roads and the Douala-Ndjamena route has made supplies rare and expensive, while prices for the main local products (cereals such as millet, peanuts, beans, soybean³⁵ and livestock) have collapsed. Although the area is primarily agricultural (involving nearly 80% of the population), many communities have abandoned their fields because of the attacks on villages and the burning of crops (as in Achigachia, Limani and Kerawa). Food security has deteriorated sharply. The cotton industry has also been affected as the Cameroon Cotton Development Corporation is still unable to buy the local crop from small rural producers³⁶. The local tourist economy – once flourishing thanks to Waza Natural Park – has lost all appeal since the region became classified as a high risk area which is not recommended for expatriates due to the increase in kidnappings.

The region’s objective reality of deep poverty is accompanied by an ‘ethos of victimhood’, that is, a strong sense of being neglected by the state. This meaning is conveyed in the discourse of northern elites and irredentist speeches which have intensified in recent months amid the resurgence of terrorism. Victimhood is also linked to certain members of the elite. For example, the *Lettre du continent* declares bluntly that “Cameroon sees its cohesion threatened by instability in the North. The idea that there is a connection between Boko Haram and some Muslim elites in the region seeking to destabilize the Biya regime is spreading”³⁷.

The arrests of officials accused of terrorist sympathies, both political (a Mayor) and traditional (Chiefs, including of Mayo-Tsanaga), and the refoulement of 2,300 Nigerian refugees after President Buhari’s visit to Cameroon in July 2015, are signs of the central government’s nervousness. This situation is made worse by the massive influx of tens of thousands of refugees into Cameroon, mainly installed in the Minawoa camp. The camp was established on 2nd July 2013, under the co-ordination of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It is predominantly made up of women, young people and Christians. The population of the host villages (notably, Gadala) has increased sixfold in two years. Besides the many displaced Cameroonians³⁸, the presence of Nigerian refugees brings

³³ Gérard-François Dumont, “La géopolitique des populations du Sahel”, *La Revue politique*, 7 April 2010.

³⁴ In some places, the price of smuggled fuel, known locally as “zoua-zoua”, went from 350CFA per litre to 1000CFA.

³⁵ The price of a 100kg sack of millet went from 1200CFA to 3000-4000CFA within a few months in the market of Kuyapé.

³⁶ Guillaume Vadot, *Coton et paysans: la production comme espace politique. Exploitation, encadrement et conflictualité sociale à l’Extrême Nord Cameroun*, dissertation for a Master’s degree in Political Science, University of Paris, 1 June 2012.

³⁷ See “Boko Haram accentue la fracture Nord-Sud”, *La lettre du continent* n° 689, 10 September 2014.

³⁸ The figure of 33,610 people was presented at the end of January 2015.

additional challenges: access to drinking water, quality of sanitation installations, the supply of wood for heating, food supplies, and the alleged presence of many members of the Islamic sect there to trade and/or recruit fighters. Given the state's increasingly limited investment, families have been largely called upon to exercise solidarity. Faith-based organisations are also involved in the care of refugees.

For the communities themselves, the social roots of radicalization are obvious and will intensify as long as the northern region receives no greater attention from the state.

2.2 Economic and security issues on the border

Lake Chad is the very definition of a transaction space, where the economic and financial issues associated with the border are most evident. The people who are active in this economic area live off the border as if it were a toll gate. The corruption of customs and police officers, denounced by the respondents in the study, is massive. The President of a fishermen's association subtly describes the little arrangements with the authorities:

"But here, if you fish and you do not bring him a little 'sauce', when there are problems, who will help you? [Laughs] That is the problem. (...) But if I see the best fish, myself, I take them on the motorbike. I leave a little 'sauce' at the Central [police department], I leave some for the brigade... and the Sultanate. And so on. That's how we do things here. But during a year, it is not enough. There is no regular fishing, here. For yourself, when you fish, if you catch some, you share with others."

The state's efforts to control the territory through its administrative staff may provoke local people and/or officials, who have built their livelihoods on the management of border flows, to use tricks to get around them – even using the highway robbers, whose collusion with Lamidos and local officials has been strongly suggested. The need for a certain level of ungovernability in a setting of generalized insecurity is not disconnected from the desire of some local people to maintain a range of sources of income. This area has a history of fostering criminal activity, which contributes to this situation³⁹. The regional border is saturated with criminal activity, whose perpetrators and victims are on both sides of the state borders and driven by solidarity and various social debts – be they farmers, fishermen, "fraudsters" (a local category of smugglers, designated as such by the people and considered to be a normal job), farmers, etc. A Chadian boatman met in Kousséri said these fraudsters are a source of insecurity on Lake Chad:

"We have no problems with the Chadian army. They control us all the time, but, like now, they have given us the green light, if they see you in the water, then they will shoot at you. Yes, there are fraudsters in the sector. But when there are fraudsters that go by river, they shoot."

Criminal acts include, in particular, the trafficking of small arms and ammunition. This is due to the chronic insecurity in the region and the wandering of armed groups along the borders – which are weakly held by state security. Cross-border poaching, the trafficking of medicine, illegal drugs, fuel, counterfeit products, stolen livestock and bank robbery can also be noted in the area. Added to this is the traffic in identity documents: around Lake Chad, fishermen are sometimes simultaneously holders of Cameroonian, Chadian and Nigerian papers. This traffic is accentuated during elections.

³⁹ Saibou Issa, "L'embuscade sur les routes des abords du Lac Tchad", *Politique Africaine*, n°94, June 2004; by the same author, *Les coupeurs de routes. Histoire du banditisme rural et transfrontalier dans le bassin du lac Tchad*, (Paris: Karthala, 2010); Nana Ngassam Rodrigue, "Insécurité aux frontières du Cameroun", *Études. Revue de culture contemporaine*, 3, (2014).

“Myself, I think Boko Haram has begun to attack Cameroon now, because before they could pass weapons through here from neighbouring countries – where, we do not exactly know. Some say that these weapons came from Sudan via Chad. So, Cameroon was just the transit area.” (Comment by a respondent, Kousséri)

The situation provides a catchment area for Islamic radicalism. With respect to this buffer area, it is necessary to highlight the role of the border economy in radicalization (in terms of political economy). With the attacks of Boko Haram, this largely smuggler economy (which compensates for the weak presence of the state in the region) has been shaken. This situation can be the basis for starting the process of radicalization, especially among the most affected categories of people⁴⁰. The state response has not taken into account recent changes in the phenomena of fundamentalism and armed violence.

⁴⁰ Three global industries, built on prohibition, are the fruits of the Sahel's abandon: drug trafficking, the transport of migrants by unscrupulous smugglers and the jihad, which correspond to the triptych of drug traffickers/smugglers/jihadists.

