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Instrumentalizing religion: the economy of insecurity

What 800 Sahelians have to say

Niger 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).

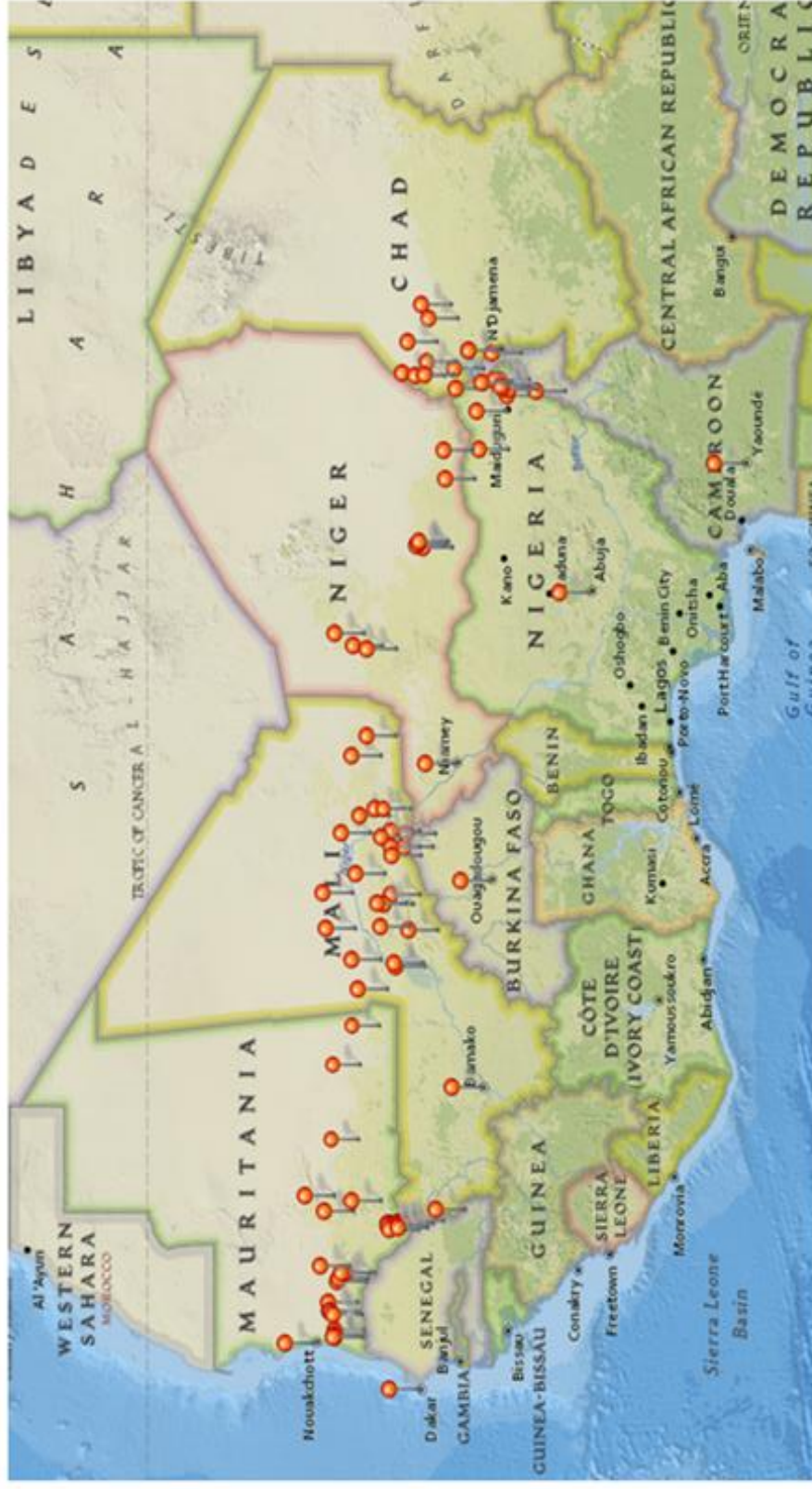
The decision to work with university researchers and interviewers of local nationality rather than with external consultants was a risk, but one which has paid off. The goal was to construct a team which had the most appropriate profile for a method of enquiry which was adapted to local realities; was 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	Senegal – 6 interviews 2'800 km – 6 days	Chad - 9 interviews 2'000 km – 6 days	8 capital cities 8 focus groups
Villages around 12 towns Languages: Hausa, Tamasheq, Fulfulde	120 interviews Villages around 8 towns Languages: English, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo	74 interviews 20 villages Languages: Wolof, French	71 interviews Villages around towns Languages: Chad Arabic, Kanembu, Buduma	80 community leaders

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To conduct this study, the team decided to work with the following persons:

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We would like to specially thank our interviewers for completing their challenging task despite the high level of insecurity and vulnerability of the study areas.

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SUMMARY

Study areas

The perceptions of insecurity collected for this study are representative of two main areas, namely Tchintabarden and Zinder. Perceptions were also collected in a third study site in northern Tillabéri as a control. It was in Tchintabaraden, capital of the Department and urban commune of the same name, that the first Tuareg rebellion broke out in 1990. The main communities are Tuareg, Arab, Fulani and Hausa. It was also in Tchintabaraden that, 15 years later, the “Flame of Peace¹”, a symbol of national reconciliation, took place. Today, while the main activity remains farming, the area is also a place where various forms of trafficking (arms, drugs, cigarettes, etc.) are common. Finally, in addition to being a transit area for migration to the north, Tchintabaraden is the reception area for people who have returned or were sent back from Libya following the fall of Gaddafi in 2011. Initially chosen for its proximity to Nigeria (a country where different religious cults have been established and from which they have spread), Zinder is a city with strong religious currents which has ulemas who are renowned at the sub-regional level. The main communities in the study area are Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Toubou, Arab and Zarma, and their main activity is agriculture. Another equally important aspect found in Zinder is the presence of youth organisations – called “palaces” – which create a risk of insecurity in the city and in the general area. The palaces, far from being mere youth groups like the “Fadas²”, are centres which recruit the young who display a strategy of violent protest against the state, traditional authority and parents. Analysis of the issue of insecurity in Niger would be incomplete if the difficult question of the situation of northern Tillabéri was not considered. Indeed, in this region, the Fulani militia is becoming a violent force connected to Malian jihadist movements. A reconstruction of the evolution of insecurity in the area has been made from secondary sources and empirical data to put the issue of nationwide insecurity into a clearer context.

State and citizenship, religion and identity

The everyday behaviour of Niger’s politicians undermines the secularity of the state which is supposed to strictly separate politics and religion. Niger has many different Islamic organisations. Consequently, new figures in the production of Islamic knowledge have emerged, dissemination of this knowledge has devolved and new networks have developed to disperse religious messages. Religious claims, when they multiply and become the norm, set the stage for radicalization which contributes to depriving citizens of their sense of nationalism. The breakdown of traditional values, and the inability of the young to achieve even the smallest of their dreams, is a source of rebellion and violence. The abdication of the state from its public role to protect the people creates a sense of abandonment and frustration among individuals, and pushes them to find refuge in ethnic or regional identity.

Inter-communal and cross-border dynamics

Various forms of sociability (inter-ethnic exchanges) undermine the border’s official status and facilitate the mobility of people and goods. For many border residents, the community or religious identity they share with their neighbours on the other side of the border takes precedence over national identity. The border is an area for work opportunities for all social strata. It is a place where basic necessities are available and accessible, and thus, a space which contributes to the reduction of social inequality. This opportunity may also be transformed into a relative dependence, particularly

¹ In September 2005, the “Flame of Peace”, a bonfire of all the weapons in Tchintabaraden, was lit to mark the end of the Tuareg rebellion and its voluntary dissolution on all fronts.

² The “Fadas” are places where young people from the same neighbourhood or with the same affinities meet. These spaces provide a setting for debate and the socialization of the young.

from an economic point of view. Fluid mobility makes it difficult for defence and security forces to control the border and promotes the flow of weapons, drugs, diseases, etc. – which are all sources of insecurity. Cross-border exchange increases the risk of attacks, fraud and illegal trafficking.

Radicalization: clues and process

The absence of justice or, rather, perceptions of unequal justice, creates frustrations which lead to an individual response ('armed banditry') or a collective response (rebellion as protest, militias for self-protection). Economic and social instability predisposes people living on the border to radical and violent behaviour. Lack of regulation of religious expression, particularly in the media, and the use of religion for political and economic purposes encourage the development of radical behaviour. People feel an increase in insecurity and violence at the border, but almost never associate this increase with the presence of radical religious messages/practices/groups. As a cross-border phenomenon, insecurity benefits a chain of actors at the local, national and international levels.

The role of women and young people

Respondents highlighted that the fragility (physical and mental) of women and children makes them vulnerable to various forms of insecurity on the border. This vulnerability is the foundation for manipulation, both political (elections) and ideological (religious, ethnic and economic). Women and young people are vectors for lasting peace when involved in decision-making and in the implementation of actions to be taken against insecurity.

Avenues for reflection

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:

For the state

- Reinforce a sense of national identity through social investment;
- Strengthen the credibility of debate in the public space.

For religious and tradition leaders

- Work to strengthen social cohesion in a systematic and concerted manner;
- Strengthen traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

From Niamey, nine researchers travelled for six days on a nearly 4,000km round trip conducting 100 interviews in the villages around 12 towns on the border with Mali (Tchintabaraden area) and Nigeria (Zinder area). Ten of the sources identified during this survey were then invited to Niamey to meet and exchange perceptions about insecurity and violent extremism in their respective border areas. The analysis of the results presented in this report has been substantiated further with information gathered on the Tillabéri northern strip in the department of Banibangou, and with contributions from national experts on the subject.

These areas were chosen as representative of those affected by insecurity in the country.

