'The children of the people': integration and descent in a former slave reservoir in Chad

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature …………………………………………………………………….

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

VALERIO COLOSIO

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

'THE CHILDREN OF THE PEOPLE': INTEGRATION AND DESCENT IN A FORMER SLAVE RESERVOIR IN CHAD

SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to explore the social legacies of slavery in the Guéra region, in central Chad. The topic of the legacy of slavery in the Sahel is receiving increasing attention from both local and global civil society, as well as from scholars. This thesis aims to contribute to these debates, connecting post-slavery issues with the new models of governance developed in the Sahel since the 1990s, and the increasing competition for resources through mobilising ethnic categories. It argues that as the recognition of citizenship rights tends to be related to specific identities, slave ancestry becomes a political tool that is used in different ways.

Based on nine months of fieldwork in Guéra, the thesis explores the complex interactions between a group that is widely seen as slave descendants, *Yalnas*, meaning "the sons of the people" in Chadian Arabic, and their neighbours. Until it came under French rule in 1911 the Guéra region acted as an effective "reservoir" of slaves for the neighbouring Wadai sultanate, whose warriors regularly took captives from among the scattered groups of local farmers. After the colonial regime's abolition of slavery, the opportunities for former slaves and the social dynamics related to this were different from those in areas inhabited by former slave-holders. In this context, the ethnonym *Yalnas* initially facilitated the integration of former slaves locally, whereas today it used to criticize the rights of its members, to the point that people called *Yalnas* are trying to get rid of this label.

The thesis analyses the narratives of the past of both the Yalnas and other local groups. It brings together the stories recounted by elders and archival sources with contemporary political tensions, to explore the ongoing importance of the presumed past of the Yalnas as slaves. In Guéra, it was relatively easy for slave-descendants to be accepted among other local groups and intermarry with them. However, Yalnas' integration has been built on contradictions that make their status ambiguous. This ambiguity is central to current contestations over land and citizenship. Since the reforms of the 1990s, a range of new local associations have formed in Guéra. These are used by local leaders to consolidate support and distribute resources on an ethnic basis. In this context, the past of the Yalnas as former slaves has been used as an argument to exclude them from the opportunities created by these associations. In these struggles, narratives about the past are used by all groups as political tools and are critical to secure citizenship rights. A focus on the label *Yalnas* and its changing uses over time provides important insights about the connection between slavery, identity and citizenship in a former slave reservoir.

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Glossary of Chadian Arabic words

Chadian Arabic was first transcribed into a written form by the colonial administrator Henri Carbou in 1913. While a complete dictionary of the language was more recently realized by the linguist Patrice Julien de Pommerol, in 1999. However, there is a lot of variation between specific regions, especially in the central and northern parts of the country where it is the mother tongue of a number of different groups. In this thesis I have followed the glossary given by Marty, Eberschweiler and Dangbeth (2009), whose research was based among the Arab migrant groups moving across the Guera and Batha regions close to where I conducted my own research. Below are some of the key Chadian Arabic words I use throughout the thesis.

abid: slave

ahalié: alliance

aqid: general

bahr: river

beyt: house

dar: land

diya: price of the blood

dim: tax

doungous: land of the ancestor

faky: marabout

férik: camp

hadjar: mountain

kachimbeyt: clan (*xacum* [entry] *bet*)

kirdi: pagan

yalnass: sons of the people

ouadi: temporary river

rajula: moving away after wedding (*rahula*, from *rahal*, to move)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Looking for slavery in a former slave reservoir

*"Before the French came, everything was different here. It was not like now, when you can walk quietly in the plains. There were always warriors hunting people and everyone was living hidden in the mountains, ready to fight. Now, everything is different, people hunt only animals, but in those days, you were always in danger and many were captured and sent to Abeche or kidnapped by the Arabs" (*Annour, Jujube, October 2014[1]*).*

During my fieldwork[2] in Guéra, a mountainous region in central Chad, I often heard statements like this. My local sources described the precolonial period as a very dangerous time, when the main problem for the inhabitants of Guéra was surviving the raids of the slave hunters. They described the raids as "hunts", mainly carried out by warriors coming from the neighbouring Wadai sultanate or by nomadic Arabs who owned horses and swords and, therefore, could attack local villages. The victims of these hunts were mostly the autochthonous inhabitants of the Guéra region, living in scattered villages on the mountains and practising the worship of mountain spirits. "They had horses and weapons. You need to have these if you wanted to resist, but only a few groups had them. When people saw the sand rising into the air because of the horses coming, they all immediately ran up into the mountains" (Sheba, Jujube, November 2014). The raiders were powerful and armed, whereas local people could rely only on their knowledge of the mountains to escape them. The balance of power was clearly on the raiders' side.

The easiness of local people in talking about this struck me. Memories of slavery are a delicate topic, usually difficult to access (Klein 1989, Greene 2003). How do people come by such detailed accounts about this topic? Why are they so widespread in contemporary Guéra, considering the common discomfort in talking about slavery? Before leaving for Guéra, my Chadian friends advised me to be careful when tackling the topic of slavery. I heard this advice during the time I spent in N'Djamena, Chad's capital, during a two-week pre-fieldwork period in January 2014. Members of civil society organisations and local scholars warned me against

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[1] All fieldwork sources cited in this thesis are pseudonyms. This is explained further in Chapter Three.
[2] This research was funded by the ERC project 'Shadow of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond' (Grant ERC 313737).

dealing with the topic of slavery, as it is highly sensitive. However, when I arrived in the Guéra region, in September 2014, it was apparently a well-remembered matter and local people talked about it spontaneously. From the beginning of the fieldwork, slave raids were a common topic when people talked about Guéra's history. Many local groups proudly remember battles against Wadai warriors or other raiders. I had the impression there was a sort of elation in recounting stories from those harsh days and the fact that their grandparents could survive such hardship and build the Guéra villages of today. Slavery seems a crucial part of Guéra history and no discourse about the region's past could escape it, nor do local people try to avoid it.

The situation was different when the discourse moved to the fate of former slaves. As slavery is a social phenomenon broadly 'remembered' by all the groups inhabiting Guéra and people seemed very open to talking about it, I tried to track the social trajectories of people who had previously been enslaved and find their descendants. This turned out to be difficult. Common answers given to me when I tried to investigate this included "Those captured were sent away. We don't know what happened to them" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014), "We used to capture people too and sell them to the raiders as slaves. Our people were never captured by them" (Mahmat, Mongo, November 2015), "There were some slaves around, but when the French arrived they all went back to their villages and now we don't know where they are" (Abdel, Jujube, October 2014). Slave raids were the most important historical dynamic in the region before colonisation. However, Guéra people present slaves as something alien to their region. The main group coming regularly to Guéra to collect slaves were the military missions sent from the Wadai sultanate or nomadic groups respecting the authority of Wadai. In the stories I collected, slaves seemed to be goods intended to be sent far away, unless they were lucky enough to escape and then disappear. Therefore, I was told, there were no slave-descendants inhabiting the Guéra region: once they became slaves, they were sent far away from Guéra.

This narrative is not just related to the absence on the ground of direct witnesses of that time. The anthropologist Jeanne François Vincent (1975) visited the region in the early 1970s, when accounts of the slavery era were much more current than now, and collected similar answers. In her analysis, slaves were a sort of currency that each group would have kept exchanging in case of external attacks from more powerful groups. In fact, the contemporary Guéra region is a mountainous area cutting between the Sahel and the savannas. This area had never been fully controlled by any of the bigger sultanates in the neighbourhood (the Bagirmi and the Wadai) and traditionally offered shelter for the groups of non-Muslim people who had been

living under the threat of enslavement since the growth of these sultanates, in the 15th century (Chapelle 1980, Fuchs 1997). The Guéra region was a sort of 'slave-reservoir', providing potential captives to be bought or captured by the neighbouring sultanates according to their needs. These features of Guéra are crucial for my research.

The contemporary literature on slavery and post-slave societies for the most part focuses on areas of high slave use. Therefore, it mainly analyses the relationships between groups of former masters and their former slaves. This has shaped our understanding of the role of slave descent in contemporary politics. In cases such as Niger (Oliver de Sardan 1975), Sierra Leone (Shaw 2002) or Mauritania (McDougall 2005, Leservoisier 2005) the hierarchies between masters' and slaves' descendants permeate most of the local social relationships. The difficult task for the researcher is to find the voices of the slave descendants, whose social status affects their capacity to present their point of view (Bellagamba et al. 2013a). In other Sahelian contexts such as Mali (Pelckmans 2012, Mauxion 2012) or northern Benin (Hahonou 2008, 2011), another major dynamic that emerges in the literature is the reactions of groups previously stigmatised for their slave past against those who used to own them. These dynamics are various, but the basic purpose behind slave descendants' actions is to fully exert their citizenship rights, as often their identities embody severe limitations, especially on land ownership, intermarriage with other groups and access to political or religious power (Botte 1999, 2000; Rossi 2009).

The Guéra region is quite different from these examples. I could not find a local group of slaveholders imposing its narrative over the other groups, nor slave descendants uniting themselves and fighting against discriminations. On the contrary, the 'memories' of slavery are widespread, as the quotes at the beginning of this section show. The legacies left by enslavement, as well as the strategies implemented by stigmatised people, were different in a region like Guéra compared with former slaves-using areas where, after abolition, former masters shared the same social space with their former slaves and kept imposing on them their political and symbolic power. However, there are no studies about these processes in areas such as Guéra – a gap that my research will address.

During my pre-fieldwork in N'Djamena, my local sources did direct me towards the ethnonym *Yalnas*, as having its origins in the era of slavery. This term literally means "the sons of the people" in Chadian Arabic and indicates persons who do not belong to a specific kin group. It is considered to have a pejorative meaning, as the lack of the kin is associated with the groups' history as slaves. This label is the main legacy of slavery that breaks with the general narrative

of the "disappearance" of slaves from the Guéra region. This term, the people that carry it, its creation and contemporary meaning and political use therefore became the central focus of my research. While categories such as *Bella* (Lecoq 2005) or *Gando* (Hahonou 2008, 2011; Hardung 2009) have been created by slaveholder groups and then contested, refused or re-appropriated by the people indicated by it, in the case of Yalnas the very origin of the term is unclear and its value has changed over time. In the 1920s, it facilitated the integration of an array of scattered people with ambiguous origin in the Guéra, through the creation of three Yalnas cantons; in the last thirty years the inhabitants of Yalnas cantons have, by contrast, been trying to get new names. I have explored the oral stories of the villages in one of the three Yalnas cantons of Guéra, aiming to understand how their past impacted on their social trajectories after the abolition of slavery.