RADICALIZATION: CLUES AND PROCESS

Points to remember:

- Although radicalism is perceived as being primarily guided by economic interests, it is part of a crisis in religious socialization. Itinerant religious training (in the form of the “Mahajirs”) is highlighted as a critical dimension of this crisis. Places where religious knowledge is transmitted are poorly controlled. They have become a disciplinary framework for humiliation and training in violence which is likely to fuel Boko Haram.
- In addition, the disintegration of frameworks which are designed to foster integration have resulted in a crisis in societal relations and the development of radicalization. Social constraint, organised by gender and generation, becomes unbearable in a context of cronyism.
- Communities are squeezed between two mechanisms of violence which fuel radicalization: the terror of Boko Haram and the violence of the state’s response to an exceptional situation. Both promote religious tensions whose intensification is dangerous.

“All our families have children who have left to join Boko Haram or who will, sooner or later, be willing to do so (...) Children who leave, come back to kill their parents and their marabout, as an offering to God (...) The Quranic school is a very tough training where the children become nomads and accustomed to violence, which dehumanizes them and cuts them off from everything (...) The Imams dare not speak of Boko Haram in sermons because they know that all the border villages have BH cells. If they denounce the action of BH, they will be killed (...) Rather than focus on reintegration, we must stop the recruitment tsunami which is caused by the repression of the military (...) The soldiers... for some of them the priority is to protect themselves, while others want to kill (...) The Prefect, the presidential party organised meetings between the driving forces of the localities but people do not talk, they are afraid that among them there are BH supporters (...)” (Comments gathered during a group interview)

1. The crisis in religious socialization: itinerant marabouts and Quranic school

Although it is intensified by family poverty, the crisis in the north of Cameroon is primarily the result of extremist socialization driven mainly by itinerant marabouts. This perspective cannot be understood without integrating it into the broader discussion of the place of Quranic school in the Far North. A respondent in Magdémé says that Quranic school is usually attended by *“children whose parents cannot send them to the Western school or buy them notebooks”*. Historically, however, Quranic school was not a ‘second-choice’ education, for Islamic knowledge was highly valued – so much so that families chose to entrust their children to reputable marabouts, even if they lived far away.

Now, it is these Quranic schools (madrasas) and Islamic universities that allow one to learn reading, writing and religion by memorising the Quran. A Quranic school teacher of Chadian Arab origin, enrolled in her senior year in a French-Arab lycée in N’Djamena, explains her plans:

“If I get [the baccalaureate], I will enroll in the university law school [Kouliya Chariya]. Inshallah. In N’Djamena. Here, it does not exist.”

As the centre of religious socialization, Quranic school has become a disciplinary instrument of placement, in the sense suggested by Anne Cadoret⁴¹ who trains the elite from the “bottom” level of society. It is an institution which encompasses all dimensions of socialization, but which is also increasingly marginalized in Cameroon, where modern schooling has been accompanied by the abandonment of religious schooling (some communities, such as the Kanuri⁴², are exceptions). Yet in some areas, Quranic school is the only space for education, whether it is in the house of the marabout, in a local village or under the shade of a tree. Essentially private, it is very accessible and privileges oral learning: “Quranic education is tainted neither by the conditions of access, nor by selectivity, which is a major advantage compared to the conditions of access to ‘Western’ education. However, the low level of teachers and the knowledge acquired are often the other side of the conditions and modalities of teaching”⁴³. The Quranic school serves to ensure community cohesion. It is a powerful disciplinary tool for acquiring the values of submission and the sense of social hierarchy, especially when the teachers are women:

“We take them outside to memorise the Quran and they come back in afterwards. This has been done since 1960 and there are no problems. Boko Haram only wants to spoil the good name of Quranic school. [The teachings are based] solely on Islam. We do not come in between those things. We teach the child how to pray, how to respect his mother, his father and the Other”. (Comment by a teacher)



The marabout often has neither rank nor title – something which gives very free access to this position. He has widely set himself up as an independent merchant of salvation, highly regarded socially. In a context of high birth rate in (often polygamous) families, children are regularly entrusted to him, from the age of five and for several years. Some are itinerant marabouts who exploit the children and live off their begging interspersed with Quranic memorisation sessions⁴⁴, which are the privileged channel for transmitting humility and solidarity. All of this happens in an atmosphere of almost total public indifference. The wanderings of these itinerant marabouts often lead them, for a time, to northern Nigeria where exposure to Boko Haram’s extremist doctrines occurs. This sets the scene for a descent into violence. It must be pointed out here that 63.2% of the respondents in the study think that violent extremism comes from outside the country.

The misery of begging. Source: Auteurs, 2015.

Today, in the Foucaultian sense, Quranic school constructs a microphysics of power over the body⁴⁵ and produces humiliation, both sought after and valued.

⁴¹Anne Cadoret, *Parenté plurielle. Anthropologie du placement familial*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995).

⁴² Sometimes this creates tensions between Quranic and modern education. The emergence of the ‘Franco-Arab’ school has allowed some villages to avoid these tensions.

⁴³ Stéfania Gandolfi, op cit.

⁴⁴ Sometimes young pupils are obliged to raise 100CFA per day for the marabout, as payment for his educational services. Failure to do so is severely punished by him.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

“It is through endurance that our boys learn to be men. If we do not do this, our religion will disappear. They must go to Quranic school”. (Comment by a political elite, Logone-et-Chari)

Students with only Quranic education are thus ‘condemned’ to enter into activities such as cross-border trade (where they excel due to their mastery of the border), petty trade, crafts, and the profession of marabout (involving services of magic or sorcery requested by clients). The itinerant nature of some Quranic schools is an aggravating factor in exclusion and forms a violent habitus in young students. Children are disconnected from any family ties or any sense of parental affection, and stay attached only to their teacher and their little comrades.

“The mahajirs [Arabic term for students traveling to Quranic schools] of the centre here, there is no problem with them. They are from Serbowel [an area of the Lake Chad basin whose name is taken from a temporary tributary from the Logone River]. But those coming from Nigeria, they are the ones we watch. In those days, we bothered them, but people went to see the Sultan and he said to leave them alone. It is these children who also teach our children, right? But the Sub-Prefect now says that each master must register their students and bring the list to the authorities. You go, you take the list, they give you the receipt”. (Comment by a resident, Kousséri)

The process of radicalization can occur in the following way: it starts in the family where the disciplinary religious socialization is chosen, less for its theological dimension than for its social significance. Then, the student is systematized in his religious training and community, before he ends up with Boko Haram. According to estimates, in 2014, some 2,000 Cameroonians swelled the ranks of the organisation. While it is difficult to establish the typical profile and path of the radical, it may be presumed that he is mainly young and male – although some female bodies have been identified after attacks. The radical identifies with Islam as being dominated (by the West, by the rich or the upper middle class, by the elites, etc.) and manifests his solidarity towards these that are dominated.