Tchintabaraden

It was in Tchintabaraden, capital of the Department and urban commune of the same name, that the first Tuareg rebellion broke out in 1990. The main communities living there are Tuareg, Arab, Fulani and Hausa. It was also in Tchintabaraden that, 15 years later, the “Flame of Peace”³, a symbol of national reconciliation, took place. Today, while the main activity remains farming, the area is also a place where various forms of trafficking (arms, drugs, cigarettes, etc.) are common. Finally, in addition to being a transit area for migration to the north, Tchintabaraden is the reception area for people who have returned or were sent back from Libya following the fall of Gaddafi in 2011.

Zinder

Initially chosen for its proximity to Nigeria (a country where different religious cults have been established and from which they have spread), Zinder is a city with strong religious currents which has *ulemas* who are renowned at the sub-regional level. The main communities in the study area are Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Toubou, Arab and Zarma, and their main activity is agriculture.

Zinder is also a city where radical positions on religious issues are taken, for example, the “Operation *bujébujé*”⁴ in 1990; demonstrations against the family code and the organisation of FIMA (the International Festival of African Fashion) in 2000; violence against three churches in 2012; and, most recently, the violent demonstration (with the burning of churches and bars) in 2015 following the participation of President Mahamadou Issoufou in the Paris demonstration to support *Charlie Hebdo*.

Finally, another equally important aspect found in Zinder is the presence of youth organisations – called “palaces” – which create a risk of insecurity in the city and in the general area. The palaces, far from being mere youth groups like the “Fadas”⁵, are centres which recruit the young who display a strategy of violent protest against the state, traditional authority and parents.

Northern Tillabéri

Analysis of the issue of insecurity in Niger would be incomplete if the difficult question of the situation of northern Tillabéri was not considered. Indeed, in this region, the Fulani militia is

³ In September 2005, the “Flame of Peace”, a bonfire of all the weapons in Tchintabaraden, was lit to mark the end of the Tuareg rebellion and its voluntary dissolution on all fronts.

⁴ During the “Operation *bujébujé*” in Zinder, any girl seen wearing a skirt (*‘bujé’* means ‘skirt’) was attacked, with the justification that skirts are religiously indecent and culturally unacceptable.

⁵ The “Fadas” are places where young people from the same neighbourhood or with the same affinities meet. These spaces provide a setting for debate and the socialization of the young.

becoming a violent force connected to Malian jihadist movements. A reconstruction of the evolution of insecurity in the area has been made from secondary sources and empirical data to put the issue of nationwide insecurity into a clearer context.

When collecting data, those involved in the study chose respondents from strategic groups who were identified during preparatory work before conducting the study. More respondents were identified while doing the field surveys. The table below provides an outline of the interviews carried out per site per strategic group:

	Tchintabaraden	Zinder	Total
FDS [national defence and security force]	3	3	6
Religious brotherhoods and movements	2	7	9
Traditional Chiefs	3	9	12
Young Christians	0	2	2
Technical services	9	4	13
Associations and Fada of young people	8	6	14
Women's groups (female leaders, women widowed by violence linked to insecurity)	8	4	14
Local leaders (political parties, patrons, merchants)	9	5	14
Humanitarian NGOs working on issues pertaining to insecurity	0	3	3
People rejected and repatriated from Libya	4	1	5
Former rebellion fighters	4	0	4
Tassara militia fighters	1	0	1
Moto-taxi trade union	0	5	5
TOTAL	50	50	100

The analysis of this unprecedented collection of perceptions from the population in the frontier zones 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.

Points to remember:

- Niger has many different Islamic organisations; consequently, new figures in the production of Islamic knowledge have emerged, dissemination of this knowledge has devolved and new networks have developed to disperse religious messages.
- The everyday behaviour of Niger's politicians undermines the secularity of the state which is supposed to strictly separate politics and religion.
- Religious claims, when they multiply and become the norm, set the stage for radicalization which contributes to depriving citizens of their sense of nationalism.
- The breakdown of traditional values, and the inability of the young to achieve even the least of their dreams, is a source of rebellion and violence.
- The abdication of the state from its public role to protect the people creates a sense of abandonment and frustration among individuals and pushes them to find refuge in ethnic or regional identity.

1. The Nigerien state, between secular standards and practices

"In our country, religion has become a slippery slope. According to the use one makes of it, religion participates in the construction or destruction of the social and political image of the people at the top of the state". (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Niger enshrines the separation of state and religion. Thus, Niger is a secular country. However, the fact that the population is estimated to be over 98% Muslim somewhat undermines this official position of secularity. A substantial amount of literature (Moulaye, 2005; Moulaye and Doka, 2009; Moulaye, Doka and Bawa, 2006; Sounaye, 2011) shows how secularity has gradually lost support and meaning due to the actual practices of different actors at both state and non-state levels. There are several factors which make it possible to formulate the hypothesis of an Islamist rise in Niger, although the connotations of this are less worrisome in Niger than in surrounding countries (mainly Nigeria and Mali). These factors can be summarized around the following points.

1.1 The proliferation of Islamic organisations

Before 1990, Niger had only one Islamic organisation, namely, the Islamic Association of Niger (AIN). With the democratization of public life in 1991, several new religious organisations emerged. Since then, they have multiplied and developed: 17 organisations were identified in 2002; 36 in 2003; and 50 in 2005 (Moulaye, Doka and Bawa, 2006). In 2014, estimates⁶ suggest some 200 organisations in all categories. Moulaye (2015) groups them into five main trends:

- Organisations affiliated to brotherhoods (Tidjaniya and Qadiriya): these appear to be the most moderate and close to the government, like the ANASI [Association nigérienne pour l'appel et la solidarité islamique], an organisation for Islamic appeal and solidarity in Niger.

⁶ Recent statistics are lacking about the number of religious associations in Niger. The remarks in this study are based on the numbers used by the participants in the group interview of 2 July 2015.

This group attracts intellectuals and works in important social reform, including the woman's place in Muslim society and the Family Code.

- The “*Jama’atu Izâlatu-l-Bid’awalqâmatu-s-Sunna*”, known as the *Izaala*: these are movements fighting for the abolition of innovation in Islamic practices and the restoration of Islamic orthodoxy.
- The “*kallakato*” organisations: more common in large urban centres, these groups are stricter in applying the precepts of the Quran (without referring to the tradition of the Prophet).
- The Goungouniyya and the “Muslim Brothers” (Shiites): these latter two groups are the most radical. They advocate the application of *Shar’ia* law. They are inspired by Nigerian denominations and have their spiritual guide in that country. They are most common on the Nigerian border (Birni N’Konni, Maradi and Zinder).

The multiplicity of these organisations in Niger has had several immediate consequences: the emergence of new actors (young people and women) in the production of Islamic knowledge; the decentralization of distribution points, with the proliferation of *madrassas* and *makarantas* and the appearance of libraries and “Islamic discotheques”⁷; as well as the development of new networks for spreading the Islamic message. These areas of production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge have also become quintessential social spaces for the dissemination of Arab culture.

It should also be remembered that Islam reached Niger around the year 1664 (Djibo, 2007). Initially, Islam had a social content; it adapted so well to local culture that typically traditional values could not be separated from those of Islam. With colonization, a break occurred in the religious landscape, especially with the attempt to control the *ulema* movement, the promotion of those who agreed to work with the colonial administration, and the expulsion of the most virulent elements to Arab countries, mainly Arabia and Sudan. This policy continued after independence, with state control over all sermons in mosques during Friday prayers.

After the National Conference (July-November 1990), the country began a process to decentralize governance and to free speech. The *ulema* who had no voice before the National Conference returned (borne by the fashionable religious movement, Wahhabism), eager for revenge. Hostility to the state and traditional religion are built into their message.

1.2 The relationship of government people with religion

A ‘non-denominational state’ implies the strict separation of state and religion. Beyond its impact on a nation’s laws, this separation can be measured through the behaviour of public figures – in particular, those who run the government – towards religion. In Niger, the behaviour of politicians, including those in charge of the management of the state, is defined by religious acts and gestures which involve not only them as individuals, but also the state as an institution.

Among the examples which illustrate this are: the invitation to collective prayers during unfortunate events (droughts, floods, attacks by Boko Haram⁸); the President’s organisation of collective breaks in fasting at the Presidential Palace for various socio-professional bodies; visits by senior officials of political parties during elections to the *ulema*; the reference to the Holy Book in oaths taken by senior officials of the state, etc. These types of actions go beyond the individuals who introduce them and establish a bridge between the state and religion (see box below).

⁷ The expression “Islamic discotheque” was used by Abdoulaye Sounaye (2011) to describe the shops and stalls where cassettes and/or DVDs of sermons by various Islamic preachers and sects are sold.

⁸ In 2015, the 1st May – which is usually reserved for Labour Day – was decreed a day of prayer by all the unions and public authorities to honour the dead (soldiers and civilians) following the attack on Karamaga Island (Diffa) by Boko Haram on 27 April 2015.

POLITICAL PARTIES, ISLAM AND SECULARISM

Although the lack of conclusive evidence makes it difficult to establish a direct link between political parties and Islamic groups, it is clear that the majority of parties have names with a Muslim resonance – names from the theological vocabulary filtered through local languages strongly influenced by Quranic terminology. Furthermore, if it is difficult for party leaders to be seen with religious groups, they have all taken care to foster relationships with them. During the writing of the Constitution at the end of the transition in 1999, debate was intense between supporters of secularism (represented by the intelligentsia educated in the French school) and local socio-cultural groups convinced that the system inherited from colonization had failed and, finally, collapsed.