In this chapter, I briefly set out the problem of slavery in the Sahel and the ways in which anthropology has dealt with it. I then move to approaches to the understanding of "post-slavery" over the last twenty years, together with the emergence of slave descendants' movements following decentralization policies across the Sahel. Of particular interest here is how narratives of slavery are related to those of citizenship and contemporary political participation. I establish the focus for my research, the questions it asks and the contribution it makes to these bodies of literature. In the final section, I outline the structure of this thesis.

2. African slavery and the contemporary Sahel

Slavery is the harshest and most enduring form of social subjugation in global history. Although now officially abolished everywhere, it represents a current topic, not only for historians, but also for social scientists and development experts. Over the last thirty years, activists and NGOs have progressively increased the use of the category "slavery". The fight against modern slavery has captured most attention (Bales 1999, 2005), while, at the same time, groups stigmatised as slave descendants are becoming more visible in the political arena, especially in the Sahel (Botte 1999, 2000, Rossi 2009). Sahelian ruling classes avoided slavery issues for several decades following decolonisation, as it was felt to be not in in the interests of their "new, fragile nations" to embark on a divisive debate after the victorious struggle for independence (Bellagamba et al. 2013, p. 2). Nowadays, together with broader decentralisation reforms affecting Sahelian states and creating new political arenas, discrimination against slave descendants has become a public problem, raised by local anti-slavery activists (Hahonou and Pelckmans, 2011; Hardung and Pelckmans 2015).

The relevance of slavery in African societies was initially underestimated, compared with the attention given to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its legacies. Colonial reports are rich in descriptions of former slave groups, as colonial governments sought to understand the existing social relationships in their new territories in order to build their political systems. However, there was no specific reflection on the social trajectories of slaves in African territories, nor did colonial governments develop policies to deal with them (Quirk 2011, Bellagamba et al. 2013b).

Apart from some references in cases such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, the topic entered academic debate in the 1960s, when Walter Rodney (1966) located the origin of African slavery in the inclusion of the continent in the slave trade of powerful external countries. John Donnelly Fage (1969) reacted to this argument by emphasising the different roots and effects of slavery in the various part of Africa independently from this global trade. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers (1977) described African slavery as less harsh than its "classical" version, emphasizing the importance of kinship discourses in dealing with former slaves' social trajectories. Claude Meillassoux (1975, 1991) built on various research in Sahel to criticise the Miers and Kopytoff (1977) model and emphasise the strong connection between power, slavery and economy in this region. Slavery's importance for the economy and the variety of pathways for slaves' emancipation or integration have been debated by most subsequent researchers: historians explored the importance of internal slavery in various African contexts and analyse the modalities of the abolition of slavery in Africa, emphasising the ineffectiveness of colonial abolition policies (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993, Klein 1998, Roberts and Miers 1988). Frederick Cooper (2000) showed how slavery as a topic in Africa was narrowed down and isolated from all the other social issues in the second half of the 19th century by the colonial powers, to legitimise the invasion of African territories. Despite its formal abolition, implemented by the French and British colonial powers, the hierarchies and stigmatisation related to slavery resisted political changes. For example, Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn (1993) describe British policies of abolition in the Sokoto Caliphate of northern Nigeria, where, despite the formal abolition of the status of "slave", the government co-operated with the local slaveholder elite and recognised Muslim customary law, making the emancipation of former slaves a slow process. Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein (1998) explored similar issues in French Western Africa, where, after the formal abolition of 1905, there was no strong political will to emancipate former slaves, who had to fight autonomously to gain their own freedom.

Despite their ambiguities, abolitionist policies defined a new political arena and fostered

various intense social dynamics, together with the building up of colonial states. Existing ethnonyms, categories and social practices are the result of the interactions between different actors in a social world widely reshaped by colonisation. Anthropologists have emphasised the importance of the colonial state in the creation and reinforcement of ethnic categories as part of African politics (Amselle and M'bokolo 1985; Amselle 1998), especially in areas where there was no strong central power and boundaries between different groups have traditionally been fluid (Kopytoff 1987). Since the creation of the colonial state, narratives of the past have proved to be important political tools to assert identities and exert control overs resources, as well as protect rights (Knorr and Trajano Filho 2010; Lentz 2013). The creation of new administrative systems by the colonial states united previously separated areas where the power was mainly exerted on people and not on the territory (Goody 1971). These divisions, made upon the creation of local customary authorities such as the canton chiefs, created a new array of traditions and institutions (Ranger and Hobsbwam 1983) and consolidated ethnonyms, reifying previously fluid divisions (Bazin 1985, Lentz 2000).

Colonial state building was mainly implemented through already existing elites, as described by scholars in Sahelian French West Africa (Miers and Klein 1998), Nigeria (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993) and Sudan (Sikainga 1996). Powerless groups often struggled to gain power and recognition, and new political systems reproduced or strengthened already existing hierarchies, as shown in the case of Mali by Bruce Hall (2011). Former slaves emancipated themselves mainly through migration, as in the massive migration from Banamba described by Klein and Richard Roberts (1980), or through the reconversion of old relationships of dependence in patronage (Schmitz 2009). Building on these points, post-slavery studies emphasised the importance of precolonial slavery in the elaboration of ethnic identities, as often slave-descendants achieved recognition as a group through the creation of new ethnonyms. For example, the label *Bambara*, despite being originally applied to pagan people inhabiting northern Mali, became a powerful tool for the absorption of former captives (Bazin 1985), also attracting diasporic communities migrating from other areas (Rodet 2015). The ethnonym *Gando*, in northern Benin, emerged to indicate lower status people, and has only recently been embraced by people as they begin to designate it as a political tool (Hahonou 2008, 2010).

A key question that this thesis therefore aims to address is how ethnonyms indicating slave descendants have been created and reproduced in areas where there are no master descendants living together with their former slaves. How and why has a label like *Yalnas*,

recalling the lack of genealogy and, consequently, a past as slaves, emerged in a context where there was not a group of former masters exerting a direct pressure over people previously under their control? What has been the purpose of this label and what are the social trajectories of the groups indicated by it?

Ethnonyms related to slavery do not necessarily indicate a group made up of slave descendants, but configure the social relations between ethnic groups on the basis of their history. Post-slavery studies are based on flaws in how slavery has been tackled (Hahonou and Lecoq 2015) and most of their examples come from societies across the Sahel (Botte 2000, Rossi 2009, Bellagamba et al 2013b). I have already explained how most post-slavery research studies deal with the relationships between former slaves and their previous masters. For example, Baz Lecoq (2005) showed the construction of the *Bella* – the label used for the Tuareg slaves – as an inferior caste, whose emancipation from their former masters has been only partially supported by central government. Olivier Leservoisier (2009) analysed the resilience of hierarchies related to slavery in Mauritania, where it is difficult for people labelled as *MaccuBe* – a Fulbe label for slave descendants - to get rid of social stereotypes and limitations related to their name. Further considering the same group, but on the Senegalese side of the border, Schmitz (2009) gives a broader historical perspective, showing that there have always been some local routes to assimilation into the masters' society, and the changes brought by the colonial government did not radically affect these dynamics but rather built on them.

Exploring the Guéra region can help us to understand whether and how such approaches fit for an area described as a former slave reservoir area. The thesis therefore analyses the creation of a new ethnic identity and its changes of use, emphasising the peculiarity of a case where labels were not strictly imposed by a group of master descendants over their former slaves, but emerged from a more complex local political struggle. In order to achieve this purpose, the focus will not be only on the historical processes related to the label *Yalnas*, but rather on the changing meaning and value it had on the time, with a specific focus on the changes in the last thirty years. To better explore this last point, it is necessary to outline the recent governance reforms implemented in various contexts across Sahel that have had an impact on the way identities of slave descendants have been perceived and publicly expressed.

3. Decentralisation, slave-descendants and the politics of belonging

In the last thirty years, new models of governance have taken hold in the western part of the

Sahel (Boone 2003), while the role of international and national development organisations has increased across the area (Mann 2015). These reforms have had an array of impacts, and are leading to a reworking of public narratives and identities. On one hand, they are fostering discourses based on autochthony and belonging (Bayart et al. 2001; Geschiere 2005, 2009); on the other hand, creating more room for marginalised groups to act politically, as in the case of slave descendants (Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011, Pelckmans and Hardung 2015).

Historically, the Sahel has had the features of a "frontier area" - using a concept developed by Kopytoff (1987) - where people were more important than land (Goody 1971) and, in a context of frequent and intense migrations, it was relatively easy for "newcomers" to be integrated into the "firstcomers" society. The availability of uncontrolled territories inhabited by decentralised societies (often used as slave reservoirs by more powerful institutions) made ownership of the land not a relevant topic in precolonial times. This situation changed with colonisation by European powers after the 19th century (Klein 1998), and later met a dramatic shift related to the decentralisation policies of the 1980s (Lund 2013). Land ownership progressively emerged as an important reason for political conflicts, especially in areas where there was a lack of a central precolonial power (Berry 2009). These zones have often multiple sources of local power and legitimacy, and so various issues emerged when decentralisation policies were implemented.