For the vast majority of respondents (94.7%), radicalization has primarily economic motives but also social and political ones. Religious reasons are only cited before education is cited, by a small minority of the people interviewed during the study. In the Far North communities, knowledge of theology and the interpretation of the teachings of Islam do not necessarily push one towards fundamentalism. This is because of the varied and widely tolerant forms of Cameroonian Islam (“rethought, reworked” in Froelich’s words about African Islam⁴⁶). In relation to theological knowledge, the respondents in the study are quite vague, when they offer any opinion at all, about the specifics of local Islam, the various denominations and rites observed.

2. The crisis in social renewal

“I have 10 children ... I am 50 years old. And I’m monogamous”. (Comment by a respondent, Kolofata)

A comparative discourse analysis, however, reveals that socio-political context, social structures, exposure to violence, psychology and ideology are all explanatory factors for radicalization. These factors can be grouped into Ernie Regehr’s categorization of the conditions prone to produce sustained violence rooted in grievances, namely, identity, capacity and the lack of alternative

⁴⁶ J.C. Froelich, *Les musulmans d’Afrique noire*, (Paris: Edition de l’orante, 1962), p.11.

solutions⁴⁷. One of the merits of this study is that it provides perspectives on these structural and media factors. By contrast, it reveals the significance of a profound crisis in social renewal in Sahelian societies in general, and in the northern area of Cameroon in particular. Ahead of the curve, the role of media in radicalization is relative, even if soldiers do report finding propaganda films on the telephones of dead insurgents.

“According to information we have, when they arrive in a village, they make use of Islam and preach. For example, we have such a video we downloaded from Google. This shows Abubakar Shekau preaching instead of an Imam”. (Comment by a young man from Makary)

Exposure to propaganda through information and communications technology is real. It is done by exchanging videos of the sect (mainly by circulating SD cards from one phone to another because access to the Internet, as well as radio and TV, is relatively limited). The border communities which are often targeted by this propaganda are not always equipped with electricity.

Even if one is not part of a community, the beginning of radicalization is marked by community-related social constraints, unlike radicalization in Western societies which is often personal and virtual. Radicalization is part of a deep social crisis. Firstly, it is a crisis of the model of the nuclear family which is no longer able to ensure effective domestic solidarity. Division of labour in the family is organised around the great virtue of separation – by gender and generation – of tasks in a social setting which is characterized by patriarchy, gerontocratic absolutism and the lack of debate. The rise of violent extremism merely becomes the revealing catalyst of a long process of disintegration of the social frameworks which foster integration, and of the institutions where socialization happens (e.g., the mosque). The resilience of the domestic group, which, in times of social and economic instability, functions to reduce or prevent social breakdown, is dramatically reduced. Celibacy is used to intensify exclusion⁴⁸. Customs of land acquisition (in communities practicing agriculture) or transmission of livestock (in pastoral ones) no longer maintain social cohesion in a context where families are increasingly unable to take responsibility for their children. The low number of formal jobs, from which many are excluded because of their low level of education, do not guarantee social cohesion. According to the respondents, this comes from dysfunction in the mechanisms of redistribution at the local level, marked by cronyism and lack of will on the part of the elite. In fact, the state speaks only to its elites, that is to say, to itself (a hegemonic monologue), structuring a top-down and parsimonious redistribution of income. This configuration transforms many marginalized people into strategic allies of the Islamic sect, which denounces Western education as unlawful (*“haram”*). The administrative authorities, sensing the danger, invite their auxiliaries (traditional leaders) to denounce those responsible for illegal Quranic schools.

“They do nothing to help our children so that they, too, can enter public service. They are there only for their own interests. If you apply for a position, you’re wasting your time,” says one respondent or “You have to be the child of someone important to get into a training school. Especially, into the ranking. The children of ‘big people’ take the top spots. My son was a victim of this at ENAM [National School of Administration and Judiciary]. Twice, he was eligible”. (Comment by a former Mayor)

“The real problem is unemployment. Because the state does not invest in youth. And, even when it does invest in youth, youth itself does not get its share. Even if you have

⁴⁷ Ernie Regehr, “Drivers of armed conflicts”, *International Relations and Security Network*, 4 February 2013. Also, see Ted Gurr, *Why men rebel?* (1970) about the weight of frustration on social actors (whether relative or absolute).

⁴⁸ For more details, see the classic works by Pierre Bourdieu, “Célibat et condition paysanne”, *Études rurales* 5-6, (1962), p.32-135; “Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système de reproduction”, *Annales ESC* 5-6, (1972), pp.1105-1125.

your diploma, you have nothing. Often it is these 'big ones' that cause problems".
(Comment by a respondent)

In this climate, young men are the first to leave the community or to show resistance or rebellion. The deterioration of the (already fragile) socio-economic situation and the identity crisis has serious consequences on self-image in communities where everyone knows each other. Social insecurity⁴⁹ is the first source of radicalization. Action is the ultimate expression of religious commitment for those who consider that their existence and humanity has been denied and who, in turn, deny that of their opponents. The plight of northern societies is also due to the social disconnect coming from a long, slow process of disintegration of peasant life. Local monographs about rural poverty show that it not only affects specific social groups (illiterate young people, landless peasants, etc.) but also entire communities and specific areas in the Far North region.

On another level, the security crisis has gradually raised awareness of the distance between the North and the greater Cameroonian nation (social distance, coupled with a sense of failure and loss of status). Structures of social control (customary law at the traditional level or within the political power dominant in the region) are seen as complicit in creating this distance.

3. Violence suffered: between terror and the state's response

For the respondents in this study, the military response to violent extremism, coupled with the actions of the jihadists, is clearly a vector for radicalization and increased violence. 78.9% of the respondents do not feel safe, while 60.5% of them have already experienced a situation of insecurity and violence. The more violence that occurs, the more profoundly society transforms into warrior societies⁵⁰. This is explained by the trivialization of violence, both through its spread and its sanctification. In Cameroon, as elsewhere, the struggle of the Islamic sect puts the state in the difficult position of balancing potentially opposing needs: on the one hand, how to ensure the integrity of the national territory, while, on the other, safeguarding civilians and respecting their fundamental rights and freedoms against an asymmetric threat known for the scale of the violence it inflicts.

3.1 Terror from insurgents

"We have seen famine kill people, but the abuse by Boko Haram, we had never seen anything like that... After what I saw, it is not possible to make peace peacefully. It is essential that the army intervene and bend them by force. Peacefully, kai! We have to fight them with fire. See the mat, they take it. The poultry, they take it. In short, they take everything they find, without mercy. So that there is peace, we need firepower. To make them really afraid". (Comment by a male respondent from Logone-et-Chari).

To describe the immensity of the damage, a traditional Chief said,

⁴⁹ Antoine Lion and Pierre Maclouf, *L'insécurité sociale. Paupérisation et solidarité*, (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1982).