After heated debate, a compromise was reached and the term “secularism” was replaced by “non-denominational state”. For supporters of secularism, “non-denominational” is not far from their position and, in addition, they obtained the inclusion in the Constitution of an agreement that no political party can use religious slogans in its propaganda. For those who are committed to Islam becoming the state religion, although they failed to impose *Shar’ia* as the state’s fundamental law, the disappearance of “secular” from the constitution was a divine blessing. For them, the current dynamic of Islam in Niger will inevitably lead to an Islamic state and the compromise is merely a postponement; for evolution remains favourable and time is working for the just cause.

Extract from Moulaye Hassane’s book published in 2015

Moreover, politicians often use religion to achieve political objectives. With democracy, a strong link was established between the state and religion, to the benefit of leaders of the state apparatus. References to Islam give politicians a certain aura and popularity, because they make them appear just and honest in the eyes of the people. Such references are made through speeches, interviews in the media, visits to sites with religious significance, the construction of buildings with a religious character, the financing of pilgrimages for militants, etc. These acts, which happen in isolation, raise important issues in relation to the use of religion.

“Islam is used in political campaigns. There is a proliferation of mosques with the appointment of Imams, whereas normally the management of mosques must be under the control of authority.” (Comment by a respondent from Zinder, 19 June 2015)

Beyond these actions, protests relating to religion have multiplied over time and become more diverse in nature.

1.3 The recurrence of protests related to religion

The first protests relating to religion were recorded in 1990 and they have since multiplied. They began in Zinder with what has been referred to as “Operation *bujébujé*”, when young women wearing skirts were molested in the street and had their skirts torn. This action was organised by religious factions who consider skirts both religiously and culturally indecent. In 2000, several religious associations protested against the organisation of FIMA (the International Festival of African Fashion) in Niamey. This protest turned violent and spread to other urban centres such as Maradi and Zinder. Several churches, bars and brothels were burned. The response of the government was to disband the organisations involved and to arrest their leaders. In 2012, in the town of Zinder, three churches were looted and burned, and anti-American slogans were chanted following the release of a film with Islamophobic themes.

Another form of religious protest has developed from outside influences over conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one example: in Niger, this conflict is considered to be a war between Muslims and Infidels. It is part of the hardening of religious identity for many Nigerien Muslims. This hardening is expressed in the various statements and protest marches that denote the collective nature of the claim of a religious popular identity. Examples include the protest demonstration in 2002, followed by the pro-Palestinian declaration by members of the Coalition of Democratic Forces (CFD). It also includes several calls – in January 2009 and July 2014 – to protest and to organize collective prayers for the Palestinian people launched by civil society organisations. These pro-Palestinian demonstrations are propagated in the mosques with virulent sermons which create a feeling of hatred towards Israel, but even more so towards the Western countries which support it. Thus, an anti-Israel and anti-Western ideology has developed. It is widely exploited by Arabist intellectuals (who control the dissemination of Islamic discourse) as well as by politicians of all kinds (both in power and in opposition).

In January 2015, protests of a religious nature were organised in three major cities (Niamey, Zinder and Agadez) against the Nigerien President's participation in the solidarity march after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo's* offices in Paris. These protests were very violent and resulted in the deaths of a dozen people. Several churches and bars were ransacked and burned. Note that the "Save Niger" collective denounced the President of the Republic for walking *"alongside those responsible for odious crimes against humanity, especially in Palestine"*.

This short history of religious protest in Niger, although not exhaustive, shows there are signs of tension and violence even if these protests are still scattered and isolated. What is of concern is the influence of external events, even distant ones, in this national context where Republican values are not the sole basis for the construction of individual identity.

2. The state-citizen relationship and its impact on security issues

"During the 1990s and 2000s, Niger was shaken by a series of rebellions and coups that have had a significant impact on the country's security, stability and development, as well as on national cohesion and the wellbeing of its peoples."
(Strategy document, High Authority for Peacebuilding (HACP), 2013)

The political context in Niger remains marked by the democratization and decentralization process which is still ongoing⁹. Since 2011, this has been facilitated by local and regional elections which have allowed the installation of municipal and regional councils across the country. Furthermore, the establishment of a High Authority for Peacebuilding (HACP), attached to the Presidency, has created a framework for reflection, the identification of the early signs of conflict and appropriate preventive actions. Security actors (FDS, information services, local security units), traditional Chiefs, local traditional authorities, the institutions responsible for the implementation of laws, and informal forces (private security companies, militias)¹⁰ were integrated within this structure. Such integration now allows security to be perceived as 'a public good' and a complex social phenomenon. This vision of the concept, however, has still not allowed the Nigerian Government to fully assume its regulatory tasks in order to build consistent trust within the population.

⁹ The decentralization process was disturbed by three military coups, in 1996, 2003 and 2010.

¹⁰ See text by the national consultant, Issoufou Yahaya (2015:5).

2.1 The impact of the weakening of the state...

The capacity of the state to ensure the safety of people living on its territory is one of the elements at the heart of the state-citizen analysis. In fact, people on the borders live in particular situations of stress due to the state's inability to address threats caused by two major events:

a) The collapse of the Gaddafi regime and the war in Mali:

The main consequences of NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 were the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the destabilization of the socio-economic and security situation across the entire Sahel-Saharan region. As Bayala (2012) explains, the fall of Gaddafi led to the rout of his heavily armed combatants (Libyans, Nigeriens and Malians); the looting of several military compounds and arsenals in Libya, which caused a massive inflow of arms into the Sahel region; and the return home, with no future prospects, of many sub-Saharan migrants working in Libya. Indeed, the collapse of the Gaddafi regime sent Malian Tuaregs home to their country. This led, in turn, to the explosion of various forms of trafficking (drugs, weapons, people and food products) on Mali's borders. This trafficking is a real source of insecurity in northern Niger.

The visible result of Western attacks in Libya, then, is the war in Mali which occurred as a result of the creation of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The presence of this movement has fostered the emergence of several other movements with religious connotations, among them, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The alliance between these different movements led to Mali's destabilization and caused several manifestations of insecurity in Niger. The most publicized were the attacks against the military camp of Agadez, against the Areva mine in Arlit and, recently, in Banibangou, Ouallam and Mangaizé (villages located in northern Tillabéri).

Four principal factors which make Niger a target and a victim of the crises in Libya and Mali

1. The porous nature of Niger's borders: with Libya, which is destabilized and fragmented by the presence of several clans, terrorist groups and scattered armed bandits; and with Mali, which is occupied by fundamentalists, torn by the Tuareg rebellion and infested with criminal trafficking of all kinds.
2. Niger's political and military action against the rebels and jihadist groups operating in Mali: this has earned Niger threats and acts of infiltration and violence, such as those against the village of Mangaizé and the civilian prisons in Ouallam and Niamey.
3. The existence of strong socio-cultural links between Nigerien and Malian border communities (Tuareg, Fulani, and Songhai): this facilitates infiltration and makes it difficult to control.
4. Pre-existing (since the 1990s) inter-ethnic tensions between Tuareg rebels and the Fulani self-defence militia in northern Tillabéri.

Extract from Moussa's work published in 2015

b) The expansion of Boko Haram (now, Islamic State's West Africa Province):

On its south side, Niger shares a 1500km border with Nigeria which allows multiple social and economic exchanges. Since it was established in 2000, the Boko Haram movement has been a real source of instability and concern at the border and across the whole country. In 2015, the actions of this movement reached the town of Diffa and the surrounding area, before making the Lake Chad region (which is bordered by Niger, Chad and Cameroon) a space for reprisals. In Zinder, on the border with Nigeria, the threat of Boko Haram feeds on all kinds of rumours which create a psychosis in the population:

“Our biggest fear is that some young people will enter the Boko Haram movement. We hear that there are people in the city who negotiate with unemployed young people and offer them money. If they are able to enlist some, the city will be the next target and that would be serious for us”. (Comment by a merchant from the town of Zinder, 18 June 2015)

This threat is also expressed through the desire to learn and pass on information received, to the point where the information itself becomes a source of insecurity:

“Information about Boko Haram comes to us from everywhere. Travellers coming from Diffa; relatives in Diffa who call on the phone; radio and television bombarding us with information. Anyone who takes seriously everything they hear, would not even be able to eat”. (Comment by an agent of the municipality of Zinder, 17 June 2015)

Explaining the reasons for such a movement, Bakary Sambe (2015) observes the segregation of elites within the public services of the state. He concludes that this movement results from “frustration fed by a dual education system in one country: on the one hand, a Western system whose beneficiaries follow a curriculum from primary school to higher education, and become civil servants; and, on the other hand, the Arabic-language system which produces the most marginalized people in our society, those who struggle to find a job or a respectable situation in their own country”¹¹.

In response to the question “What does a 20-year-old here dream about?” all of the answers by respondents in this study converge towards a general idea: “To find work and start a family”. The impossibility of achieving that dream is a source of despair and frustration for these young people and exposes them to the temptations offered by terrorist groups. According to Moulaye (2015), the factors which have determined the growth of the Boko Haram movement are inextricably complex in the sense that its leaders take advantage of the economy, politics, history, ethno-cultural reality and religion. “By focusing his propaganda on religion, Mohamed Youssouf [ideologue of Boko Haram] chose what is most deeply rooted in the people’s unconscious; his counter-offer points to all the inadequacies of social, political, economic and cultural governance of so-called modern states – built according to the original Western model – on the poor quality of life of the people. This is what justifies the attractiveness of the teaching and the influence it has exercised and continues to exert on young people in the region affected by its action”. Boko Haram’s uniqueness lies in its cruelty, its rapid expansion, and its strong capacity for popular mobilization.

Faced with such threats, including banditry, the state calls for the collaboration of the population through the denunciation of anyone suspect. But this form of co-operation faces two major challenges:

- The weak response by local security services: these services (police and gendarmerie) are accused, rightly or wrongly, of being ineffective in emergencies. For example, some areas are considered hazardous due to recurrent insecurity, yet no lasting measures are ever taken by the security services.