Drawing on Carola Lentz's (2013) approach to narratives, belonging and ownership in Burkina Faso, I consider narratives about slavery as contemporary, malleable tools, potentially used by all political groups in political struggles. The peculiarity of an area represented as a former slave reservoir is that the effects of the reworking of these narratives are not limited to the relationships between former slaves and former masters. These narratives have an impact on the way all identities are constructed and interpreted even if the relations between former master and slaves do not play a central role. Therefore, while focusing on the *Yalnas*, a category that embodies legacies of slavery in Guéra, the thesis explores the trajectories and stories of other Guéra local groups, showing how every local identity is built on a specific positionality towards previous slave raids. This was one of the first aspects of political dynamics I noticed in Guéra. I often heard, in my daily conversations, about the spreading of tensions between different ethnic communities related to the ownership or use of the land. Local actors describe these issues as something recent. However, I noticed how their roots were often related to the past, partly to disagreements arising from precolonial times, partly from controversial decisions of the colonial government. The status of Yalnas is also related to

controversial colonial choices: critics of the colonial administration's choices in land allocation and the status of administrative centres, often raise questions about Yalnas status and rights. In exploring this issue, it is important to keep a focus on the use of narratives related to slavery and their changes in order to understand why and how legacies of slavery matter. Moreover, governance reforms and development interventions are having an impact on these locally rooted issues.

The anthropology of development has explored in depth how development initiatives tend to be appropriated by local groups for their own interests (Long 2001, Olivier de Sardan 2005). Focusing on the Sahel, scholars noticed a dramatic growth of local associations, more for collecting external funding than for representing grassroots needs (Jacob and Lavigne Delville 1994). Further research identified the creation of a group of local brokers managing the important influxes of aid coming from the donors to an array of decentralised institutions, local authorities or civil society associations (Bierschenk et al. 2000). The *Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local* (LASDEL) analysed the various dynamics related to decentralisation in the Sahel, emphasising the variety of ways local elites appropriate these policies. I had the chance to spend two weeks at LASDEL in Niamey for their Winter School, speak with local scholars and read their works. The LASDEL publishes a journal of its activities, *Etudes et travaux*, mainly focused on the various processes of decentralization in Western Sahel countries. Most of these studies do not suggest a general trend across Western Sahel, despite the similarities of the institutions inherited from the French colonial state and the policies implemented following international donors. Rather, they emphasize the importance of exploring the peculiarities of the micro-political arena and their specific actors[3].

In Chad, as elsewhere in the Sahel, the imposition of a group of brokers capable of distributing development resources according to their own agendas, and the emergence of a group of local authorities in charge of administration in local territories, impacted on the management of local resources. However, the implementation of decentralization reforms have some specificity. In meetings with Anti-Slavery International in London in November 2013 and human rights organisations in N'Djamena[4] in January 2014, I was told that Chad is the only country in contemporary Sahel where there has not been any kind of slave descendants'

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[3] h[ttp://www.lasdel.net/index.php/nos-activites/etudes-travaux](http://www.lasdel.net/index.php/nos-activites/etudes-travaux), visited on December 2017
[4] I met with the *Association des Eleveurs Nomades* (AEN), the *Ligue Tchadienne pour les Droit de l'Homme* (LTDH), the committee *Justice et Paix* and some members of the Catholic Mission in Chad, between the 3rd and 9th of January 2014.

movement. Focusing on decentralization, Ndjénodji Mbaïdédji (2008) argues that, even though those policies were chosen as a way to unite and pacify the country, since the 2000s they became a strategy of the central government to appoint new, loyal, elites in the peripheries of the state, while only a few city councils have been elected by citizens.

Peter Geschiere (2005, 2009) already explored the connection between decentralization reforms, power and identities. He explains how these policies tend to place various local actors in competition with each other, and are contributing to the strengthening of "autochthony" as a crucial category in local political arenas. He explores the case of Cameroon, where decentralisation policies changed political strategies, with loyalty to the central ruling party becoming less important than the ability to divert resources to their own supporters on the local political arena, thus fostering new forms of competition. On the other hand, Eric Hahonou (2008) demonstrates that decentralisation policies create new local arenas where slave descendants – marginalised at the national political level – can have more room for representation. The Gando in northern Benin were able to elect their own representatives in the first local election, after having been previously excluded from political roles at the national level and access to customary authorities at the local one. This case is one of several situations across the Sahel where slave descendants are trying to take advantage of decentralization reforms to access political power, upturning previous hierarchies that marginalised them (Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011; Pelckmans and Hardung 2015).

This quest for citizenship rights is the primary way the growing issue of modern slavery has been expressed in the Sahel, and is contributing to the visibility of this issue. However, it is emerging in different ways and through different elaborations of the meaning of slave ancestry. While among the Gando the use of slave ancestry as a political tool led to an acceptance, to a certain degree, of a past as slaves, in the case of Guéra all local groups try to prove an entirely slave free ancestry. The quotes I presented at the beginning of the chapter show that memories of slavery are well alive as long as contemporary inhabitants of Guéra can demonstrate that their ancestors resisted to the raids and, therefore, their ancestor was never enslaved. Moreover, distinct from other Sahelian contexts explored by the literature, in Guéra there is not a local group presenting itself as made of descendants of the former masters and basing the legitimacy of its political power on this. Instead, I found the coexistence of different sources of legitimacy: Some groups present themselves as entirely indigenous, tracing their ancestry back to a mythological ancestor who born from the mountain; while some others describe a union between autochthonous people and warriors who united with them,

accepting their religious power, but taking the political authority. Also, another group tries to connect their genealogy to those of other Muslim groups, claiming to be migrants arrived in Guéra with the purpose to spread Islam, which became the main religion during the 20th century.

A common aspect of all these narratives of the past is the lack of slave ancestry in every Guéra group: some slaves may have been absorbed during the time, but all local groups have a clear free slave ancestry genealogy. I will show how it needs to show a slave free ancestry in the narratives of the past is mainly aimed to present itself as a legitimate local political actor. During the fieldwork, I explored various areas where a slave free ancestry in contemporary Guéra politics matter; and I outlined some critical dynamics related to it. Narratives about the past have an essential role in issues such as intermarriages between local groups and access to land. Local sources claim that intermarriages between different ethnic groups are possible only when there is mutual recognition of the genealogy, while land can be legitimately owned only by those groups capable of demonstrating some attachment to the territory, either through an ancestral link or a military victory. However, my finding suggests how the way these strategies are applied, as well as the very use of local narratives, is "malleable", quoting anthropologist Carola Lentz (2013). Moreover, decentralisation reforms further impacted on this and according to most of my sources, the stress on free ancestry and clear genealogies are increasing its importance in the last thirty years, when these reforms were implemented in Chad.

Unlike other Sahel context, groups labelled as slave descendants in Guéra did not unite valuing their presumed past as slaves, instead tried to impose alternative narratives, leading to the representation of Guéra as a slave free area. This thesis explores their strategies and elaborates on the reasons why the same set of decentralisation policies may at times empower people traditionally considered as unrooted, like the slave descendants, and at other times foster policies and politics of autochthony, challenging the rights of anyone who cannot claim a strong link with the territory. What are the effects of these policies in a context where former slaves were not ostensibly marginalised by their previous masters, but, at the same time, could not prove the same attachment to local territory as other groups who had resisted slave raids in the mountains? How can the findings in such a context contribute to broader debates?

4. Structure of the thesis

The thesis explores legacies of slavery in a former slave reservoir, exploring the interactions the Yalnas have with the other Guéra groups. In Chapter Two, I develop the main theoretical tools of the thesis; I show the connection between the weaknesses of the western Anti-Slavery project as presented by Joel Quirk (2011) and how their effects can be tackled through an approach focusing on "post-slavery". I then move on to the contents and context of my research. First, I explore the importance of slave descendants' social movements in recent post-slavery studies. I explain the connection between these movements, the reforms focused on "decentralisation" developed in the last thirty years in Sahelian Africa and the emergence of the politics of belonging and autochthony following these reforms. I then develop the concept of the "slave reservoir" and show how tackling these issues in such a context could contribute to broader debate. In an area where there is not a local group of former masters capable of imposing its own narrative over the others, but rather a variety of potential victims and perpetrators of raids, the main political categories nowadays used have emerged in a different way and embody different meanings. Exploring these concepts enable comparisons with the dynamics and categories used so far by social sciences.

In Chapter Three, I present the context of the research and the methods used: first, I introduce the Trans-Saharan slave trade and its impact on the Sahel, moving then to the historical process of abolition and the bitter legacies it left, focusing on the case of Chad. I then explore the area of the research, the Guéra region, explaining in detail the social context of the research and the most appropriate methodologies for collecting information about slavery.

The four ethnographic chapters, Chapters Four to Seven, constitute the core of the thesis. In Chapter Four, I analyse marriages and kinship relations among the Hadjiray, the broader label used to describe the people of Guéra. I show how Yalnas enjoy the same degree of integration as other Hadjiray. However, according to local narrations, it has not always been like this and, despite the possibility of intermarrying with any other group, their status is often presented as ambiguous. This chapter reveals the importance of land tenure, particularly for the people defined as Yalnas. In Chapter Five, I explore this issue, describing three specific cases and showing how Yalnas status matters when people attempt to take decisions about their land and territory. These issues have emerged in the last thirty years, as land has become scarcer and governance more competitive at a local level. In Chapter Six, I argue that what matters is not just the control of the land, but Yalnas' recognition as legitimate local representatives, as shown by the various struggles related to access to and management of development projects.

The chapter shows how local political life is highly fragmented and related to ethnicity. In this framework, the Yalnas built alliances to prevent marginalisation, but the stereotypes related to their name are tools easily mobilised by their opponents.

In Chapter Seven, I explore the renaming of the canton in 2003. In a context where it is important to demonstrate your origin and attachment to the territory, the label *Yalnas* has negative connotations, so the elite close to the Yalnas canton chief opted for a new name – Abbassid – coherent with their narrative of the past. Despite formal recognition, the new name is not well known or accepted in Guéra.

The legacies left by slavery constitute the leading thread of the thesis. I explore the ways these legacies appear in contemporary political life, comparing the situations described by the literature to what I found among the Yalnas of Guéra. I aim to demonstrate that these legacies are broader than those emerging in the relationships between former masters and slaves. The legacies of slavery framed the way ethnicities have been created in Guéra and still impact on the relationships between the different local groups. The ethnonyms, the stereotypes, the narratives and sources of legitimacy the different groups use to define their position toward the past as well as toward their neighbours, all embody the dynamics of the time of slave raids. The thesis explores and analyses these legacies, in the effort to create a ground for comparison with other cases, enabling a broader reflection about the meaning of "post-slavery" and the different ways such approaches can enlarge the comprehension of social dynamics in the contemporary Sahel.