⁵⁰ This concept was suggested by George Mosse who shows how, at the end of World War I, European societies continued to exhibit aggressive attitudes, although peace had returned. It was in this atmosphere that fascist ideology was constructed between the two wars. (*De la grande guerre au totalitarisme, la brutalisation des sociétés européennes*, (Paris, 1990).

“Listen, my son, all these villages that I will name are completely empty of people [killed or driven out by insurgents]: Kerawa, Andaba, Lede, Alaborno, Gra, Tamballam, Guerandiya and Kodougou.”

“At first, they attacked in Nigeria and came to Cameroon to hide. The state did not handle this well. They came to hide in Cameroon with weapons. We saw that they came in with weapons. If they need you, they come on a motorcycle and get you in Cameroon. Initially, they came on Dames [a motorcycle brand], quiet ones. They come to get you, just like that, quietly. (...) But some Christians also joined the group. My little brother, same father, same mother, joined Boko Haram. They took him by force like that into the bush. It’s been already seven or eight months ago, they came to our house to take him by force. I was not there. Our father is dead. Mama is at home. That day she was not there. And I do not know, they have their stuff to give people. He went into the bush, he became rebellious and came back. He even slept at home (...) He had already become Muslim, he took his wife, as she was pregnant. They did not take anything from home. We called the family and in-laws to come and collect things. Today, they have vanished without a trace”. (Comment by a respondent, Amchidé)

Brutalisation proceeds from terrorist acts which result in unspeakable massacres. The attacks of Boko Haram, characterized by destruction and mass killing, are often accompanied by the kidnapping of young people and children. Extremist engagement is also the result of forced conscription. Yet, greed is widely reported as a motivation – the distribution of motorbikes or money – by virtually all the respondents in the study who argue that religious values have no place in extremist engagement.

“These Boko Haram do not come to preach religion but to rob us of our property, even if they say that this village is animist and that Cameroon is an animist country”. (Comment by a displaced person, Mozogo)

“In every family, cattle or sheep or people have been kidnapped or killed. In the area of Balqué, they killed people, they left only the widows. In some villages, only seven individuals were left. They survived because they were away, travelling. Millet has been destroyed, since in the area, much millet is grown. In one village, they killed 50 people”. (Comment by someone from a city which has been repeatedly attacked)

“Here, the Boko are against everybody, against the State. They kill, they cut throats. They hide under the banner of Islam. They stole our cattle and they abusively slaughter the animals without being able to eat the meat”. (Comment by a respondent from Kolofata)

For the respondents, the jihadist groups are essentially “bandits” (39.5%) and, secondarily, “fanatics” (18.4%) and “desperate” (10.5%). The other categories, “resisters” or “saviours”, are hardly employed to describe the jihadists (respectively 2.6% and 0%). It should also be noted that 26.3% of the respondents were unwilling to give their opinion. Indoctrination, then, is accelerated through economic motivation, and the young recruits, sometimes conscripted by force, are often sent to the front lines during operations but also used as suicide bombers⁵¹.

Many respondents mention magic as a power in recruitment:

⁵¹ The most recent kidnappings were in Tchakarmani where 135 people were forced to follow the terrorists, the majority of whom were children.

"It's as if the people of BH⁵², there, came with their remedies, see. Something like powder, and when they come like that, they pour the powder on you, and you inhale it and that's it. And they even have these dibouna [dates], they had those and, even if you are a Christian, you become BH. One day we took a BH, we beat him until he told the truth. He said that they collect the saliva of corpses, they put it in a barrel, they accumulate it, they mix with their other stuff. And when they give you that, then, your head, it's still out there". (Comment by a respondent)

Ritual beheadings, the cutting of tongues, the eating of dates soaked in the blood of people whose throats have been cut, the consumption of human blood in calabashes, are some of the acts noted in the propaganda videos. The belief that violent extremism uses magic is very strong:

"I do not know. Maybe they gave them the Quran or a fetish so that they cannot get out of it... People say that the dibouna [dates], there, they write something on them, some say they are mixed with human blood, and when you eat one, then, even if they cut your head off, you cannot go back. That's what they give them". (Comment by a traditional Chief)

"They have these dates, then, and if you eat one, it's over. They have already changed your brain. Since then, no one eats dates in Kousséri, especially dates offered by guys who come from Nigeria, no one eats their dates... They put them in water. They say there is a cask, that they mix all that in a cask, leave it for two or three days, then they dry them, how would you know how?" (Comment by a motorcycle taxi driver, Kousséri)

LAW OF EXCEPTION

"Is punishable by the death penalty, anyone who, personally, in complicity or by joint action, commits any act or threat of action likely to cause death, to endanger the physical integrity of people, to cause injury or property damage, damage to natural resources, environmental or cultural heritage with the intention of:

- a) intimidating the public to provoke fear or coerce the victim, the government and/or an organization, national or international, to do or abstain from doing any act, to adopt or renounce a particular position or to act according to certain principles.
- b) disrupting the normal functioning of public services, the provision of essential services to the public or creating a crisis among the population.
- c) creating general insurrection in the country."

Because of this law, it was not possible for this study to meet with supporters of Boko Haram. Their words would have obliged those involved in this study to report them for fear of being tried for complicity. In addition to researchers, this risk also applies, in particular, to journalists.

Law n° 2014/028 of 23 December 2014, article 2 (1)

3.2 State response: a climate of exception

"War is war and against Boko Haram's level of logistical sophistication, which is very high, we cannot act conventionally". (Comment by a senior Officer actively involved in operational exercises)

The strength of state response is, firstly, built on the foundations of an exceptional legal regime owned by the state. At times, the state monopoly of legitimate violence becomes a vector for the undue exploitation of local communities. In the war against terrorism, a climate of exception is created, one of the most explicit manifestations of which is the adoption of a highly controversial

⁵² Abbreviation by which soldiers and part of the population refer to the Boko Haram rebels.

anti-terrorism law. This law has angered the opposition parties and civil society organisations who see it as a tool to stifle protest by using the threat of the death penalty as a means of leverage against the leaders of protest movements. Maurice Kamto, political party leader, says that the text “ultimately equates Cameroonians who manifest their discontent with terrorists”⁵³. In his 31 December 2014 greetings, President Paul Biya responded: “(This law) is by no means, a pretext for restricting public freedom. Moreover, the text is perfectly clear in this respect”. However, many respondents do not think that the hardness of the law is questionable: *“These people do not deserve to live”* is a common refrain. Suicide attacks have done a lot to reinforce the legitimacy of the state of emergency and many criticisms once raised against the law are now inaudible.

Nevertheless, our respondents emphasized the brutality of the state in describing violence against themselves.