“There are roads that are not secure here in Zinder, I can name you 30: Garin Liman, Kaouboul, Madataï, Itchen-Goro, Kadamari, etc. We are really afraid of these roads; anything can come down them. The FDS [national defence and security force] is well

¹¹ From the book by Bakary Sambe about the financing of Boko Haram, *Boko Haram: Du problème Nigérian à la menace régionale*, published 14/05/15 on <http://www.senxibar.com>, consulted on 26/06/15.

aware of the trafficking there, but they do nothing because of corruption". (Comment by a merchant from the town of Zinder, 18 June 2015)

Similarly, information may itself become a source of insecurity, due to the lack of protection.

"How can you expect people to turn others in when they can be the target of these bandits the following night? The security forces, arresting the suspect, reveal to them the source of their information. And as a person can be charged only when there is evidence against him, well, they make the whistleblower their primary enemy". (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

Traditional leaders, expected to relay information to the local administration, also do not always feel protected.

"If they know who denounces them to the authorities, they will not hesitate to kill them! That's why we're all afraid to denounce". (Comment by a district Chief of Zinder, 19 June 2015)

- The tacit complicity of certain actors in local insecurity: the multiple attacks, which reflect the fragility of the state in terms of security, are also the expression of infiltration by some members of the local community.

"In most cases, the attacks happen with the complicity of people at the local level, which explains their effectiveness". (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

2.2 ... on building a new type of citizen

The fragility of the state, as demonstrated by its inability to protect people facing a range of threats (external and internal), is illustrated in two ways:

a) The presence of external forces in the country: It is seen to reflect the state's failure to meet its obligations.

The table opposite shows that 53% of respondents are in favour of the presence of African armed forces on their national territory because they do not think that the national army can cope with the multiple threats to the country. However, 69% of the same respondents are against the presence of Western forces, which they see as a source of insecurity and the "abdication" or "inability" of the state to meet its obligations to its people. This may explain the development of basic actions of solidarity among the lower classes to ensure their own protection.

What do you think of foreign armed forces in your country? (more than one answer could be given)					
	Very favourable	Somewhat favourable	Somewhat unfavourable	Very unfavourable	No opinion
African armed forces	1	53	46	0	0
Western armed forces	0	30	69	0	0
International armed forces	1	27	71	0	0

b) The emergence and continuity of self-defence militias: In general, a militia is formed in response to a weakness in the state's ability to provide local security and the protection of members of the community and their property in insecure areas. The main militias are the Arab militia of Tassara

(northern Tchintabaraden) which was introduced in the wake of the Tuareg rebellion of 1990; the Toubou and Fulani militia in the Diffa region; and, especially, the Fulani militia in northern Tillabéri. The latter has been the most publicized, given its alliances with the Islamist groups Ansar Dine and MUJAO in Mali. It is maintained to deal with external aggression (mainly Tuareg attacks) against the livestock of Fulani herders.

“We cannot stand idly by while the Dawsak [Tuareg sub-group] come and plunder our families and take our animals. Even when they know, the FDS only intervenes if their fuel is paid for by the victim. Most importantly, their involvement is never thorough. Since we have the militia, attacks have been rare”. (Comment by a participant in a group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

For local people, who feel that the state has deserted and abandoned their area or their ethnicities (in terms of security, investment and services), any sense of national belonging is complicated. Speaking of the water problem in Zinder, a respondent expressed himself in these words:

“You cannot say that the state, for over 50 years, cannot solve a water problem in a city (...). The city and its people are victims of state marginalization. We can do nothing!!!” (Interview with a young man from Zinder, 18 June 2015)

Another respondent denounces the different treatment suffered by some pastoralist communities:

“When 10 Fulani herders are killed, nobody talks about it (...) but let one sedentary person be killed and all the televisions and radios are mobilized, the interior minister makes an appearance, steps are taken. What is this state we live in where people’s lives are not equal?”

These types of statements are quite common and indicate the frustration of some groups with the state. Such frustrations create and maintain a clan mentality among the people concerned at the expense of national sentiment.

INTER-COMMUNAL AND CROSS-BORDER DYNAMICS

Points to remember:

- Various forms of sociability (inter-ethnic exchanges) undermine the border's official status and facilitate the mobility of people and goods.
- For many border residents, the community or religious identity they share with their neighbours on the other side of the border takes precedence over national identity.
- The border is an area for work opportunities for all social strata. It is a place where basic necessities are available and accessible, and thus, a space which contributes to the reduction of social inequality. This opportunity may also be transformed into a relative dependence, particularly from an economic point of view.
- Fluid mobility makes it difficult for defence and security forces to control the border and promotes the flow of weapons, drugs, diseases, etc. – which are all sources of insecurity. Cross-border exchange increases the risk of attacks, fraud and illegal trafficking.

1. The border as opportunity

"The border is like a tree. When you're under it, you enjoy its shade, its leaves, its bark, its dry branches and its fruit. But when it dies, one becomes an orphan, sad".
(Comment by a citizen of Tchintabaraden in an interview in Niamey, 19 June 2015)

1.1 The transit of profitable consumer products and equipment

Because of the border, the presence of a variety of good, low-cost products creates an important opportunity for local people who often face poor harvests due to varying weather conditions.

"The products that come from these borders are cheaper because the transport cost is not high and very often the carriers go around the customs checkpoints."
(Comment by the President of a youth association in Zinder, 20 June 2015)

The Tchintabaraden area, with its borders (with Mali and Algeria) and proximity to the Libyan border, is a transit hub for a variety of food products (pasta, dates, juice, etc.) and household appliances (televisions, refrigerators, stoves, etc.).

"(...) Indeed, trucks transport food and various goods from southern Algeria to Tahoua in Niger, and they transit through Tchintabaraden. These goods are affordable to most people. On their way back, truck drivers load animals (large and small herding animals) and cereals (millet) that they take to Tamanrasset".
(Comment by the head of a Tuareg group, 17 July 2015)

Zinder, in turn, is a place where agricultural and industrial products from Nigeria are consumed.

"Traders make two to three turns per day to stock up on food crops (millet, maize)".
(Comment by a merchant from Zinder, 20 June 2015).

Another respondent added:

“Without Nigeria, I wonder what would happen to our markets. Our main sources of supply are the border towns of Nigeria. We depend on them because they are our product suppliers and we are their consumers.(...) So, we are interdependent.”
(Interview with a district Chief, 18 June 2015 in Zinder)

The border, then, represents an opportunity to access products which are both diverse and low-cost, making them accessible to all social strata in the area. In a way, then, the border helps to reduce socio-economic inequality.

1.2 Attractive spaces for youth migration

Living on the border is seen by the respondents in the study as an opportunity to access various activities in neighbouring countries. In Tchintabaraden, Algeria and Libya are the primary host countries for young migrants. In this area, migration is a strategic way to adapt to the chronic shortage of local resources in that it allows young people to send home money, clothing and even equipment to their families.

“Before the crisis, all the young people were leaving for Libya. In every family, there was at least one person who went there. That was where the money was. There was always work and it was well paid. Within a few months, one could achieve a lot. You could come home and start a business or buy a transport vehicle. Almost all the houses you see were built through migration”. (Comment by a woman interviewed in Tchintabaraden, 19 June 2015)

Migration is also a way to train and learn. Most young people in Zinder migrating to Nigeria do so to increase their knowledge of Islamic culture (mostly through Quranic studies).

“The major cities of Nigeria (Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, etc.) are invaded by Nigerien youth who go to study the Quran and to trade. Most of the marabouts in this city went to Nigeria during their Islamic learning cycle”. (Comment by a religious leader in the town of Zinder, 20 June 2015)

Migration for people on the border is a regular practice which is deeply rooted in social and economic habits. This mobility on the border contributes to social cohesion and reduces the sense among local people that it is an official designation.

1.3 The social and cultural mix which weakens the borders

Generally, the same linguistic and cultural communities live on both sides of the border. This feeling of dual nationality across the border (real or imagined) promotes cross-border movement and trade, both social and economic. The people of Tchintabaraden maintain a broad relationship network with the people of Mali, Libya and Algeria, as do the people of Zinder with Nigeria. These social interactions are a benefit which make the cultural heritage of the border areas much richer and favour a strong socio-cultural integration between the peoples of these neighbouring areas.

“(...) At the heart of things, I do not know how to tell you who I am! I live in Zinder, I have uncles in Jigawa [a town in Nigeria] and my wife is from there. So, my children will be both Nigeriens and Nigerians. (...) When you go to Magaria [Nigerien village on the Nigerian border], you see how people are related to those of Baboura [a nearby Nigerian village]”. (Comment by a city trader in Zinder, 20 June 2015)

This makes the borders rather artificial. People who feel they are from the same land, and even the same families, have no real respect for formal barriers.

“Villages with the same name on both sides of the border indicate kinship ties between their inhabitants. Generally, one of the villages was created by an inhabitant of the other village”. (Comment by the same city trader, 20 June 2015)

This is the case for the villages of Adare, Datchi, Kokotoko and Gazabi, which are located both in Niger and Nigeria. These villages contribute to the merged identity of the inhabitants who multiply alliances and complicate national identity. Undermined by the dense network of social relations, one's identity as a national citizen inevitably gives way to a prior commitment – that of kinship, ethnicity or region.

2. The border as threat

“The border is a double-edged sword. In case of problems, those who live there are the first victims”. (Comment by a respondent in Tchintabaraden, 19 June 2015)

2.1 A shared feeling of insecurity

Despite a significant proportion (78%) of respondents who say they feel safe, 68% of them have already experienced a situation of insecurity in their lives. These are mainly related to the frequency of theft, muggings and robberies on the border. The qualitative interviews in the study indicate that insecurity stems from four main factors. Firstly, armed banditry, as is evident in Tchintabaraden with attacks on the major routes towards Algeria and Mali. The regularity of this banditry has prompted the government to organise convoys to more effectively secure transportation to the north. Secondly, networks to trade livestock stolen on the Malian and Algerian borders, which benefit from the complicity of some political and military leaders. This is also the case in relation to drug and cigarette trafficking networks which constitute a real threat to local people.