Chapter 2

Drawing the threads together: slavery, decentralisation and autochthony in the Sahel

1. Introduction

This thesis assesses whether and how legacies of slavery affect contemporary political life in an area, the Guéra region, described as a former slave reservoir by its inhabitants. Addressing this question and related issues can make an important contribution to the ongoing debate about the social legacies of slavery in the Sahel and its connections with the political reforms of the 1990s. In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework within which I am developing my argument. First, I present the main concepts I will refer to in the thesis: legacies of slavery, "post-slavery" and slave reservoirs. I aim to show the important analytical value these categories have, and how they could be used to critically analyse the array of changes in the governance in Sahel. My assumption is that slavery matters because its abolition has not been fully effective and the condition of former slaves has changed – without necessarily improving – over time. Building on the recent research of Benedetta Rossi (2009), Joel Quirk (2011), Alice Bellagamba, Sandra Greene and Martin Klein (2013b), I refuse the teleological narrative of the anti-slavery movement, which identifies the abolition of slavery as the starting point of a continuous increasing of citizenship rights. In the Sahel, the process is more complex and the enduring relevance of slavery-related categories is an outcome of this. Exploring theories of slavery, I noticed the important role of civil society, both in pressuring colonial powers to move towards abolition and in emphasising the weaknesses of this abolition over the last thirty years. The connection between the bodies of literature about these two topics, as well as the changes brought about by the decentralisation reforms in Sahel since the 1980s, are among the points the thesis tries to address. I try to broaden the application of the theories, framing the connections between these topics that the ethnographic chapters will explore in more detail.

This chapter starts with the story of anti-slavery initiatives and their weaknesses. As abolition was not fully effective, there are various legacies left by this practice in Sahel that a post-slavery approach can explain. Noting how post-slavery studies are often related to civil society and local association activities related to slavery in the Sahel, the chapter next discusses the reforms of decentralisation. It focuses on the claims to citizenship rights expressed by slave

descendants' movements, noting the apparent contradiction between a growing demand for rights and the increasing importance of autochthony and belonging in the political arena. The last section defines a "slave reservoir" and explains how a focus on this context can highlight the meaning of this contradiction and the way legacies of slavery, as well as other narratives of the past, can be mobilised as a political tool in the contemporary context.

2. Anti-slavery, abolition and post-slavery

This section first focuses on the anti-slavery movement, emphasising its weaknesses and the consequent need, in Sahelian Africa, to adopt a "post-slavery" approach to understand the legacies left by slavery, and their effects on contemporary political life.

2.1 The narrative of anti-slavery

The movement for the abolition of slavery started in the United Kingdom in the late 17th century and progressively gained momentum all over Europe. The first successes it achieved were the legal ban of the trans-Atlantic slave trade between UK and the Americas (1807), and the prohibition of the slave trade in all British (1833) and French (1848) territories. Various agreements were signed with the intention of abolishing the slave trade, until the Brussels act was signed in 1890 by the main colonial powers of the time (the European countries and the Ottoman and Persian empires), which banned any kind of slave trade from Africa (Miers and Roberts 1988). Slavery was progressively abolished in the African territories along with the European empires' expansion, although with ambiguities and slowdowns (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993; Miers and Klein 1998). Finally, the League of Nations approved the first international treaty against the slave trade and the institution of slavery in 1919. The number of countries recognising it has increased over time, as well as the number of types of practices considered similar to slavery (Miers 2000).

The philosopher Hans Joas (2013) relates this process to the development and universalisation of an ethic that gives a sacred value to the individual as a person. In this framework, the anti-slavery campaign was among the first moments of this process and the broadening of the anti-slavery movement could be a consequence of the affirmation of this ethic. In 1956, the United Nations published the addendum to the League of Nations' ban on slavery, building on a 1930 ILO (International Labour Organization) resolution against forced labour, and the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and recognising the need to fight against any practices that have the same effects as classical slavery. Nowadays, NGOs follow these documents in their fight against bonded labour, child labour, forced labour, descent-based discrimination

and human trafficking, officially recognised as contemporary forms of slavery. Since the 1990s, the topic of modern slavery has acquired progressively more visibility in the global debate. On one hand, the works of Kevin Bales (1999, 2005) had a relevant impact and underlined the importance of "modern-day slavery" in mainstream media and the Western political arena. On the other hand, long-standing organisations such as Anti-Slavery International, newly created ones such as Free the Slaves (related to the work of Kevin Bales) or associations initially involved in other arenas, such as the IDSN (International Dalit Solidarity Network), are all increasing their actions across the world to fight the practices denounced as modern slavery.

The actions of these associations, as well as Bales' theoretical paradigm, position the fight against modern day slavery as a direct prosecution of the struggles against old forms of slavery, assuming that linear evolution of human rights started with the abolition of slavery by the European powers and continues with the effort to eradicate slavery and related practices. Presented in this way, the anti-slavery narrative is a powerful one, and recent wide-scale events such as incidents of human trafficking in Libya since the fall of Gaddafi have been represented through the label of modern slavery, also receiving attention in mainstream media. However, there are some critics of this narrative. Some scholars have emphasised how the acts of abolition implemented by Western states and liberating mainly African-origin slaves are celebrated as the most relevant acts, while the revolts of the slaves – even when successful, as in Haiti – tend to have much less space in this narrative. Quirk (2011: 54 - 111) notes that the abolitionists' actions were implemented through a highly paternalistic and top-down approach, in the framework of the colonial "civilisation" of the African territories. The former slaves and their descendants were not considered as active players and this limited the effectiveness of their emancipation. Julia O'Connell Davidson (2015) denounced the growing use of the "modern-day slavery" label as a strategy that homogenised a variety of different practices, hiding their connections with contemporary laws and practices.

This debate is important because it problematizes the linearity of the social process that followed the abolition of slavery. In most cases, slavery has not fully disappeared or, even if it disappeared, has left various legacies. This topic has entered into the academic debate quite recently. Roger Botte (2000) gathered a range of evidence on social problems related to the legacies of slavery. This collection presents a variety of cases covering the whole African continent, as well as cases from the diaspora in Europe, even though most of the interventions focused on Sahelian contexts such as a Sudan (Ahmed Bachir), Mauritania (Messaoud, Kamara, Ould Saleck, Ruf Urs), Northern Senegal (Mbow) and Niger (Tidjani Alou). Botte (1999, 2000)

argues that descendants of slaves tend to inherit a marginal position in various social contexts because of their origin, and this emerges in a variety of ways. He also notes how the ruling classes of Sahelian countries underestimated the problem of slave descendants following decolonisation. However, these issues seem to be increasingly subjects of debate in both African academia and civil society institutions.

Introducing another collection of essays about this topic, *Reconfiguring Slavery,* Rossi (2009) distinguishes between different varieties of "reconfiguration" of slavery, acknowledging increased attention among scholars from Sahelian countries. Her work emphasises how slave-descendants are not passive victims, but deployed and are deploying various strategies to get rid of the stigma of their past, challenging common assumptions about their condition, such as their lack of history or their extraneousness to any kinship groups. Among the most relevant chapters of this book focusing on Sahel cases, Schmitz shows the reshaping of master-slave relationships into a patronage link in southern Senegal, as well as emancipation through schooling and army service in the colony, or absorption into religious brotherhoods, noting how emancipation never means access to individual freedom, but involvement in new hierarchies. Hardung describes a different path. The *GannunkeeBe* are former Fulani slaves who were able to gain control of land when slavery was abolished and, despite suffering social marginalisation from their former masters, have been able to improve their economic condition. Today, united under the label *Gando* (the French name for *GannunkeeBe*) they are challenging political power relations in northern Benin.

In a recent special issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery*, Bellagamba (2017a, pp. 1 – 9) and Rossi (2017, pp. 185 – 194) connect the abolition of slavery with the ideas of freedom emerging from it. Bellagamba emphasizes how in sub-Saharan Africa the abolition of slavery "was coeval with the beginning of another form of coercion and oppression: colonialism" (2017, p. 4), leading to what Rossi defines as a fragmented "semantic space" in the European Empires where some kinds of unfreedoms "were justified in the name of progress, morality, nature or religion; and indigenous 'slavery' was equated with barbarism" (2017, p. 190). Therefore, "abolitionism did not end slavery" (Rossi 2017, p. 190), but legitimised the colonial domination over sub-Saharan African territories, setting the conceptual framework for former slaves to seek some degrees of independence from their former masters, under the authoritarian control and the limits put by the colonial state. The social trajectories of the GannunkeeBe previously mentioned were framed in the context of the colonial and post-colonial states, and despite the achievement described by Schmitz (2009), their full recognition

as citizens is still problematic (Hahonou 2009, 2013). In the *Journal of Global Slavery* there are also the examples of George Michael La Rue (2017, pp. 11 – 43), who shows the personal life trajectory of an enslaved woman in the Trans-Saharan slave trade, dealing with the limited options available for her emancipation; and the analysis of Bellagamba (2017b, pp. 72 – 99) exploring the various ideas of freedoms emerged following slavery abolition in southern Senegal. This case shows the various degree of freedoms people can enjoy according to the changing hierarchies, demonstrating again how colonialism provided for some groups "opportunities of emancipation" but, at the same time, led to a "stiffening of indigenous social hierarchies under the overarching umbrella of colonial ones" (Bellagamba 2017b, p. 98).

These works constitute a starting point for a growing debate about "post slavery". A common assumption of these approaches is that in Sahelian Africa the abolition of slavery has not been the linear and teleological process described by the anti-slavery narrative, but the source of a complex variety of dynamics. Among the various cases presented in these studies, I identified as an element of primary importance the role of ethnic categories in the redefinition of identities in post-slavery contexts. *Haratin, Gando, MaccuBe*, but also *Bella* (Lecoq 2005) or *Bambara* (Bazin 1985) are all ethnonyms that cannot be understood without exploring the history of precolonial slave raids. In this respect, tackling the social issues related to these groups using a post-slavery approach can build on the importance of colonial governments in creating ethnonyms described by Jean – Loup Amselle (1998) and Mahmoud Mamdani (1996), and put these dynamics in a broader perspective.