“Truly, since the closure of the borders, work is not like it used to be. Now, even if you are transporting a commodity, they suspect you of going to re-supply Boko Haram... The police, our police, even if you are taking a bag of millet home to your family, they stop you. Yes, there is a blockade, and even if you are taking millet home to your family, it is impossible. Since then, because of Boko Haram, we can no longer work. Round-ups are organised in the city, not to identify people, but for their [the police] own profit. They [the police] enter a house, if you have two motorbikes, you must pay. You give them something. We ask for a receipt. We are no longer safe. A round-up should be to identify people, but for the police, it is to make money.” If one is arrested during the curfew which seeks to ban motorcycles after 20:00, *“we give them 2000 CFA francs and they leave the bike. This goes into the ‘pocket’. Normally, they only take motorcycles, but there are also complaints by pedestrians. Often, the police scam pedestrians for their national identity cards and they are forced to pay 3,000 CFA francs or they end up in jail.”* He adds, pessimistically: *“This is never going to stop. They are too used to it. Now, if they come and don’t find Boko Haram, they find your motorbike and they ask, ‘Whose motorcycle is this?’ They say, ‘Finish with us’. And you ‘finish’, they leave, even if they have not found anyone”.* (Comment by a motorcycle taxi driver, Kousséri)

“They go to the market, they collect money, and, if you do not give, then... They collect 100 francs, sometimes 500 francs ... You have no more power here. They say ‘If we do not collect 100 francs, what will we eat with? What will we drink with?’” (Comment by a young Koza)

“Some of the soldiers in the national marines scam the people in Makary, asking them to submit their tax-withholding cards or even their national identity cards. When the people arrested do not have the required documents, they make them pay for them to return home”. (From an interview with a youth group, Makary)

Often, the respondents say that the police are responsible:

“Our problem now is the police. Every day that God creates, they organise round-ups”. (Comment by the head of a motorcycle taxi union)

In addition, extrajudicial abuse was reported by the respondents, who evoke a particular case from Doublé.

⁵³ See Mathieu Olivier, “Cameroun: Paul Biya accusé d’instrumentaliser une loi antiterroriste à des fins politiques”, *Jeune Afrique*, 16 January 2015.

ACCUSATIONS AIMED AT SOLDIERS: LATEST NEWS FROM THE FAR NORTH

In autumn 2015, the Cameroonian press produced daily reports on the increasing degradation of relations between the public and military authorities, and between the army and the people of the Far North.

Firstly, the behaviour of the military is now openly denounced by civilians. Last September, merchants of the city of Mokolo (Mayo-Tsanaga department) organised a demonstration to protest against robbery by soldiers. As reported in *L'Œil du Sahel*, 14 September 2015: "At 6AM on Friday, the sub-prefecture of the borough was stormed by a number of traders come to express their anger at the men in uniform. After having gathered, they left from the roundabout of the central market for the sub-prefecture. There, they did not beat about the bush in accusing the military of being behind the series of robberies perpetrated in recent days in the city of Mokolo." The newspaper also published the testimony of a shopkeeper: "There were four of them in a 4x4 vehicle. They had guns and machetes in hand. In a panic, I could not say a word. But I recognized one of them, because one day he came into my shop. At first, I thought it was a general search organized by the army but, as soon as they came in, they demanded money and hurt me." Faced with the growing discontent, the prefectural authorities are considering prohibiting soldiers carrying weapons from entering the town.

Discontent caused by the attitude of the military in the Far North has also resulted in violent confrontation between civilians and soldiers in Maga. On the night of 21st-22nd October 2015, a military base was attacked and burned by an angry crowd, exasperated by security policies that restrict the movement of civilians. There were explosions in the buildings of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR). According to the testimony of a policeman: "Fortunately, when the people arrived at the camp, the military had already emptied the premises. Otherwise, there would have been many killed." This attack on a military base began with two motorcyclists who were stopped at a control point and ended in shooting, killing one of the two motorcyclists – a 33 year-old – and injuring the second one.

Moreover, it appears that the prefectural authorities increasingly openly criticize the security practices of soldiers stationed in the Far North region. Thus, on 12th October 2015, Akaou Babila, Prefect of Mayo-Sava, sent a message to the Sub-Prefects of Mora, Kolofata and Amchidé in which he notes that the BIR is "rowing against the current of security measures prescribed by administrative authorities at the regional and departmental level, and this denotes a complicity with ulterior purposes." These statements and other criticisms are now spread across the press and show that the fight against Boko Haram has caused a divide between civil and military authorities.

Sources : Beatrice Kazé "Passe d'armes entre le Bir et les autorités administratives dans le Mayo-Sava (Extrême-Nord)", *Cameroon-Info.Net*, 20 October 2015; Jean Areguema, "Cameroun – Vandalisme: Les populations de Maga s'attaquent aux installations militaires", *CAMERPOST*, 28 October 2015; Jean-Marie Nkoussa, "Cameroun - Sécurité: Des militaires accusés de braquage à Mokolo dans l'Extrême-Nord", *Cameroon-Info.Net*, 14 September 2015.

*"I do not know, but I understand that soldiers descended on Doublé, they rounded up everyone. Between Lined and Magdémé, they took about 240 people. They brought them to Maroua, but before they arrived in 42nd Bim [Motorised Infantry Battalion], they released some of them, mainly small children. They took the others to Maroua. Before that, they had also arrested 47 people. We do not know where they are in Maroua exactly. But we do know that one of them has died."*⁵⁴

Suspected members of Boko Haram are victims of the soldiers' rage to "avenge their colleagues" (Comment by a soldier). This makes de-radicalization difficult, because the followers of the sect are aware that the outcome of their commitment is either death of the opponent or martyrdom.

This strong response is justified by the authorities and the effects inevitably also spread throughout the country areas from which the soldiers are called up and to where they return after their service.



Soldiers in the field

Source: Authors, 2015.

The "dirty war" in Algeria in the 1990s is a striking example of how communities can feel squeezed between two mechanisms of violence (state and jihadist) while the army is celebrated. Now part of

⁵⁴ Without precise statistics on the number of judicial procedures, it is difficult to go further.

daily life in these communities, the blind violence of the terrorists is answered with that of the state. Besides the slaughtered bodies of the insurgents gathered and displayed for all to see, with the communities forced to contribute to paying for their funerals, 'state brutality' translates, for the respondents in the study, into weighing regular abuse (extortion, racketeering, rape, illegal hoarding of private property) against claims that "You are funding terrorism!" or "You will supply the enemy with this bag of rice" and immediate confiscation.

For many respondents, and those who took part in the group interview, the current system of security can, in itself, be a factor in radicalization. Moreover, it was observed that large parts of the territory located in areas where the Islamic sect makes frequent incursions are not patrolled, especially at night (the favourite time to attack villages, and the number of attacks have multiplied – over 120 attacks in six months, since the second half of 2014). These attacks are intensified by the use of landmines which have caused enormous damage to the Cameroonian army.