“The Malian Tuareg operate in a network. Some in the bush steal the animals of the Fulani of Niger and butcher them, while others come to get the meat to sell it in the settled villages. Other animals are taken to be sold in the rural markets of Mali. It was after this that the Fulani decided to defend themselves by establishing a militia made up of young people aged 20-25”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

Thirdly, the emergence and spread of contagious diseases (cholera, measles, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.), the control of which requires the mobilization of border states who do not always have the same strategies for coping with an epidemic.

“On the border with Nigeria, integrated health centres are places where diseases are easily transmitted due to the massive attendance of patients from Nigeria. It is mainly women and children who come there, because of the policy in Niger's health centres to give free healthcare to children from birth to five years”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

And, finally, young people who study in Nigeria and return home with attitudes and behaviours that create differences between them and those who never left. These differences are mainly in dress and ways of performing religious rituals (prayers and ablutions).

“Extremist behaviour comes to us from outside, with the talibés who leave to study in Nigeria. When they return, they usually stay together and use their time to spread the religion they adopted in Nigeria”. (Comment by a health worker, 20 June 2015 in Zinder)

2.2 The difficulties the FDS faces in terms of controlling the population

Insecurity in Libya and Mali poses a potential security risk for the Tchintabaraden area whose borders with both countries are too porous to be effectively controlled by the FDS. Thus, the major fear of the people in the area is the possible incursion of irregular foreign forces (armed/Islamist groups) and/or the occurrence of isolated acts of violence and robbery. In the area of Zinder, the focus of the perceived threat is the risk that Boko Haram will infiltrate the community. This risk is taken seriously, given the very strong social bonds between peoples on the border.

“Today, we can no longer tell the difference between who is dangerous and who is not. People are all the same [a reference to ethnic clothing] and it is even difficult for a local person to see the difference”. (Comment by a native of Tchintabaraden in Niamey, 17 June 2015)

Furthermore, in a context of insecurity, the peoples on the border often find themselves caught between two equally difficult things. Indeed, sometimes the army and/or armed terrorist groups accuse the members of a community (rightly or wrongly) of being accomplices of the opposing force. The case of a respondent in Tchintabaraden is illustrative. This respondent was the station chief in Aderbissnatt before he was abducted by rebels in 1991 because they considered him to be an accomplice of the state. A few months after his release by the rebels, he was seized by the regular army of the transitional government (established after the National Conference) because they thought he was an accomplice of the rebels. This set of factors remains worrisome for local people.

The fight against insecurity is also complicated by the fact that communities overlap. Indeed, the same peoples live on both sides of the borders (Arab, Touareg and Fulani for Tchintabaraden, Hausa and Fulani for Zinder). They share a common language or dress which can make the identification of criminals difficult for officials of the defence and security forces (FDS). This difficulty is aggravated by the non-cooperation of local people for cultural reasons. Denouncement is not only risky; it goes against local values.

“We cannot denounce someone of the same ethnicity. That looks very bad. It must be a close relative or we would be called ‘munaacifi’, an Arabic word that has been integrated in all Nigerien languages to describe the ‘slanderer’. Besides, anyone who does denounce, exposes themselves to the repression of bandits. The easiest way is just to shut up!” (Comment by the head of an NGO working on issues of peace and security in Niger, 18 June 2015, in Niamey)

2.3 An economy more vulnerable to insecurity

Insecurity in Libya and Mali has reduced the scale of the transnational trade in livestock which once existed between Tchintabaraden, eastern Mali and southern Algeria. This trade involved several dozen families in the Department of Tchintabaraden, some of whom have been forced out of business. Insecurity has also affected the circulation of consumer products imported from Libya and Algeria to Tchintabaraden, making these products more expensive than in the past.

“The price of everything goes up when a convoy is attacked. Even a rumour about a possible attack can raise prices! For example, the rumour last month increased the price of a mattress from 18,000 to 35,000 CFA francs and, then, a few days later to 40,000 CFA francs”. (Comment by a merchant from the city of Tchintabaraden, 20 June 2015)

In Zinder, due to the pressure of Boko Haram, some products (fish, peppers) have become scarce or expensive. The perfume *Encens*, produced in the Diffa region, which once cost 2000 CFA francs a box, now costs over 5,000 CFA francs. This situation is getting steadily worse with the state of emergency which has been prolonged and affects this region. Similarly, insecurity also impacts the level of remittances by migrants and transforms the migratory trajectories of young people.

“Before the fall of the Gaddafi regime, emigrants from Tchintabaraden in Libya sent home to their families some 100 million CFA francs each month, on average. But with the large number of men deported and returned home from Libya, migrant rates have sharply fallen. Others leave for Niamey and go on to the coastal countries or to Europe”. (Comment by a respondent from Tchintabarden, 20 June 2015)

The drastic fall in remittances from migration contributes to weakening purchasing power among local people.

Thus, despite the economic and social opportunities which life on the border offers, the security risks, even insecurity itself, are permanent. In recent years especially, people on the borders have lived in a permanent state of stress.

RADICALIZATION: CLUES AND PROCESS

Points to remember:

- The absence of justice or, rather, perceptions of unequal justice, creates frustrations which lead to an individual response ('armed banditry') or a collective response (rebellion as protest, militias for self-protection).
- Economic and social instability predisposes people living on the border to radical and violent behaviour.
- Lack of regulation of religious expression, particularly in the media, and the use of religion for political and economic purposes encourage the development of radical behaviour.
- People feel an increase in insecurity and violence at the border, but almost never associate this increase with the presence of radical religious messages/practices/groups.
- As a cross-border phenomenon, insecurity benefits a chain of actors at the local, national and international levels.

1. Popular understanding of the key concepts in the study

The key concepts of this study have many meanings. Their use relates to both a scholarly understanding and a popular understanding coming from the people most concerned. In other words, the explanation of popular perceptions of insecurity, radicalism and violent extremism allows so-called scientific knowledge to be confronted with so-called popular knowledge. It is obvious that the use of these terms varies according to the place and strategic groups surveyed, hence the need to understand the background on which these perceptions of security and insecurity are based. Similarly, understanding these concepts means a distinction must be made between their political use, their use in the media and their religious use in popular and scholarly forms.

Insecurity and security: the combined field data shows that insecurity is not only about violence or physical threat. It also includes the absence, inadequacy or inaccessibility of basic public services and the ability to be self-sufficient in terms of food production.

"In our area, we feel insecure when the annual harvest is bad or when we have problems getting drinking water, caring for our family members, schooling our children or when bandits are in the area and we cannot let our young people go out because we fear they will become victims of these bandits". (Comment by a respondent from Tchintabaraden, interviewed in Niamey, 11 June 2015)

Thus, notions of security and insecurity are encompassing concepts. For example, in Fulfulde, the translation of insecurity by *"rafi hakkilo fukkiigo"* refers to a lack or an absence of *moral tranquility* that encompasses both physical health (linked with food self-sufficiency and access to resources) and state of mind (linked to respect, consideration, and appreciation of the individual citizen).

Radicalism: for the people surveyed, any act which is prejudicial to the physical integrity of a human being must be characterized as extreme violence. According to them, four main factors promote violence in Niger: socio-economic, educational, religious and international. Furthermore, the respondents say that people engaged in violent extremism are motivated primarily by material goals, and only secondarily by the symbolic dimension.

Jihadism: in the areas covered by this study, this concept remains little used in everyday language. It is used to reproduce discussions in the media or when speaking of terrorists from outside the country. In the places surveyed, *jihad* is understood in its normative form referring to the believer's internal struggle that brings him closer to his God.

2. Contributing factors

“No, there is no community that is more prone to violent extremism. It is daily living conditions that tip the balance into violence”. (Comment by a Director in the Ministry of Planning, interviewed in Zinder, 19 June 2015)

It is important to emphasise that predisposition is not action, but rather a condition which promotes action. Predisposing factors, mainly relating to living conditions, are structured around the following points:

2.1 The almost permanent absence of the state

In the areas covered by this study, the weak presence of the state is perceived through a lack, or inadequate provision, of basic public services and the absence of fair justice.

The **basic public services** in question concern access to drinking water, health services (both for humans and animals in pastoral areas) and education. For several years, Zinder – the second largest political centre in the country – has suffered a severe shortage of water which most inhabitants believe is due to the lack of political will to solve the problem.

In Tchintabaraden and northern Tillabéri, the problems are more complex. Several villages have no school, no health centre, and no modern water point.

“Many villagers in the area know the existence of the state only in terms of the annual taxes they pay. Moreover, villagers flee when they hear the sound of a car coming because, in their experience, a vehicle is always linked to misfortune (such as armed bandits or uniformed officials coming to punish them). The FDS supposed to protect them only comes to their homes to extort money from them”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015).

Another respondent added:

“In northern Tillabéri, there is no state presence. School, health and water infrastructures are absent. No public official wants to go to the area. Only the ICRC is present in the area. It is involved in the humanitarian context and vaccination of animals”. (Comment by a citizen of northern Tillabéri in Niamey, 21 June 2015)

This lack of basic social services in villages creates a sense of marginalization as an area (in the case of Zinder) and/or as a community (in Tchintabaraden and northern Tillabéri). This makes local people more open to radical, even violent, messages.