2.2 The "lens" of post-slavery in the contemporary Sahel

The category of "post slavery" has been widely applied to the bitter legacies left by slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean, but rarely applied to African contexts. In their introduction to a special issue of the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, the anthropologists Hahonou and Lecocq defined post slavery as an "exploratory lens" useful for making sense of an array of "social, political and cultural relations in Africa after slavery was abolished legally and formally, but still existed in a variety of reconfigured forms" (2015, p. 192). Building on Stuart Hall's approach towards "post-colonialism", they suggest that the abolition of slavery in Africa affected only the legal dimensions, but was often not effective on the ground. Slavery resisted the efforts of the state to abolish it and "vanishes and reappears in a variety of forms that more often than not are related to the past" (Hahonou and Lecocq 2015, p. 192). An assumption of a post-slavery approach is that there is an array of social practices that can be interpreted because of their relationships with slavery and the variety of changes they have

undergone since slavery was abolished. These dynamics are various and complex, but focusing on them in relationship to their slavery roots can facilitate their comprehension.

In the introduction of *Reconfiguring Slavery,* Rossi (2009) explores the variety of dynamics that followed the abolition of slavery and develops theoretical tools to better distinguish between the various "reconfigurations" slavery has gone through since its formal abolition in Africa. She proposes to distinguish between the "circumscribed resilience of historical forms of enslavement (slavery); discriminations on the ground of putative slave status (classificatory slavery); forms of exploitation akin to slavery (metaphorical slavery); and exogenous discourse opening new fields of thought and action around the notion of slavery (extraverted slavery)" (Rossi 2009, p. 5). These categories have an analytical value and should be, according to Rossi, distinguished in research into modern forms of slavery. At the same time, researchers should carefully apply them and explore their nuances. It is important to consider who could be defined as a slave-descendant and how, what the practical consequences of this label are in terms of social status and economic condition, and how the contemporary condition of people indicated by a slave-descendant label can be ascribed to their past or to other contemporary phenomena (Rossi 2015b, pp. 314 – 315).

Bellagamba et al's (2013a, 2016) approach mainly focuses on the memories of the past and their connection with contemporary issues. The history of slavery in most of the African contexts has been mainly written from the elite point of view (Bellagamba et al. 2016), ignoring the point of view of the former slaves. I go into more detail about the problem of memory among slave descendants in Chapter Three, when dealing with methodology. In this section, I emphasise the effort to access hidden memories of slavery, focusing on specific social practices that embody those legacies. Through this approach, it emerges that slaves were resisting enslavement already before the colonial interventions. In *Bitter Legacy* (Bellagamba et al. 2013b), the same authors highlight this ability to resist as well as how former slaves' strategies were refined in the light of the new opportunities created by the colonial legal and political framework. Schooling, migration and the army offered important opportunities for individuals of slave ancestry, even though they had to act against the opposition of slave-holder elites, often supported by colonial governments, especially in Sahelian areas (2013b, p. 8). Most of the case studies from this collection come from the Sahel region, such as northern Benin (Hahonou 2013), Mali (Pelckmans 2013), northern Cameroon (Opata 2013) and northern Senegal (Ousmane Traore 2013).

Another point debated by scholars is the distinction between the reconfiguration of old and the new forms of slavery. Rossi (2009, p. 7) claims that it is important to stick to a strict definition of slavery, rather than those used by the activists to "maximise the coverage of exploited and abused people". The definition of Hahonou and Lecocq (2015, p. 182) of slavery as "a system of economic, social, political and cultural inequalities among socially constructed categories of people within a society, created through sanctioned forms of legal or non-legal commodification of human physical and mental capacities, leading to the loss of autonomy and self-ownership of those being commoditised" seems narrow enough to exclude those contemporary forms of exploitation tackled by the contemporary anti-slavery movement. In this respect, O'Connell Davidson's (2015) approach seems complementary, as it denounces the application of the label of "modern slavery" to a huge variety of different phenomena that would be better understood if directly associated with their specific causes. According to her, the enlargement of "modern slavery" as a category enabled a vast array of NGOs to get funding for their activities, as the label "slavery" is attractive, supporting policies that in fact hide the specific roots of those problems, which are to be found in the migration laws, labour laws and economic deregulation of the last decades.

While being also critical of the misuse of the category "slavery" by these organisations, Quirk (2011, pp. 167 – 192) tries to locate "classical slavery" within this framework, describing it as one form of the broader label of "descent-based discrimination", also used by Anti-Slavery International and the IDSN (International Dalit Solidarity Network). He bases his conclusion on the fight for more stringent laws to protect slave descendants in Mauritania and Niger and on the widespread violence and cleavages in Sudan, arguing that, while these cases attracted international attention thanks to the use of the category "slavery", there are broader local social issues that "are unlikely to be effectively addressed through the narrow lens of classical slavery, but instead require a broader vision, that places slavery alongside a larger series of challenges" (2011, p.192). However, this point is not universally accepted. Ahmed Bachir (2000) notes that in Sudan the category of "slavery" drew external powers' attention to the country, specifically the US. Alice Bullard (2005) made a similar point about Mauritania. These cases are both mentioned by Quirk (2011) as examples where the category of "slavery" has been effective in drawing international attention, even though some of the policies applied to them seem controversial.

When I started my research I initially thought that "descent-based discrimination" could be a good lens to tackle the case of the Yalnas. During the fieldwork, I progressively realised that

this approach would have not grasped the strategic roles that ethnonyms and descent play, nor how local actors continually reshape them over time. Descent in Guéra is not a tool used to ascribe a marginal status, but a contested political arena, where different groups implement different strategies through different sources of legitimization. In this sense, the lens of "post-slavery" and its focus on the variety of phenomena that started after formal abolition seemed to me more effective. In the works previously mentioned, post-slavery does not appear as a set field of analysis, where a clear array of groups and issues can be isolated and analysed in relation to slavery. Rather, it is analytically important to question if and how the past related to slavery effectively impacts on contemporary conditions, and to explore the connection these dynamics have with contemporary political struggles.

A growing contestation of hierarchies related to slavery is an important element of most of post-slavery research. In Botte (2000, 2003), Rossi (2009) and Bellagamba et al's. (2013a) studies, it is interesting to note how the voices of slave descendants have been emerging in the last three decades. These voice have long been silent in order to guarantee some social stability in a context where slave and master descendants were living together. Nowadays, slave descendant issues are emerging in connection with development initiatives or through the protest of local associations. Quirk (2011) and Joas (2013) emphasised the importance of organisations such as Anti-Slavery International in the fight against slavery. The same Anti-Slavery International presents itself, on its website, as "the oldest international human rights organisation in the world"[5], founded in 1839. Slavery was formally abolished after a series of global campaigns by influential organisations. Nowadays, it is acquiring more importance in the political debate globally, thanks to the actions of other influential international organisations or, in the Sahel, because of the important work of local slave descendant networks.

There is a connection between the anti-slavery movement, civil society association activities and the emergence of certain topics in public debate. In Sahel, the oldest local association dealing with this issue is *El Hor*, created in 1974, in Mauritania. *El Hor* means "the freemen" and its first achievement was to obtain a new law abolishing slavery in Mauritania, in 1980. The main purpose of this association was not to radically overturn the power structure in Mauritania, but rather to guarantee the involvement of the broader group described by the label *Haratin* in the political arena. Since the 1990s, the Mauritanian government has allowed more room for political parties and civil society associations, leading to the emergence of

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[5] https://www.antislavery.org/about-us/, visited on December 2017

other movements supporting slave descendants' issues in that country (Ould Hamed Samed 2009), as well as all along the Sahelian belt. These associations are various, as are their purposes and requests, and often supported by western partner, such as Anti-Slavery International or other donors. The emergence of these associations is an outcome of both global reforms and the existence of long-standing social issues previously neglected. These associations are not focusing only on fighting cases of classical slavery, but are acting in a broader sense for the empowerment of the groups labelled as slave descendants and therefore marginalised in terms of political representation, intermarriage with other groups, land ownership and other rights regarding access to local resources.

The topic of slavery in Sahel emerged together with fresh quests for citizenship rights and the effort to implement a new model of governance based on human rights and participation. These new actors tackled this topic for the first time, in contexts where local cleavages or the control of power and knowledge by former slaveholder elites prevented this kind of debate. Nowadays, they are radically changing the condition of people labelled as slave descendants, how to remember slavery and how to talk about internal slavery. At the same time, and together with the same kind of reforms, various claims to indigeneity appeared all over Sub-Saharan Africa (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009). This thesis claims that these two events are related and based on a new use of the narratives about the past. Therefore, the topic of legacies of slavery needs to be tackled together with that of the strength of identities of all the other local groups, at least in the Sahel geographical and political context.

3. *The paths towards citizenship in the age of decentralisation*

This section focuses on the meaning of citizenship in the Sahel states and the strategies deployed by slave descendants to be recognized as citizens. It first critically reflects on citizenship in the wake of colonialism and then explores the strategy of slave descendants, with a specific focus on their reactions to decentralization reforms.

3.1 Colonialism, elites and decentralization

The narrative of the anti-slavery movement legitimised the colonisation of Africa, leading to the formal abolition of slavery under European empires. In the previous section, I showed the weaknesses in this narrative and the issues related to it. I mentioned the importance of civil society organisations' actions, in the fight against both old and new forms of slavery. European public opinion pressurised their governments in colonial times, while today civil society and social movements animate the debate on this subject. Following the formal abolition of slavery

across the different colonial empires, colonial governments shifted their focus towards modernisation and development of their territories as a way to legitimise their presence. In this framework, there are important continuities in the way colonial and post-colonial states implemented these policies. The idea of bringing "civilisation" through a modernising colonial state machine permeated the whole French colonial enterprise (Conklin 1997), while the "Africanisation" of the civil service in the post war British Empire was the last stage of a "transfer of techniques" from the United Kingdom intended to develop its colonies (Cornwall 2006, p. 67). On the one hand, these approaches emphasise the continuities between colonial policies and contemporary NGOs' activities focused on development. On the other hand, some scholars notice that the transition from development policies based on state intervention to those supporting local associations and authorities was a sort of breakthrough for the issues related to slavery in Sahel, facilitating the emersion of these topics to the national political agenda (Botte 2000; Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011).