Glorification of the soldier

State brutality is accompanied by the glorification of the soldier and the legitimization of terror.

"Since the military deployed, peace and tranquility have returned. Currently, motorcycles have started to circulate again in Makary, whereas when the threat was at its worst, motorcycles were prohibited. That's why we love the security and defence forces". (Comment from a group interview with older people, Makary)

With the same fervour, a traditional Chief says:

"Without the army, Boko would have arrived in Ngaoundere [southern edge of the northern part of the country]."

This celebration of the soldier – he who sheds his blood for the country – and the sanctification of his sacrifice are expressed in speeches and commemorations. Soldiers become popular heroes and are regularly covered with medals for bravery, welcomed by the entire political class, supported by all kinds of collections of money⁵⁵, greeted by the people.

"There is no problem from the army. The soldiers help people. They even have a hospital to treat the sick. Those who have stayed there, feel at ease". (Testimony by a displaced Nigerian traditional Chief)

The idealization of the army is accompanied by a social demand for terror, as revealed in these comments by the Christian leader of a charitable organisation about soldiers of the Chadian army:

"These guys are not joking, see (...) If the Chadians were not here, Boko Haram would already be in Kousséri. They really kill people there."

It should be noted that 65.8% of the respondents call the presence of the army 'reassuring', 10.5% call it 'disturbing', while 23.7% of respondents did not answer this question.

The dangerous rise in religious tensions due to the military response to Boko Haram

The sociological composition of troops in the theatre of operations reflects inter-faith tensions. Often from the south of the country, which is predominantly Christian, the soldiers are perceived as

⁵⁵ The latest solidarity operation raised over 600 million CFA francs through calls for donations, essentially launched by the elites.

“Muslim killers”. The constitution of the vigilante committees – the “guys with the stick” – is another example, for they are often Kirdi or Christians. This tension between Christians and Muslims results in a diffuse acceptance of radicalization when abuse is directed only against Christians:

“No, it is no longer a Christian affair. At first, when it was only against Christians, everyone agreed with them. They burned churches, killed those who drank alcohol. But now, they are enemies of Islam. They even attack during the hour of prayer. Their targets are the mosques”. (Comment by a former Mayor)

“At the beginning of their actions, they said they would only fight the Christians. But since then, they attack not only Christians, but even massacre Muslims... Currently, Boko Haram has plunged many families in pain and sadness. They attack everyone, all social strata, all religions, all ethnic groups, regardless of gender or age.” (Comment from a group of elderly people, Makary)

A sense of abandonment has led some communities to compromise (at their own risk) with the insurgents or to organise self-defence:

“We have always stayed in Amchidé. We found that the state had made no arrangements. BH was advancing. Now they come here and we leave (...) The state has done nothing. This really struck me. But we are nothing and we can do nothing. As for soldiers of the BIR [Rapid Intervention Battalion], we only found out in the morning that a delta column was entering the camp (...) It was God who protected us. I have been the victim of several attacks. We created the vigilante committee once they had been driven away”. (Comment by a respondent)

In Mora, for example, the vigilante committee has agents watching:

“In mosques, bus stations, churches, markets, neighbourhoods, everywhere... wherever a stranger may be suspicious. There are intelligence officers without uniform”. (Comment by the head of a radio station, Mora)

Paid by the army (in credit cards, food, money or token payment), they have become vulnerable⁵⁶, and increasingly frustrated, auxiliaries.

“They promised us we would be military intelligence agents.”; “They exploited us, they always send us to the side where there is shooting. We never had any weapons.”

(Comments by respondents)

Evidence that former hardened criminals and bandits are on the vigilante committees has been collected. To the dismay of the communities, they have sometimes become the new lawmakers of the land. Growing sectarian tension is also felt in these committees which are often set up by Christian communities which refuse to take Muslims (and, especially, the Kanuri) onto their teams, as a President of one vigilante committee told those involved in the study.

⁵⁶The risks come as much from the insurgents, who systematically abuse presumed traitors and denouncers, as from the soldiers, especially the Chadians who have, themselves, attacked many.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Points to remember:

- Young people and women are traditionally considered ‘social juniors’.
- Many young people, in situations of social distress and humiliation, have joined radical groups and the community offers no way for them to return.
- Women are, at the same time, objects of reward for extremist engagement, victims and producers of violence.

Described as “social juniors” by Jean-François Bayart⁵⁷ (as opposed to “social seniors” whose superiority is based on age or possession of social/material resources), women and young people are in a relationship of social subordination. This subordination constrains their social mobility as much as their access to the rewards of power. Local societies exemplify these criteria of social prioritization due to their strong inclination towards patriarchy, although in recent years some evolution has been seen. Will the current security configuration change these criteria? The survey reveals a paradoxical order: women are experiencing both relegation and advancement, while many young people have begun reversing the power dynamics with their elders in a vengeful way.

1. The mobilization of young people, or the revenge of the humiliated

If young people are at the heart of violent extremism, it is due to specific reasons which must be examined. According to the respondents, the main sources of insecurity are precariousness and poverty (34.2%) and marginalized youth (31.6%).

Rural poverty, exclusion and social revenge

“Between 17 and 20 years of age,” is how witnesses describe their attackers in Kolofata. Young people in Makary explain that this is due to poverty and illiteracy:

“In our opinion, the elements responsible for the creation of Boko Haram are poverty and illiteracy. Most Boko Haram members are illiterate, people who have no future. Because an educated person cannot follow these people.”

This analysis is corroborated by a respondent in Magdémé:

“Young people do not have money. Life has become difficult here. Young people can no longer live. Some had children, four or more, and nothing to feed them. The weaker ones joined this movement. That's what brought all the young people into it.”

Socio-economic factors and the territorial dimension of rural poverty make it possible to assess the determinants of perceptions among people who experience poverty and exclusion⁵⁸. While it is common that they conceal this poverty and exclusion, as shown by Richard Hoggart (1970), respondents speak without difficulty of the misery around them⁵⁹. They are poor, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, and in Mollat’s sense “in a situation of weakness, dependence,

⁵⁷ Jean-François Bayart, *L'État en Afrique. La politique du ventre*, (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

⁵⁸ Alexandre Pagès, *La pauvreté en milieu rural*. Doctoral dissertation in Sociology, (Paris: Université Paris V, 2000).

⁵⁹ Richard Hoggart, *La culture du pauvre*, (Paris: Minuit, 1970).

humiliation, deprivation characterized by the lack of means, varying according to times and societies, power and social status: money, relationships, influence, power, scientific and technical skills, intellectual capacity, personal freedom and dignity”⁶⁰. This condition, which arouses anger and hatred, comes from humiliation. This feeling of humiliation is sensed but not understood by the community which continues to speak of pathology when explaining violent extremism.