The absence of **social justice** is expressed in both recruitment conditions for civil and military jobs, but also in the way justice is administered in the surveyed areas. Several respondents mentioned the manifest dysfunction of state services due to corruption, cronyism, favouritism, nepotism – in sum, anything which creates and sustains the marginalization of poor population groups (in the economic and social sense). These illustrations are just some examples of injustice among others:

“I do not understand why, even with a diploma, you cannot get a job without going through an acquaintance. To be recruited, you must always have some pull, know someone in the service who may influence the decision. Somebody who has nobody will remain forever unemployed”. (Comment by the Chairman of a youth association in Zinder, 18 June 2015)

Another respondent expressed a feeling of injustice because *“for any administrative document you need in the state services, you have to pay the agents, otherwise you will go back-and-forth without ever getting it”* (comment by a citizen of Tchintabaraden, 17 June 2015). In all sectors of public life, injustices are experienced by community members. The accumulation of these injustices causes violent behaviour to develop among social actors.

2.2 Socio-economic conditions

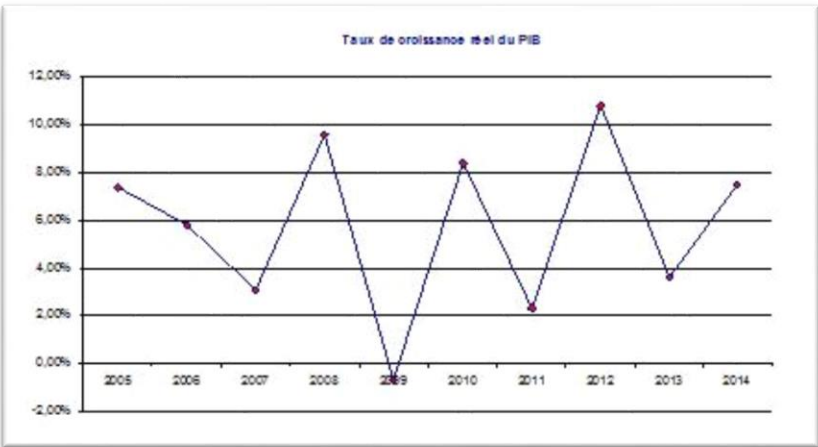
Analysis of the socio-economic situation in Niger ranks it among the poorest countries in the world.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENCHMARKS

According to data from the Institute of National Statistics (INS), Niger had a GDP/Inhabitant of 401 US dollars in 2013, placing it among the poorest countries in the world. Its poverty threshold in 2011 was 51.8%, with a strong feminization of poverty (3/4). Niger also experiences significant underemployment, affecting 4 out of 5 people, due to the seasonal nature of its agriculture. It also suffers chronic food shortages and has to face major demographic pressure; with 51% of its people under 15 years of age, a life expectancy of 59-60 years, and a population estimated at 17 million. Niger has a total fertility rate of 7.6 children per woman and a gross birth rate of 46.1%, one of the highest in the world. With a ratio of one doctor per 18,824 people in 2013, almost twice the ratio considered normal by the WHO, Nigerien health is far from guaranteed.

Extract from the work of Issoufou Yahaya published in 2015

The graph below shows the evolution of the economic growth rate in Niger from 2005 to 2014. The graph reveals economic instability which restricts social investments and the functioning of state public services. This rate, which is totally out of step with Niger’s population growth (see box), is a source of protest about access to public services and social justice.



Source : www.afd.fr

Thus, socio-economic factors are widely cited by respondents as prime factors which create the conditions for people to experience insecurity in all its forms. The factor which is mentioned most is

poverty, with its corollaries of want, unemployment and the increased marginalization of vulnerable groups (see table below). The socio-economic conditions in the table are also factors which predispose individuals to radicalization and violence:

In your opinion, what are the sources of insecurity in your region (poverty, unemployment, marginalized youth, absence of security forces, etc.)? (more than one answer could be given)	Nb
Inactivity/unemployment	49
Poverty/want/precariousness	77
Marginalized/abandoned youth	45
Delinquency/criminality/drugs	10
Political disinterest (abandonment by public authorities, local or regional elected officials)	11
Presence of radically religious messages/practices/groups	2
Absence of security services (police, gendarmerie, army)	1
Other	0

Poverty is perceived by the 2012-2015 PDES [Plan de développement économique et social] – a policy planning economic and social development – as deprivation “of basic social services, of a healthy and balanced diet, of drinking water and a decent living environment and housing. (...) It affects rural areas more than urban ones (...) and takes an endemic dimension in Maradi, Dosso and Tillabéri”. This comparative analysis of poverty in different regions of Niger allows us to understand that the two areas surveyed (Zinder and Tchintabaraden) are not the poorest. This relativizes the role of economic factors in explaining the causes of insecurity.

2.3 The effects of youth migration

Migration has different effects on young people, depending on whether they are on the Nigerian, Malian or Libyan border. The link to the border is important here since 82% of respondents state that young migrants primarily go to the neighbouring country. Thus, conditions of life in the neighbouring country are imported through these young migrants. These living conditions reflect social values which are expressed through behaviour and attitudes which, often, are not in sync with those of the country of departure.

Destination of young people	Nb	%
The capital	0	0%
Other part of the country	8	8%
Neighbouring country	82	82%
Elsewhere in Africa	9	9%
Europe	0	0%
No opinion	1	1%
Other	0	0%
Total	100	100%

“Young people returning from Libya build houses, buy nice cars and have a living standard that is above that of the people of the city. They also return with equipment for their home: living rooms, flat-screen TVs, various appliances, etc. All this encourages young people to migrate or to create the conditions that give them access to resources – often, by any means possible”. (Comment by a respondent from Tchintabaraden in Niamey, 20 June 2015)

Furthermore, Niger is a transit country for migration between the countries of West and Central Africa and towards Europe. Its expansive territory and the low capacity of the state to control its borders, combined with the large number of migrants in transit in Niger, all predispose the country to significant security risks.

3. Factors of radicalization

“When human dignity is not respected, one is ready to do anything, including join Boko Haram”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

3.1 The exploitation of religion

The struggle for influence between traditionalism and radicalism: the two religious trends differ as much in terms of religious practices as in the individual behaviour of their leaders, although the presence of a hard core movement in the areas covered by this study is not perceived as a source of insecurity. The respondents (especially in group interviews) did, however, express fears about the risks of the radicalization process which is underway in their localities.

The reformers (*Wahhabis*) now consider any practices which give meaning to social values (baptisms, weddings, funerals) as *bid’a* (“blameworthy innovations”, un-Islamic practices). They have also initiated the translation of Islamic books into Western languages for better dissemination of this knowledge. Many young people are transforming themselves into preachers and presenting programmes on television and radio (at least two Islamic broadcasts a day – for example, on radio and television Bonferey¹² – over which the state has no control). In their messages, several religious practices have been condemned as un-Islamic, thereby suddenly creating two groups: traditionalists (who try to find compromises between local culture and religion) and radicals (who refuse to compromise with local culture). By cross-referencing data from the qualitative interviews and the scientific literature, the specific characteristics of these two trends can be described.

Traditional current	Radical current
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ conservative ○ adapts to the local context (social and temporal) ○ part of local traditions and culture ○ flexible and tolerant ○ interprets texts in an allegorical and symbolic manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ dogmatic ○ based on an established order ○ adheres to the original texts from the origins of Islam
Advocates the culture of resilience	Cultivates dogmatism in ritual and seeks absolute change in the communities

The differences between these currents are more noticeable in the dress of followers (e.g. short trousers), in grooming (e.g. long beards without a mustache), in the performance of rituals of prayer and the content of sermons. Indeed, rituals differ both in form (e.g. times of prayer, manner of making ablutions, the posture taken in prayer) and content (e.g. the types of verses read, the times of reading and the quality of expression). This creates enormous differences which double the number of mosques in the same neighbourhood or lead to the refusal to pray behind an Imam who is not of the same religious group.

“In many neighbourhoods, it is easy to find mosques that have been separated by just a narrow alley. Depending on whether one is traditionalist or radical, one goes to this mosque or the other. Traditionalists will pray the prayer of Zuhur from 14:00 and the Asr from 16:00; while the others pray Zuhur from 13:30 and Asr at 16:30”. (From an interview with a Maliki marabout, in Zinder, 18 June 2015)

¹² Bonferey is a radio and television company which broadcasts religious chants and sermons.

Several respondents brought up the haughty attitude of the radicals who think that traditionalists are not rigorous in their religious practices.

“I have a neighbour who refuses to pray with us. He travels almost a kilometre to pray in a Wahhabi mosque, going past two more mosques on his way. He thinks that the traditionalists have no mastery of Arabic, and so misinterpret the texts of the Quran”. (Comment by a religious leader in Zinder, 20 June 2015)

Moreover, the body of concepts used by these radicals in their sermons (during prayers on Friday or in the media) is, in itself, a factor of radicalization. These messages are developed around the problems of The Hour (the end of the world), while taking into account the concerns of the masses. These speeches are generally targeted at young people (often without employment), officials (their relationship to their superiors, or to their regular duties), traders (in carrying out their business) and women (in relation to their married life and relationships with other women). For each of these groups, specific themes are developed with a particularly inspiring accent.

Goals/interests beyond religious display: around the obvious religious message and the distinctive behaviour of religious radicals, the survey suggests a hidden agenda, namely, that of building an Arab network of funding. Indeed, the various Islamic associations (*supra*) use the channels of radical currents to mobilize Saudi, Kuwaiti and Qatari funds in their favour. These funds are used to create religious and social infrastructure (mainly mosques and water points). They are also used in education (Islamic training, scholarships), in health (the distribution of medicine) and in various humanitarian activities (the distribution of food, clothing, etc.).

The intervention of NGOs considered to be providing Arab aid is much appreciated by the local people. Data from the quantitative surveys show that 73% of respondents find this aid effective. This appreciation is explained by the fact that these actions affect real life (water, education, health and food) as well as the symbolic life of the people (mosques), with flexibility in the conditions around access. Indeed, people do not have to complete a formal application in order to benefit from the work of the Arab NGOs.