The connections between state, citizenship and legacies of slavery are a crucial topic to explore. Slave descendants' movements emerged, together with broader global reforms of state and development governance, in the 1980s. Decentralisation, civil society, and good governance became globally widespread buzzwords. The Sahel was one of the first areas to become a focus of interest for these policies, following the droughts of the 1970s (Mann 2015). Two World Bank reports, "Accelerated development in sub-Saharan Africa: an agenda for action" (1981) and "From crisis to sustainable growth – Sub-Saharan Africa: a long-term perspective study" (1989) marked the shift, throughout the 1980s, from policies based on support for state reinforcement to direct interactions between international development organisations and local actors, either customary or decentralised authorities. At the same time, scholars increasingly narrowed their focus to the ability of civil society to create an environment favourable for social cohesion and economic development (Putnam et al. 1993), as well as its capacity to act effectively in the political field (Carhoters and Barndt 1999). The idea behind this approach was that civil society and decentralised authorities could create a socio-cultural environment that fostered citizenship rights, respect, and participation (Van Rooy 1998; Fine 2010).

In this thesis, I refer to "decentralisation reforms" to indicate that vast array of political reforms suggested by the Washington Consensus institutions and applied in various Sahelian countries since the late 1970s. These reforms progressively reduced the importance of central state and increased the competences of an array of local actors, such as decentralised

authorities, customary authorities and civil society organisations. I also find it fruitful to apply the term "civil society" to the vast array of organisations that spread following these policies. Civil society has become a key global actor in social policy (Carhoters and Barndt 1999) as well as in in development policy (Scoones 2009). Various authors noted how behind these global buzzwords there is a "plurality of thinking" and "meanings" (Howell and Pearce 2002, p. 37), as well the strategies deployed by different social actors. Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce (2002) argue that these decentralization policies implement a neoliberal agenda aiming to enhance the role of civil society as a provider of services, progressively replacing the state. On the other hand, Ferguson (1994) noted that development projects are often very effective in indirectly reinforcing the bureaucratic capacity of the state. Therefore, the replacement of the state by civil society as a supplier of basic services does not necessarily imply a reduction in the capacity of the state to control the territory. However, the proliferation of political actors may create new arenas of struggle and contestation. Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2005) showed the impact of these policies in this respect, emphasising the need to study the dynamics of each case. It is also important to take into account that, when these policies are applied in a new context, local actors appropriate and modify them according to their own agendas. David Lewis (2002) argues that the nature of many civil society organisations in Africa is often different from the mainstream models, although, in some cases these kinds of organisation are contributing, through various forms and practices, to opening up new fields of struggle and negotiation.

Tackling the issue from an historical perspective, Cooper (1997) emphasises the continuity between the colonial effort to insert their colonies into the broader system created by the empires and the development assistance given to post-colonial countries since independence. The elites among colonised groups were involved in the management of the state by both French and British empires in the Sahel, even though with some minor differences. British indirect rule, implemented in northern Nigeria, entrusted local elites with the consolidation of state authority and the implementation of policies intended to boost the local economy. In French Western and Equatorial Africa, the approach was more centralised, even though the effort to create elites of "educated" Africans progressively led to the devolution of roles to local people. These policies spread together with the creation of the state and the drawing up of administrative divisions, intended to represent through customary or native authorities the various indigenous groups.

Scholars have criticised these policies because of their creation of "traditional" institutions which were in fact something new (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and the crystallisation of ethnonyms previously used in a flexible way (Amselle and M'bokolo 1985, Amselle 1998). Mamdani (1996) identifies in this process the origin of various local cleavages affecting postcolonial Africa. Since colonial times, African states have been conceived as "bifurcated states", with some rights and rules applying through democratic procedures for the settler, and other hierarchical procedures applying to people defined as "native" and, therefore, deemed to be worth a lower level of rights. The outcome of this process is that a ruling elite made up of local people, but recognised by colonial authorities, was entrusted by the central government with very great power over specific local areas. Mamdani (1996, pp. 37 – 62) defines the integration in postcolonial states of a small elite through specific ethnonyms and the marginalisation of a vast sector of the population as "decentralised despotism" and consider it the root of the authoritarian way the state works in post-colonial Africa. Moreover, he argues that the "decentralized despotism" is also the cause most of the harsh ethnic divisions that exploded in dramatic conflicts. He described in detail these processes in the cases of Rwanda (Mamdani 2001) and Dar Fur (Mamdani 2009).

Mamdani's model reveals the importance of the role of African elites fostered by the colonial state. Other studies of decentralization reforms echo this finding. Cornwall (2006) emphasises the continuity in development policies between the colonial and postcolonial periods and criticizes the fact that only some elites chosen by the donors are effectively involved in the political arena. Other studies emphasised the role of the "brokers" between international donors and recipient communities (Bierschenk et al. 2000; Lewis and Mosse 2006), showing how certain groups of people have taken advantage of these policies, by being able to enter into dialogue with international donors and, at the same time, mobilising their own communities. Interestingly, among the cases mentioned in Bierschenk et al. (2000), there is a Nigerien NGO acting in support of slave descendants, *Timidria*. Mahaman Tidjani Alou (2000) emphasises the necessity to arrange the functioning of the organisation according to the needs and policies of international donors. Since the reforms in Niger at the beginning of the 1990s, the leaders of Timidria have had to develop the ability to translate their approach to slave descendants into projects eligible for international donor funding. A group of leaders able to manage the relationships between these two dimensions emerged, and enabled the success of the association, nowadays considered a reliable partner by various donors and, therefore, eligible for funding for specific projects.

The achievements of the Gando described by Hahonou (2008, 2011), as well as Timidria's actions, have been effective because of the ability to adapt political projects to the institutional needs of the context. I mentioned a contradiction between the use of these policies by slave descendants to overcome previous marginalization and the conclusions of some scholars who fear they are fostering new ethnic divisions. Jean Francois Bayart et al. (2001) note the relation between local democratic competition for power and the growing importance of discourses of "autochthony" all over sub-Saharan Africa. This topic is further explored by Francis Nyamjoh (2005) and Peter Geschiere (2005, 2009), who describe the idea of autochthony as even more malleable than that of ethnicity (Geschiere 2005, p. 382). This approach partially recalls Mamdani's (1996) analysis, even though Bayart, Geschiere and Nyamjoh focus more on contemporary politics rather than on the legacies of colonialism and criticize the excessive importance gave to the authoritarian power of the state in shaping ethnic categories (Bayart et al 2001, p. 192). Hall (2011) makes a similar point about Mamdani's analysis of the Dar Fur war (2009), which focuses on the division created during the colonial regime, underemphasising the pre-colonial period and its legacies. Exploring the case of Northern Mali, where slavery plays a crucial role, Hall argues that the long tradition of slavery created a strong racial division between the groups of slaveholder descendants and those of slave descendants. Thus the divisions between the groups are not just an outcome of colonial domination, but have deeper roots.

Mamdani's work is important to emphasise structural aspects of state and political life that are suitable for the Sahelian states. The continuities in development practices (Cooper 1997, Cornwall 2006) did not radically affect the way power is exerted. In this sense, the emergence of the politics of belonging (Bayart et al. 2001) is consistent with the continuity of the development practices previously described: as interventions are based on a wider array of brokers (Bierschenk et al. 2000), which can compete between themselves without the mediation of the state, competition increases and fosters claims of autochthony. Taking the case of Cameroon as a start point, Geschiere (2009) notes that autochthony is not based only on connection with a local area, but on a broader array of values and narratives. In this framework, slavery can be a political tool used by the new local political elites. Geschiere also mentions slave descent among the criteria used to criticize autochthony, as it appears from the use of Maka term *lwa* – slave descendant, but also foreigner - in Eastern Cameroon (2009, p. 92). Hall's criticism of Mamdani emphasises the role of local elites not just as passive subjects of external policies, but as active players. They try to take advantage of the changes, as well as to preserve certain hierarchies. Therefore, the politics of marginalisation of slave descendants

in Mali cannot be described just as a legacy of the past, or a consequence of colonial policies, but is a result of a complex interactions between different players, including, crucially, local slaveholder elites.

The debate between Mamdani (2009) and Hall (2011) highlights the relationship between slavery and ethnic identities and their effects on contemporary political life. Moreover, exclusion and stratification based on lineages are not just a legacy of the colonial state, but are actively used in the contemporary political landscape. Most of the post-slavery studies previously mentioned showed how there was a continuous elaboration of strategies among people labelled as slave descendants to change the marginal social role slaveholder descendants tried to keep them in. The emergence of demands related to the wave of decentralisation reforms is one of those strategies. This is quite interesting, as for a slave group it seems impossible to develop a politics of belonging, in the light of their history. However, most of them – or at least some of their elite – have been able to take advantage of decentralisation and increase their political power and prestige.

3.2 Slave descendants in the wake of decentralization

Slave descendants' movements acquired importance over the last twenty years. The appearance of these movements is not to be considered a radical break with the past. Apart from the strategies of emancipation that followed the abolition during colonial times (Klein and Roberts 1980, Pelckmans 2011), the Mauritanian case shows that the problem of slave descendants was already playing out in politics. El Hor started its activities in 1974, before all these reforms affected the area. The Haratin have clashed with political authorities all through the 1980s and 1990s, progressively reshaping their demands and strategies. Then, following the political reforms of the 1990s, new slave descendant movements have been created, such as *SOS Esclaves* and subsequently *Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist movement* (IRA), reshaping the targets and strategies of intervention

Hahonou and Pelckmans (2011) compare eight different movements across Sahel: El Hor, SOS Esclaves, Saafaalbe Hormankoobe, Fedde Pinal and Balagoss in Mauritania; Semme Allah in Benin; Timidria in Niger and Temedt in Mali. They explain how in their analysis they focus on all of them as social movements, and consider social movements and civil society to be not necessarily in opposition. These movements focus on a specific "social status and a specific cultural group", are led by local, well-educated persons and have a "common ideological basis, but adopt different organisational forms" (2011, pg. 11). Apart from the fight against stigma, they often support political empowerment of their groups, as well as schooling, land tenure

reforms, and other legal actions against the practices marginalising them. These associations have often been able to access power roles in national or local assemblies, as well as promoting better integration of the supported groups in the local political arena. The policies implemented all over Sahelian Africa following the end of the cold war made these kinds of local claims a common political strategy, articulated through either political movements or NGOs.