“The people of Boko Haram, there are not like us, they are crazy.” (Comment by one respondent, representative of many others)

Myriam Benraad argues that “humiliation and revenge have long been found to be related to terrorism, the psychological factor that often lays the foundation for terror, before the political struggle as such. Jihad, quickly justified as revenge for Muslims against the interference and oppression of the Judeo-Christian West, imperialist and demonized, is also the manifestation of emotions, beyond its more political foundations and the usual cultural prejudices that find a supposed ‘predisposition’ in Islam and Arab culture to violence”⁶¹. Material and matrimonial incentives help explain the enlistment of many young people.

“Because when people come find you, they can give you 30 Naira, like that – each - for no reason. BH has a system: whatever you love, then that is what they will get for you. If you like a motorcycle, they’ll buy you a motorcycle. If you need a woman, they will give you a woman. They will find you a woman by force: their marriages, they’re not complicated. They seduced our boys, who never had any money. Imagine, you’re just standing here, and the money you never imagined having, someone just gives it to you”. (Comment by a young respondent)

A group of young people in Makary also confirmed this, explaining that it is not always enough:

“We have just learned that they offered women and money to young men. Over time, they realized that this method did not allow them to recruit many new members, and that’s why they started carrying out forced recruitment of young people. They also make the young people who are already recruited believe that they will go straight to heaven by cutting the throats of the largest number of people. The prizes vary, depending on the method used to kill one’s victim. It is highest when the victim has his throat cut.”

The incentive is significant in a context of high economic uncertainty and the domination of young people. To return and strike on the site of one’s social humiliation against the figures of one’s domination (the Imam, the big-wigs, the rich or the “bourgeois”) is a logical step for the Boko Haram jihadist. This is what emerged in the context of the Kolofata hostage-taking in July 2014, where houses seem to have been carefully selected⁶². The Lamido and Mayor Seini Boukar Lamine, his family, as well as Agnès Françoise Ali, wife of the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of relations with Parliament, were all taken. Moreover, the targeted killings of traditional Chiefs and religious authorities by the Islamic sect were already common. The respondents often return to the role of small beggar children in targeting the attacks.

“Fotokol’s children are in on it. It is they who show the houses”. (Comment by an elite of the town)

⁶⁰ Michel Mollat, *La pauvreté au Moyen Âge. Étude sociale*. (Paris: Hachette, 1977).

⁶¹ Comment made after the attacks of 7 January 2015 against *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher grocery store on 9 January at Porte de Vincennes in Paris (*Libération*, 22 January 2015).

⁶² Interviews with an ex-hostage.

Jihad and crime

Radicalization is also built in the criminal world, as Tahir Abbas⁶³ has shown in the European case. In a context of the structural development of rural banditry and a cross-border economy based on smuggling, the Islamic sect has attracted a large number of thugs who find in the movement a solution to their grievances. Violent extremism is an opportunity for them to become ideological or religious mercenaries as a local intelligence workforce (guides locating the targets of attacks) or providing logistical support for resupplying fuel and supplies. This approach can end with a more radical commitment that brings about departure from one's community. For all these humiliated men and former criminals, jihad confers an identity, a new respectability. It offers a boon to restore justice in a context of crisis in the social renewal of communities. Seeing in such thinking a revolutionary cause for social and divine justice, the jihadists argue the following:

"God is good, he has taken the [begging] bowls out of our hand and given us a Kalashnikov. We can sleep in the homes of bourgeois". (Comment by a former hostage of the Islamic sect who lived for 2½ months with its followers)

Which way out?

This situation also complicates the challenges of counter-radicalization (more encompassing than the concept of de-radicalization) and favours a particular focus on the disengagement of supporters. It appears difficult for society to convince an individual who has taken a radical direction and performed extreme acts to abandon his activities or ideology. This questions the possibility of, and capacity for, forgiveness in communities most exposed to violence. Can one come back from an extremist experience? For the respondents, the answer is an obvious 'no', for they consider that the only outcome of extremist commitment is physical and/or social death.

"We are not ready to take them back. They are not like us". (Comment by a male respondent)

This position is supported by an Islamic religious official of the city of Maroua:

"There can be no forgiveness for people who do that."

Many respondents (42.1%) consider that the insurgents must be judged by national courts (and not by traditional justice, 13.2%). If the anti-terrorist law makes the confession of one's radicalization unthinkable, de-radicalization is not possible, unless the families and communities are willing to take charge of the radicalized individuals. However, patricide and fratricide by enlisted youth have been frequently reported in communities: the family sees the follower of Boko Haram as a serious threat to its survival. De-radicalization, which seeks to make the radical give up his activities or extreme ideas and which targets the young, is practiced neither at the state nor community level.

2. Women and insecurity: The paradox of presence-absence

⁶³ Tahir Abbas (Ed), *Islamic political radicalism: a European perspective*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Carolin Goerzig & Khaled Al-Hashimi, *Radicalization in Western Europe: integration, public discourse, and loss of identity among Muslim communities*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

“The problem of insecurity has caused us many problems. The Boko Haram came to us, they killed my husband, they took all our sheep, our goats and cattle. They took everything we had (...) Many Boko Haram came and they aimed to kill the fathers of families, to seize their assets [livestock]. They then kill all the Christians and pagans and leave for the Nigerian side with the goods, the small boys and older girls. After killing the husband, they leave his body to his wife. They still do not kill women”. (Comment by a displaced woman, Koza)

“I arrived here, it's been a year, already. Because I was with the children, at each place where I arrived, I slept under the trees. I had 8 children. The scene I experienced is this: the Boko Haram came around 17:00, took my husband because he worked for the Chief of Bama, he was an official in the court of the Lamidat... I was at home, receiving the condolences of neighbours who had found out that my husband was arrested. Then, three cars came in front of our house and my husband was in one of the cars. They took him out of the car, made him lie down and told me to come lie on my husband. As I had a child on my back, I asked if I could put him down. They told me to put down the child and then come and lie on my husband. And then they told me to get up, and then they killed him in front of me and my children in our home in Bama ... And that's when I took my 8 children and I started walking until we arrived in Koza with my 8 children, 5 boys and 3 girls. The eldest is 13 and the youngest 3 (...) and, in addition, I was not alone, for we were many who had lost our husbands”.

She attributes the death of her husband to the fact that he was not Muslim and was close to the Chief. In this sense, many traditional notables have also been murdered, including the brother of her husband. Another displaced woman from Koza has a similar history. Followers of Boko Haram killed her husband and took away their cattle.

“You will have women, money and motorcycles!”

The Far North has the nation's highest percentage of poor women, nearly 60%. Paradoxically, the actors of violent extremism, while giving women a great transaction value as compensation for recruitment, consider them as objects. Although they are interchangeable goods, women may escape the violence because of their sex. In Koza, say the respondents, *“women get up at 2am to draw water and come home at 5am.”* The reason is that going out at night is more risky for men. Being a woman is the ultimate cause of alienation for *“they kill the children and take the women to make them their wives”*, says the Chief of Katikimé. For some respondents, this is also an instrument of protection:

“No, they do not want women. They take them just to marry them to a single man. But if the women are already married, they do not take them.” Or “They kill the husbands and leave the women”.