“With the Arab NGOs, there is no need to provide papers. Often, it is enough just to see the Director, explain what you want, and the NGO comes and digs the well. All they want is for a photo to be taken once the work is finished”. (Comment by an ex-fighter from the Tuareg rebellion, interview in Tchintabaraden, 19 June 2015)

In addition to this type of physical infrastructure, these NGOs provide other benefits (of material and symbolic nature) which also enable them to disseminate ideologies. These ideologies are often specific to the donors.

Perceptions of cases of violence: the manipulation of religion is more worrying when it takes a violent turn. This is the case in relation to the various violent movements which have developed in West Africa over the past decade. AQIM, the MUJAO, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram are considered by the majority of the respondents in the study (56%) as bandits using Islam to spread violence and terror in the sub-region. They are also considered to be fanatics or madmen by 22% of respondents. However, 7% of respondents consider them to be liberators and defenders, while 11% gave no opinion. The results presented in the table below demonstrate that there is a tolerant attitude towards the actions of the jihadists.

Three factors can be used to interpret these results:

In your opinion, the jihadist groups are:	Nb	%
Saviours or liberators	2	2%
Resisters or defenders	5	5%
Desperate	3	3%
Fanatics, madmen	22	22%
Bandits	56	56%
Other	0	0%
No answer	11	11%
Total	99	99%

1) The professional profile of the respondents: in the study sample, farmers, craftsmen, merchants and the unemployed made up 52% of respondents. These groups are most critical of state actions because of their poor access to public services. For them, the jihadists offer a way to punish the state.

“Some of the positions of tolerance of the jihadists can be explained much more by their own relationship to the state than by their compassion for religion”. (Comment by participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

2) Frustrations linked to administrative and social injustice (of which the people have been victims). People do not necessarily fear a worst

case scenario, even though their level of despair is high.

3) The proliferation of sermons with radical content serving to legitimize actions by the jihadists.

3.2 The economy of insecurity

Although, a priori, insecurity is considered in theoretical literature as having tragic human and psychological consequences, it does develop a parallel economy (visible and invisible) which benefits various actors. Cross-referencing the qualitative data from the study has indicated that, beyond the visible face of insecurity (abuse in many forms), an entire economy prospers through the circulation of arms, drugs and people.

First, the study shows that the transportation of drugs and other illicit products to Tchintabaraden is an important activity for most young people. Transportation consists of driving a vehicle (e.g. a Toyota Land Cruiser) loaded with illegal products from Mauritania or Mali. These goods are then delivered to the Algerian, Libyan or Egyptian coasts by crossing Niger. After this delivery, the driver receives the unloaded vehicle and a sum ranging from 10 to 15 million CFA francs, depending on the nature and quantity of the products delivered.

“Now, with the instability in Libya, young people only want to transport, so they can get an Aujule [a brand of a 4x4 Land Cruiser car] and a few million CFA francs. Actually, all the young people who have already made such transport have this type of vehicle and houses in the city of Tchintabaraden”. (Comment by a young man from Tchintabaraden, 20 June 2015)

The interesting detail in terms of this analysis is the fact that it is young people who are in search of transportation jobs and not traffickers seeking drivers. This trend is different from the situation in Zinder where young people are solicited to join the Boko Haram movement in exchange for a motorcycle and 300,000 CFA francs.

At the national and international level, drug trafficking and smuggling generate significant resources for actors in these networks, as Jeune Afrique (2013) and Issoufou Yahaya (2015) note: “The stakes are economic and social. Drugs, for example, are the main factor in destabilizing a country. This traffic in the Sahel brought in 900 million euros in 2012, according to UNODC. It is important to neutralize, with the help of partners, the air, sea and land routes used by drug traffickers.”¹³

Several respondents interviewed during the study indicated that the trafficking networks (drugs and arms) which accompany insecurity are managed and maintained by local, national and international actors.

“Drugs and weapons trafficking networks are quite powerful networks, often stronger than our states. They are managed by powerful people or international firms, conducted with the help of a set of actors wherein everyone gets their share”.
(Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

“(...) Let there be no illusions: some vehicles are never controlled because a checkpoint officer has received orders to let them pass”. (Comment by an ex-fighter in the Tuareg rebellion, interview in Tchintabaraden, 20 June 2015)

From these comments, selected from many others, it can be inferred (although it is difficult to state categorically) that it is not surprising that trafficking networks find various accomplices: top officials in the civil and military administration, political leaders, local bosses and traditional leaders. To this end, Grégoire (2013) notes that “the stronger presence of AQIM, the fall of Gaddafi and the growth in drug trafficking have allowed the Tuareg to wield significant financial means: many traditional leaders and rebels have prospered by charging rights of way or ensuring the transfer of precious commodities”.

Finally, this economy of insecurity attracts new actors such as criminal groups who organise the kidnappings of Westerners for ransom and Islamist groups which spread terror in the sub-region. Issoufou Yahaya (2015) stresses that “to give themselves even more leverage, these terrorist groups present themselves as ‘subsidiary jihadists’”. Alain Chouet, former Director of the external security intelligence service, insists that “any violent protest in the Muslim world, whatever its motivation, soon realizes that it must call itself Al-Qaida or Islamic State if it wants to be taken seriously. AQIM has done this since September 11, 2006 and, recently, Boko Haram has, too.”

3.3 The lack of media regulation

The media, which represents information and citizen training tools, is present in the areas covered by this study. Various local, national and international channels (television and radio) make it possible for local actors to stay informed. However, the comments collected during the study question their potentially positive impact. Several raised the issue of the negative impact of the sort of ‘front page’ news which dominates coverage of Africa, and particularly West Africa.

¹³ “Over the past 12 years, West Africa has become a revolving door for the traffic of Latin-American cocaine towards Europe, taking advantage from the poverty and governmental weakness of countries in the region. The drugs arrive by boat into the Gulf of Guinea or by plane in direct flights (Venezuela-Mauritania or Mali) before being stocked or redistributed by road mainly across the Sahel towards the southern coasts of the Mediterranean.” (Jeune Afrique, 10 March 2013).

“The international channels, especially radio RFI, the BBC, the Voice of Germany or America, that provide information in Hausa and are much listened to in Nigeria, essentially spread terrorizing information. When it comes to talking about Africa, only famine, war, epidemics and terrorism are mentioned”. (Comment by an agent of the FDS in Tchintabaraden, 20 June 2015)

Another respondent goes further by pointing to the lack of neutrality of certain television channels.

“Of course, I keep aware of what is being said in the media, but sometimes it is the media which are the real sources of insecurity. When you look at certain channels, you see they encourage or give voice to frustrated people spreading religious and ethnic hatred”. (Comment by a teacher in a primary school in Tchintabaraden, 19 June 2015)

Local and national radio stations, which are also the most listened to (33% and 36%), pose two major issues which are mentioned in the qualitative interviews: 1) the debates they organize are usually led by incompetent people, so the explanation of the topics covered is not good; 2) in most cases, sermons with incendiary content are broadcast.

“The channels broadcast several Islamic shows and some chains even seem to share Islamist propaganda. Preachers of all kinds are invited. Often, we witness direct attacks on people or other religious groups”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

Some chains are supported by religious leaders or sponsored by humanitarian NGOs of a religious nature.

From several qualitative interviews, it is also clear that the current violence is felt to be fiercer, with no place for either dialogue or tolerance. Contrary to violence in the past, which was less cruel and unusual, today “human life is desecrated and death, trivialized”.

“(…) This is modern violence, characterized by media fuss and influence; the use of modern means of communication [mobile phones and the Internet] that are fast and reach a large mass of people at the same time; a policy of intoxication based on the manipulation of religion; and methodical brainwashing with strong psychological coercion”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

All of this should be subject to careful supervision by the state. Unfortunately, given the sensitivity of the issue and electoral considerations, no authority has committed itself to controlling religious messages in public debate¹⁴.

¹⁴ In July 2015, the Minister of the Interior, Public Security, Decentralization and Religious Affairs, announced new controls on the content of sermons and Friday prayers. But, even before the measures could be put into effect, the printed press had put them on the front page and labeled the Minister as an unbeliever who wanted to harm the diffusion of Islamic knowledge.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Instrumentalization of religion, economic insecurity and the lack of regulation of the media contribute to the transformation and evolution of forms of violence in the area covered by the study and in the country in general (the nature of the actors involved, the approach, the promotion of ideology and the purpose of the actions undertaken). Indeed, it appears from the interviews in the study, that there is a clear difference between the current violence and that experienced by older generations. Previously, at the local level, people knew – and mutually controlled – each other. Today, with the high population growth rate, people living in the same area may not know one another, thus making local control more difficult. Before, there was not this proliferation of armed robbery and gratuitous violence. Moreover, before the advent of democracy, there was greater social cohesion. Everyone knew their place and the limits of their rights within the community. But with democracy, everyone now thinks they have the right to do anything, including criminal acts when they feel aggrieved or in a position of strength.

Extract from the synthesis of the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Points to remember:

- The fragility (physical and mental) of women and children makes them vulnerable to various forms of insecurity on the border.
- This vulnerability is the foundation for manipulation, both political (elections) and ideological (religious, ethnic and economic).
- Women and young people are vectors for lasting peace when involved in decision-making and in the implementation of actions to be taken against insecurity.

“Women are the guardians of peace; and young people, the foundation of the future! If we want to have control of a community, we have to know how to manage them”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

In Niger, as in other Sahelian communities, women and young people remain the most vulnerable because of their limited capacity to access substantial financial and symbolic resources. Various aspects were raised in the qualitative surveys to explain this weakness:

- The physical nature of women and the immaturity of the young.
- Women’s role as educator of children, which forces them to spend most of their time at home.
- Women are more exposed to the harmful effects of divorce and widowhood.
- Women and young people have little or no access to family property for customary and/or religious reasons (a woman’s share of an inheritance is two times less than that of a man).