International NGOs and civil society are today focusing on these practices[6]. There are differences inside these movements, as well as caveats to emphasise. In the case of northern Benin, the Gando political battle is explicitly challenging the aristocratic ideology behind the persistence of social hierarchies. The local elections are a good example of this: Hahonou (2008) describes how, after a long tradition of power being exerted only by members of the old aristocracies, slave descendants appropriated the new procedure of appointing representatives based on democratic elections. However, he explains that these movements do not seek to transform the form of governance. Rather, the opportunities offered by the new political landscape are opening access to spaces that used to be inaccessible for slave descendants, creating a new balance in the ruling elites, with the inclusion of members of local elites with slave ancestry.

What emerges is the need among many of slave descent to gain full recognition as citizens, and the change in the struggle for these rights created by the 1980s and 1990s governance reforms. The movements of slave descendants emerged together with other local claims based on autochthony, creating a generally more scattered and competitive political landscape. I claim that these dynamics can be explained as a fight for citizenship rights, in a context where those rights have traditionally been recognised in an unequal way. However, there are some contradictions that need to be further explored.

First, while some authors (Cooper 1997, Cornwall 2006, Mann 2015) emphasise the continuities between the development policies implemented at the colonial time and the methods implemented following the global reforms of the 1980s, others (Ellis 2009; Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011) describe the emergence of new movements – such as slave descendants' movements – as a result of the new political spaces opened by decentralisation policies. Second, while some authors have highlighted the growing importance of attachment to local land as the main outcome of these policies and, therefore, the growing difficulty for the non-

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[6] A good summary of contemporary initiatives can be found on the Anti-Slavery International website: www.antislavery.org, visited on December 2017

autochthonous of exercising their citizenship rights (Bayart et al. 2001), at the same time a group traditionally seen as unrooted, such as the descendants of slaves, is breaking its traditional silence and acquiring visibility.

The explanation of these apparent contradictions lies in the crucial role played by the local elites of African post-colonial states. As noted, a common element in the analysis of colonial and post-colonial state governance in Sahel is the role of the local elites, either as auxiliaries in local governance (Mamdani 1996, Cooper 1997) or as brokers between international aid and beneficiary communities (Bierschenk et al. 2000). These elites emerged in a context where the abolition of slavery failed to create an effective emancipation of former slaves, but, as argued by Bellagamba (2017a, pp. 1 – 9) and Rossi (2017, pp. 185 – 194), legitimised a variety of other forms of unreedom and the social hierarchies related to them. The ineffective emancipation of former slaves came together with the creation of Mamdani "bifurcated state" (1996, pp. 37 – 62) previously described, which impacted on the social trajectories of these groups. I agree with Mann (2015) when he claims that the shift of the 1980s was not a dramatic change in the Sahel, a point with which Geschiere also concurs when he warns us not to overemphasise decentralisation reforms (2009, p. 20). Decentralisation reforms failed to empower local communities as a whole, but contributed to the emergence of new local elites who were significantly empowered by the opportunity to interact directly with donors. Moreover, as shown by most of the research on how these reforms have been appropriated in Sahelian Africa (Bierschenk et al. 2000; Lewis and Mosse 2006), local elites have often been able to manipulate the policies imposed on them by state authorities. The emergence of both discourses based on autochthony and movements focused on empowering slave descendants are strategies enacted by certain local elites to adapt their actions to the changing political framework. Jacqueline Knorr and Wilson Trajano Filho (2010, p. 9), introducing their collection of essays about the use of the past in contemporary West Africa politics, note that ethnic identities may "be used in a pendulum like fashion: there are times when they tend to essentialize and times when they are rather transitional and flexible". They emphasize that the same groups in the same contexts may play with their identities in very different way, shifting from inclusion to conflicts.

Knorr develops her argument through the case of the *Krio*. These slave descendants in Sierra Leone took advantage of the general mistrust toward discourses of belonging after the dramatic civil was that affected the country. They were able to access local political arenas emphasizing their different origins compared to "native" groups (Knorr 2010, pp. 205 – 228).

My analysis about the shifting use and meaning of the ethnonym *Yalnas* aims to show how the same group can implement a variety of different strategies over time; and that discourse of slavery do not lead automatically to the refusal of autochtony, as the cases of Krio or the slave descendants movement may suggest. In a former slave reservoir, without the constraint of the former masters imposing their narrative and ideology, Yalnas had more room to reconfigure their identity and build some sort of belonging to the Guéra region. In the ethnographic chapters to come, I will emphasise how the very creation of the label *Yalnas* was not an invention of the colonial government, nor an imposition by a former master, but the outcome of a local political process whereby the people indicated by the label *Yalnas* achieved some degree of recognition. Moreover, I will explore how the meaning of the label has been manipulated by their neighbours and rejected by the Yalnas themselves, in the light of the changing political arena. Governance reforms, global climate change and narratives of the past all blend together in the Yalnas' political actions. The broader changes in Sahel of the last thirty years further impact on this.

A point already explained by Klein (1998, pp. 208 – 210) is the role of land control in political power in the framework of the "customary authority". According to Klein, while in precolonial Africa the capacity to mobilise (or own) people was the key to political power, ever since colonisation and the abolition of slavery, the capacity to demonstrate the legitimate entitlement over a certain territory started acquiring importance. He notes that in French Western Africa "the chiefs became faithful partners of the French, and were often able to use their position to define traditional law and land rights" (Klein 1998, p. 210), keeping slave descendants as powerless sharecroppers or pushing them to migrate. The growing valorisation of land, as well as the power given to decentralized authorities in charge of its management – or civil society organisations receiving funding for development projects – increased competition (Lund 2009, Lentz 2013). Moussa Diop (2003) showed how these transformations impacted more on marginal political actors such as slave descendants in Guinea Conakry. He emphasizes the growing importance of land in the last three decades is leading slave descendants to cross social boundaries previously impassable, increasing the pressure for a different arrangement of resource access and citizenship rights. This triggers the reaction of their former masters, seeking to protect their privilege over land and resources. Land ownership facilitated the emancipation of the Gando studied by Hardung (2009) and Hahonou (2008, 2011), while it constituted a fertile source of conflicts in the Nuba mountains, where the various indigenous peoples inhabiting these valleys are denied formal control of resources by the descendants of the ethnic groups who previously raided them (Kunda Komey 2008).

Ethnic identities increasingly emerged as tools to exert control over a certain territory. In such a context, the citizenship rights of local groups considered as marginal seems more and more endangered. However, the same dynamics also offered new arenas for accessing political roles and contributed to putting the social issues related to legacies of slavery at the centre of the political debate (Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011; Pelckmans and Hardung 2015). The connection between belonging, resource access and legacies of slavery constitutes a good starting point for an anthropological analysis in the Sahel. Researchers trying to explore these dynamics have found the lens of "post-slavery" to be quite effective in various cases. The anthropological research on Mauritania (McDougall 2005), Mali (Pelckmans 2012, 2013) and Benin (Hahonou 2011), as well as the historical study of Nigeria (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993) and Sudan (Mamdani 2009) all emphasise the role that legacies of slavery have in the political arena. These studies explored the different social trajectories and opportunities of former slaveholder and slave groups mainly in former slaves-using areas, where slave labour was massively exploited. In these situations, slave descendants generally struggle to get rid of the stigma associated with their condition and, even when they are able to considerably ameliorate their economic situation, their social status and citizenship rights are often more critical. This thesis aims to build on this research by exploring a situation that has so far received less attention: the slave reservoir.

4. Legacies of slavery in former slave reservoirs

In Chapter One, I explained how Guéra is nowadays described as a former slave reservoir for the Wadai sultanate, without exploring in depth the meaning of the term "slave reservoir". In my analysis of the literature I often found scholars using this concept, but I could not find a clear definition of it. Meillassoux (1981, pp. 117 - 119) coined the concept of "labour reserves" for the areas in South Africa where the apartheid government confined African populations, preventing them from freely managing their own land, with the purpose of keeping them as cheap manpower for the industries managed by the settlers. In his analysis of the Western Sahel system of slavery (1991, pp. 45 – 63), the description of the areas raided by the army of slave hunters recall the "labour reserves" officially instituted by the settlers. These zones are described as necessary to guarantee a continuous flow of potential slaves to Sahelian sultanates. Therefore, they were never totally conquered and the local population was not forcibly converted to Islam, which would have prevented their enslavement. However, despite the similarities between the idea of "labour reserves" and the description of those areas where Muslim sultanate were regularly capturing slaves, I could not find a conceptualization of

the idea of slave reservoir in Meillassoux's book.

Other scholars mention this term. The historian John Wright (2007, p. 3) defines the whole of sub-Saharan Africa as a massive slave reservoir for the "Muslim world", but he does not explore too much the meaning of this definition. In this thesis, I use a narrower definition of this concept, drawing on other approaches. For example, Allan George Barnard Fisher (2001) explains that the Sokoto caliphate was using Adamawa as its slave reservoir, similarly to the Funji Kingdom of Sennar with the Nuba Hills in Sudan, according to Leonie Archer (2013). These cases focus on a relationship between two specific political actors – Sokoto and Funji among the slave-holder, Adamawa and Nuba Mountains as areas for raids – which seems closer to the relationship between the Wadai sultanate and the Guéra region I want to describe. However, even reducing the focus to a specific geographic area, the dynamics between slave reservoirs and the powers surrounding them have often been more complex than the label "slave-reservoir" may suggest.