A Nigerian Chief, now a refugee in Cameroon, confirms this testimony, indicating that in Kerawa or Banki, the insurgents did not kill the women but kidnapped them to make them their wives.

“That's why they do not want to kill them. Currently, near their camp in Sambisa, the army recovered nearly 6,000 women, who are now in Nigeria. If you have a family, you go see if your wife is there, you take her to the hospital. But it seems that the 200 high school girls are still in captivity. We did not wait for Boko Haram to come find us. As soon as the army fled, we, too, fled with our women, that same evening.”

According to the statistics of humanitarian organisations, camps for refugees and displaced persons are mostly made up of women.

“The girls are here. You will see, out there, that the majority of the refugees are women and girls. They are widows whose husbands were killed. There are a few men who escaped”. (Comment by the co-ordinator of CODAS Caritas)

The head of an association of Muslim women explains that women are usually spared in the attacks. The defence of good character and decency mainly concerns the control of women's bodies⁶⁴. One of the ways to defend them is to wear the veil which two female teachers legitimize as follows:

“It’s good for a woman. In Islam, if we should do things the right way, to talk with us as now, a hijab [protection, veil] should be between us and you. And if you have something to ask, it should be behind a veil.” [Here, the respondent recited a verse that regulates interactions between men and women]. *“The veil in Islam is good. But it should not be used to do bad things: stealing for example. Some people wear it to go steal. Or, some men wear it to slip in among the women ... as if it was a woman who had come.”*

Source of *fitna* (‘disorder’, in Arabic), the female body must be firmly controlled. For this reason, the presence of women is also linked to that sign of radicalization which, for some respondents, relates to the wearing of the veil. Kidnapping, rape, being sold, forced marriage: that is the status of women among the insurgents of the Islamist sect. This relegation of women is part of a patriarchal social structure and unfavourable to girls’ education despite the incentives of public policy.

“We find that our society has remained closed around traditional dogma. We do not send girls to school, only boys have the right to education and the girls’ place is in the home”. (Comment by the Director of a community radio station)

But women are also part of the production of violence, contributing in many ways to the war effort. This may be logistical support through supplies: in June 2015, a woman was arrested in Mora while trying to buy 50 litres of fuel (the military authorities thought it looked suspicious). A woman may also fight during the attacks: in the four suicide attacks in Maroua and Fotokol, it is now known that it was women who blew themselves up. The suicide bombs have led to renegotiation about wearing the veil in communities.

“We do not want a woman to come to our school like this [completely veiled] ... We are afraid. If she comes, it is necessary that the face be uncovered, not fully covered. We must be able to see her eyes. Before, the fact that a woman was completely veiled did not bother us”. (Comment by a teacher in a Quranic school)

⁶⁴ Mansour Fahmy, *La condition de la femme dans l’islam*, (Paris: Allia, 1990).

AVENUES FOR REFLECTION

Is counter-radicalization impossible?

“Reconcile with whom? No! Reconciliation, we just cannot do that with the rebels. We cannot negotiate with them. They kill men, cut their throats. No, you cannot negotiate with them. I ask you this question again: Negotiate with them? (...) It is impossible, we can no longer accept them. Even God will hunt them down”. (Comment by a traditional leader)

Like this respondent, many consider that a return to the past is unthinkable. The parents whose children have enlisted, the traditional and religious authorities, but also society as a whole, see death as the only outcome for the jihadist. As for forgiveness and reconciliation:

“It’s hard, I think that the state itself cannot accept that”. (Comment by a Christian official in a charitable organisation based in Kousséri)

Most urgent is to restore peace which will lead to the movement’s decline. They suggest that the focus should be on daily life.

“I see no way out of this situation, but I really ask for food to survive”. (Comment by a displaced widow living in Koza with her children in precarious conditions)

“All I ask of you is to think of me, because I suffer a lot to eat and feed my eight children”. (Comment by another displaced widow, mother of eight)

This primordial waiting is accompanied almost everywhere by a feeling that things have come to a standstill. The youth of Makary note in this regard that:

“To get out of this crisis (...) at the moment, we believe that the only likely way to end it is the army.”

Objections to reconciliation are representative of the difficulty people have of thinking of ways out of violent extremism. Based on the perceptions collected during the study and observation in the field, as well as the analyses of, and discussions with, various relevant stakeholders, the following avenues for further reflection emerge:

Avenue for reflection 1: Empower exposed zones: provide needed institutions for the border region around Lake Chad

If social and political processes allow the negotiated management of latent tensions and sources of radicalization, resilience is certain. The people involved have good reasons for rejecting the status quo when they have access to material, social and political sources of violence. The resulting radicalization and use of force is motivated by the belief that they are the only options for change. Thus, by acknowledging and giving social value to Sahelian communities exposed to violent extremism, the devastating effects can be contained. To give value to these communities means to keep listening to them, to maintain communications with them and to take care of them. The fluid nature of the border area between Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria could be recognised as such and valued. A special socio-economic, socio-cultural, political, legal and institutional regime could be applied. It would be useful to review existing measures to effectively move in this direction.

Avenue for reflection 2: Develop a national strategy to counter radicalization based on a comprehensive approach (i.e., security, governance and development)

Strengthening social cohesion is another decisive element in counter-radicalization. It can be accomplished by providing essential social services to the region, as well as through a reassessment of places which foster religious socialization and transmit religious knowledge (including control of this religious knowledge). Both of these approaches could help define, more precisely, the right response to the challenge of marginalized youth and the best ways to foster intercommunal dialogue as an effective response to tensions and/or existing conflicts.

Civil officials, local community leaders (both traditional and religious) and scholars could all be wisely put to the task of developing strategies for the border areas. The process of developing a governance model for the border areas would need to adapt to any institutions set up to provide services in these areas.

If conditions for support are defined collectively, counter-radicalization could also include an early warning system to detect those who may have a high potential for radicalization, as well as those who disseminate.

Avenue for reflection 3: Build an argument against radical discourse which is ethnically neutral and free of ideology

These arguments could be delivered at the local level to counter community stigmatization. Relayed by community-based police/gendarmerie, these arguments could facilitate the establishment of trust with communities. It would also involve developing a confidential platform for radicals, a sort of “exit talk”, for those who may want to return to civilian life. Religious rehabilitation, through recognised *ulémas* who would be the bearers of a doctrine of repentance, could be a useful element to implement. Asking communities to contribute will require major investment, for asking the faithful to fight jihadism seems contrary to the tenets of Islam. A preliminary framework could be established through the development of forums for dialogue.

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