The combination of these factors creates a situation where women and young people find themselves dependent on a husband, brother or father, with little or no say in decision-making.

In terms of numbers, these two groups are the largest groups in the country. In Niger, women represent about 52% of the population, and young people 75%, according to figures from the National Statistics Institute. These figures make them significant groups, who are even coveted by politicians (for the elections) and Islamists (to strengthen and expand their ideology).

1. Women, the potential beyond the vulnerability

A recent study¹⁵ showed the important role women play in local and national elections. They are used as ‘electoral cattle’, mobilized only for their support while their concerns are barely taken into account, or not taken into account at all, in decisions relating to public policy.

Similarly, the new religious discourse recruits them, organising them in *makaranta* (religious spaces for training and information) where they adopt new behaviours both in terms of dress (Islamic veil, *burkha* and *niqab*) and psychology (conjugal docility, attachment to religious principles, etc.). These women are the target of humanitarian NGOs using Arab funding. The *makaranta* are less present in Tchintabaraden, but most visible in the city of Zinder.

¹⁵ Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan (ed.) (2015).

In terms of insecurity, it is clear from the interviews in the study that women are much more vulnerable than men.

“Women are the first victims of insecurity because they are most exposed. (...) The example of the girls abducted in Nigeria by members of Boko Haram is illustrative. They had done nothing wrong but were victims simply because they are women. They were reduced to sexual, moral and physical slavery”. (Comment by a city official of Tchintabaraden, 17 June 2015)

Another person interviewed in the same area adds:

“Women are vulnerable in times of conflict because they have no means of defence and, most often, stay with their children, which is also an obstacle to mobility. Then, they are not financially independent and do not have the means to flee”. (Comment by a teacher in a primary school in the city of Tchintabaraden, 18 June 2015)

Moreover, in times of unrest, the risk of a woman losing her husband is quite significant. In losing her husband, the woman usually finds herself without material means and with sole charge of her children. These elements show that the vulnerability of women is not only physical and economic, but also psychological and moral. All this makes them vulnerable to various forms of ideology which preaches resignation and promises an *after-life* (religion) or offers a break from the current conditions through promises and acts of financial support (humanitarian NGOs, institutions working on gender issues, etc.).

2. From manipulation to the rehabilitation of young people

Young people are certainly considered to be the most significant people in relation to the future of a community. But the current situation of young people in Niger, in general and in the study areas in particular, is characterized by growing unemployment (both as a result of lack of employment and the disruption of migration paths due to unrest). Idle and unemployed, young people often gather in organised gangs and create fear and anxiety around them. The young people of the “palaces” in Zinder are a concrete example of this. Indeed, for several years now, unemployed young people from poor families have formed groups of bandits offending relatives, neighbours and state officials.

“They [the young of the palace] have territories, distinctive signs, passwords, speeches”. (Comment by a participant in the group interview in Niamey, 2 July 2015)

They are identified by various behaviours and attitudes: open drug use; the way they drive motorcycles; their lack of respect for the Highway Code; and other regular violations of social and administrative rules they do in order to get attention. The interview group also made it clear that these groups could be manipulated by various actors according to the local and national context.

“The young people of the palaces are currently the main cause of insecurity in Zinder. There are several youth groups who clash, and sometimes kill; they may attack a family and plunder with no real cause; they may threaten or attack a relative of one of their own members when this member starts opposing their way of action; they rape girls (often, as a gang) and attack government departments, especially the police station. They work as ‘outlaws’ and position themselves as masters of the city”. (Comment by a respondent from Zinder, 19 June 2015)

Youth from palaces in Zinder are not the only examples of violent youth in Niger. The Fulani militia in northern Tillabéri is another case of violent youth. Unlike the first group, who attack members of their own community or even their own families, the youth of northern Tillabéri act to protect their communities against abuse from the Malian Dawsak Tuaregs who rustle livestock in their area (northern Tillabéri). This self-defence has evolved in relation with the precarious inter-community relations between the Fulani and Zarma¹⁶ in the area and the security situation in Mali (with the creation of the MNLA). These young people first affiliated themselves with the *Ganda Izo* militia of Mali before joining the MUJAO with whom they learned how to use heavy weapons and develop war strategies. According to one participant in the group interview of 2 July 2015, talks initiated by the Government of Niger allowed their return to the area. Yet, they have remained without supervision and become a real threat to stability in the area. The attacks on Maigaizé, Oualam and Banibangou in April 2015 have been attributed to them. It is also likely they will form an alliance with the Macina Liberation Frnt (MLF) given the ethnic links between them.

CREATION AND ORGANISATION OF THE FULANI MILITIA IN THE NORTHERN TILLABÉRI REGION

The creation of the Fulani militia in northern Tillabéri is the result of a succession of events carried out by some Malian populations against Nigerien Fulani herders located along the border with Mali. These events – ranging from livestock theft to armed attacks and murders – have evolved as they have increased.

Initially, members of the militia had traditional weapons and shotguns. But with the unrest in northern Mali, which favours the circulation and sale of weapons, many pastoralist families have sold animals to buy weapons. Thus, each member of the militia has a weapon purchased by their family or members of their community. So, it is the area's farmers themselves who support, both materially and financially, the militia. Initially, the militia members moved on foot or by camel. But given the emergencies and the often long distances to cover to assist attacked camps, the militia has acquired vehicles purchased through financial contributions from the Fulani pastoralists of northern Tillabéri.

The gathering of members into this militia receives increasing popular support in the area (including in the Zarma community) due to the equity of the justice rendered, as shown in this testimony.

“Once, a young Fulani killed a Zarma man for no reason and the Zarma, instead of retaliating as usual, informed the Nigerien Fulani militiamen in Mali. The militia came and, after conducting an investigation, established the guilt of the young Fulani to whom Shar’ia law was applied. He was beheaded before the representatives of the two communities”. (Comment by a representative of northern Tillabéri breeders)

The application of *Shar’ia* in this case is seen as just and fair punishment which avoided inter-ethnic feuding due to the fault of one member of a community.

From these two examples (in Zinder and northern Tillabéri), it can be easily understood that unsupervised young people can be the cause of local, national and even sub-regional unrest. For this reason, parents must be involved in the transmission of ethical values and social morality. The state, for its part, must create the conditions to ensure professional guidance and jobs are provided to the young, not only to care for them but also to control them.

¹⁶ For more detail about the conflict between the Fulani and Zarma, see the text in Appendix IV by Moussa Mohamed, national consultant on this study.

Local security starts with the control of mobilized masses. Women and young people, because they form a large part of Niger's population, are important actors in any development action, including actions targeting the development of security. As shown in this report, women and young people are vulnerable groups which can be easily manipulated. Supervisory measures by both the state and community can help transform the risk that women and young people are manipulated into an opportunity for these two groups to contribute to development.

AVENUES FOR REFLECTION

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:

For the state

Avenue for reflection 1: Reinforce a sense of national identity through social investment

Given the complexity and diversity of the forms of violence in the country, the state could work to strengthen its credibility through social investments to make its citizens aware of belonging to a common nation. In border areas, the priority actions to be undertaken could include:

- Strengthen and extend actions in basic social services (water, education and health) to make these services available and accessible to all.
- Take responsibility for the protection of the border territory by equipping the army and strengthening its technical and logistical capacity. This capacity-building could contribute to reconciliation between the state and communities. Thus, communities would see the state performing its role of security provider.
- Initiate public policies facilitating youth employment through two axes: (1) a policy of training and technical support for self-employment; and (2) an effective policy for creating jobs so that young people are less idle and/or tempted to join terrorist movements.

Growing civic consciousness, on the basis of concrete improvements in living conditions in the border areas, could be supported by increased appreciation of local authorities, including traditional ones. Local authorities could, then, act as a positive intermediary between government and citizens in order to start regular dialogue/debate between them, and build trust between the different actors.

Avenue for reflection 2: Strengthen the credibility of debate in the public space

On issues with great potential to mobilize, the state could be the guarantor of a respectful debate between the different sensibilities. To this end, it could:

- Develop a participatory policy concerning control of the *ulema* to more effectively control the content of the messages delivered through preaching and sermons.
- Initiate consultation with the High Council for Communication (CSC), which is the regulatory body for the public and private press, to develop a mechanism of control and sanction of media outlets which broadcast hate speech around politics, religion, regions or ethnicity.
- Build relationships and bridges for collaboration between the Arab and Western NGOs to reduce the risk of them disseminating religious ideology along with their work at the local level.

For religious and tradition leaders

Avenue for reflection 3: Work to strengthen social cohesion in a systematic and concerted manner

As vectors of influence, religious and traditional leaders can play a role in efforts to strengthen social cohesion. On the basis of their individual responsibility, as well as their collective responsibility, religious and traditional leaders could contribute through concerted efforts to:

- Silence the differences between religious groups. Bridges between the different religious denominations are needed to improve the conditions of community life.
- Educate communities about the culture of peace by integrating Republican values (tolerance, acceptance of others, forgiveness, etc.) into preaching and sermons.
- Organise awareness sessions on subjects such as public service, access to school, attendance at health centres, non-violent conflict management, as well as security and social cohesion in order to strengthen the common values of communities living in the same space.

Avenue for reflection 4: Strengthen traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution

Since traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution are close to the local population and local issues, with long established legitimacy, these mechanisms could provide traditional leaders with opportunities for dialogue enabling them to negotiate effectively with local radicals. Thus, beyond the regular conflicts which undermine any community, these mechanisms could help prevent radicalization in cases identified by the population. Efforts to resolve conflicts and address radicalism could also be accompanied by efforts to foster peaceful coexistence between communities as a way for communities to play an active role in ensuring community security.

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