Analysing research about the periphery of bigger sultanates, Klein (2001) defines areas harassed by slave raiders as "reservoirs within which the more powerful military formations fished for bodies to sell into the Atlantic and Saharan trades" (2001, p. 49). He claims that researchers can find complex dynamics both internally and in the relationships they had with their attackers. Another definition of slave reservoir is presented in Lotte Pelckmans's thesis about slave descendants in Mali (2011). In this thesis (2011, p. 5), based on the idea of the Sahel as a "frontier area "(Kopytoff 1987), and on the need for a constant supply of slaves for bigger kingdoms described by Goody (1980), she calls the "uncontrolled zones" between the various Sahel kingdoms a slave reservoir. A similar approach, although without a specific definition of a slave reservoir, is that of Baniara Yoyana and Jean-Pierre Magnant (2013) in their work on customary law in Chad. They divide the country into three areas: the sultanates, the vassal states of those sultanates and what they define as *Dar Al-Harba* ("the land of the lance" in Arabic), areas considered as *res nullius*, where the sultans' armies could capture as many people as they wish (2013, pp. 233 - 236). Though they recognised it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a vassal state and a *Dar Al-Harba*, as even in those areas there are local political structures trying to deal with their neighbours, the Guéra region is presented as one of the few "inexpugnable shelter areas" (2013, p. 236) where resistance was more likely and contact with the groups of slavers reduced.

Further to the historical reasons for these territorial divisions, I have found relevant the theory of the "slaving zone", developed by the historian Jeffrey Fynn-Paul (2009). He argues that an

aspect of slavery extant since the spread of monotheistic religions is the division of the territory – by the states that were capturing slaves – into what he defines as "slaving zones", which are "the geographical area impacted by demand for slaves"; and the "non-slaving zones (..) considered off limits for slave raids by that society" (2009, p.4). A consequence of this division is that slaves could only come from certain regions, whose inhabitants had not converted to the religion of the dominant state. Since the diffusion of Islam in Sahelian Africa, areas progressively emerged where most of the people were Muslim, and, therefore, slave-raids were forbidden, and areas inhabited by pagans, considered as the only potentially enslavable people and therefore under the constant threat of raids. Based on these sources, I defined as "slave-reservoirs" areas where there was no strong, local, central power and the local inhabitants were constantly and for a long time under the threat of enslavement by neighbouring strong political powers.

The location and importance of slave reservoirs changed over the time. As the slave trade was one of the crucial economic activities for Sahelian sultanates, the pressure on those areas whose inhabitants could be captured grew in the period preceding the European colonisation of the area (Fisher 2001, Wright 2007, Austen 2010). There are various sources of information about these kingdoms and their handling of the slaves, whereas our knowledge of the neighbouring areas regularly harassed by these sultanates remains much weaker. Andrew Hubbel (2001, p. 28), focusing on stateless groups in the Niger bend, notes that slave reservoir inhabitants are often defined as the passive victims of some "predatory states" enriching themselves through slave raids. However, the people who inhabited these areas developed different strategies to deal with their powerful neighbours, sometime fighting, sometimes negotiating with them. Walter Hawthorne (1999) presented a similar argument concerning the case of Guinea. He notes that those societies often developed complex relationships with the institutions of the states raiding their villages. Slave reservoirs were not just areas where passive scattered groups were harassed by soldiers from more organised states, but there were local hierarchies and institutions that developed to deal with this situation. Nicholas David (2014) shows similar dynamics between Fulbe slavers and pagan groups inhabiting the Mandara Mountains, emphasising how the reactions of the raided societies could differ a lot even in the same area.

An assumption of this thesis is that in former slave reservoir local groups developed specific practices to deal with the legacies locally left by slavery, as well as to integrate or expel people considered as descendants of those slaves. Slave reservoirs were not rare in Sahel. Many

sultanates based their power on the slave trade across the Sahara. Hence, in the savanna areas south of these sultanates, different areas inhabited by non-Muslim people were considered as slave-reservoirs. Meillassoux (1991, pp. 45 – 63) described this as the "Sahelo-Sudanese" system, focusing on how sultanates in the Western part of the Sahel steadily grew, achieving their peak before French colonisation. Dennis Cordell (1985) presented the story of Dar Kuti, a small sultanate selling slaves to the bigger and more powerful sultanates of Dar Fur and Wadai. He used the concept of "borderland" to show how, rather than being just an area of conflict or raids, the contact area between Muslim sultanates and people living in the savannas was more nuanced, at least in the case of a small kingdom such as Dar Kuti.

Stephen Reyna (1990) makes a similar analysis in *Wars without end*, a book about the Bagirmi sultanate in the Lake Chad area, where these dynamics achieved their peak in the second half of the 19th century. Reyna (1990) worked on the model of the "predatory state", describing the process of enslavement of people from marginal areas just as a unidirectional process, where the raided groups had no kind of role or agency. Meillassoux's (1991) and Cordell's (1985) analyses focus more on the variety of the actors involved and their changing role over time, the first emphasising the difference between a trade mainly managed by warriors and a second phase where merchants became the main actors; the latter describing the role of Dar Kuti as a vassal of a bigger power, therefore acting as a broker between raided areas and the bigger power involved in the trade.

This kind of approach is criticised by more recent studies emphasizing the active role of the inhabitants of slaves reservoirs. Hawthorne (2001) and David (2014) attacked the model of the "predatory state", showing the variety of roles that local actors inside the "reservoir" can assume, from traders to hunters or rebels. However, most of the case studies on this topic have been tackled from an historical point of view. Among the studies dealing with present issues, Issa Saibou (2005) mentions the problem of keep clearly distinguished social categories such as former masters and slaves from ethnic categories like Fulani, Arab, Kirdi or Maccube, the first two associated with the slaveolder, the latter with the slaves. His work further confirms how it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between pagans as victims of raids and their raiders as masters as well the effects this has on contemporary ethnic identities. Marian Charles Jedrei (2006) compared the trajectories of the Hadjiray of Guéra and the Nuba of Sudan. Her article explores the construction of new, inclusive identities when the areas were under the protection of colonial governments and involved in broader administrative systems. In fact, both Guéra and Nuba Mountains were integrated into a modern state machine by the

colonial government, after having been a shelter for groups raided and marginalised by neighbouring stronger states. In these contexts, there was not a main local group able to impose its rule and narrative during the imposition of colonial institutions. Local elites emerged after colonisation and tried to legitimise a new form of power, dealing with a scattered and divisive memory of the past.

These authors combine oral and written sources, with the purpose of retracing past events and dynamics. My research moves on from their claims about the variety of dynamics and hierarchies in those societies and focuses on the social legacies the slave raids have left behind. If the inhabitants of slave reservoirs were not just passive victims of the actions of more powerful social actors, but deployed strategies to deal with it, I expect that, once the slave raids were prevented, interesting local dynamics were triggered and the social legacies of slavery had a role in them. In Chapter One, I presented the paradox that struck me at the beginning of my fieldwork: the variety of local stories mentioning slavery and slave raids, in a context where everyone claims that the slaves "disappeared". Even though people labelled as slave descendants are probably demographically less relevant in areas mainly used as slave reservoirs than in zones where slave labour was massively exploited, the fact that discourses about slavery are so common led me to the conclusion that the "disappearing" of slaves could have other explanations. It has interesting implications for the debate I have outlined in the preceding sections and suggests the value of exploration of slave-descendants' social trajectories in an area nowadays described as a former slave reservoir, like the Guéra region. The ability of people labelled as slave descendents to access resources and citizenship rights, as well as the way they present themselves and their version of the past in such a context could contribute to this literature. Furthermore, the nature of political authority and local civil society, as well as the perception of the state, could be significantly different in this area, compared to the centres of former slaveholder societies. Therefore, the reforms started in the 1990s may also have had a disparate impact.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the various analytical tools for studying the legacies of slavery and their connections with contemporary political life. I started by summarising the debate about the abolition of slavery, arguing that this abolition was not supported by policies aiming to emancipate former slaves. In the Sahel, the ineffective abolition policies and the political institutions built on these by colonial and post-colonial states are at the root of most contemporary social issues. Therefore, a post-slavery approach can bring important insights

into political dynamics. This is a topic that has grown in importance in the last two decades, not only in scholarly debate, but also in wider politics. I presented the apparent contradiction between the new political spaces available for slave descendants, and the growing importance of autochthony as a political category, both processes that emerged with the decentralisation policies of the 1990s. A pivotal point to interpret this is the importance of elites in the Sahel political arena: decentralisation policies may have been able to reduce the importance of those ruling the central state, but they still rely on an array of local elites, which partly emerged during colonial rule, partly fostered by the new funding augmented by international donors. In such a framework, local identities increased in importance in guaranteeing citizenship rights, and slave-descendants' movements, as well as claims for autochthony, are both outcomes of this struggle for more rights.

The chapter ended with an explanation of the concept of a "slave reservoir" and its main features. A point that I raised in Chapter One is that exploring areas described as former slave reservoirs can give new evidence to the study of "post-slavery". Slavery left many legacies that can be mobilised in different ways by the actors on the ground. Those areas where slaves capture was more impacting than slave-labour exploitation and are nowadays described as if they were just slave reservoirs have received, so far, less attention than areas where there are historical evidence of relevant slave-labour exploitation.However, the existing literature suggest that also in those areas there is a variety of strategies implemented by local actors to deal with slave raids and, subsequently, legacies of slavery. The case of the Yalnas in Guéra is a good example of this variety of experiences and can help in better understanding the connection between autochthony, identity and slavery, as well as the role of local elites in the newly decentralised Sahelian political arena. While these points will progressively emerge in the four ethnographic chapters, the next chapter gives additional information about the context, and the methods used to grasp this information.

Chapter 3

Slave raids, colonial order and ethnic tensions. The Trans-Saharan slave trade and the "Mountaineers" (Hadjiray) of the Guéra region

1. Introduction

In Chapter Two, I outlined the main theoretical perspectives that inform this thesis. I emphasised some features of the Sahel area, such as the ineffectiveness of the colonial abolition of slavery and the variety of reactions to the decentralisation policies implemented in the area since the 1980s. There are various aspects of the Sahel that make it relatively homogeneous, and the issues related to slave descent comparable in this context. This chapter aims to develop this discussion of the Sahel exploring the historical processes that affected its regions in a similar way. Slavery has a particular importance in Sahel history, because of the trans-Saharan slave trade before colonisation, and because the abolition of slavery legitimised European colonisation. The social issues affecting slave descendants described in Chapter Two are a consequence of these dynamics. I explained that most research on slavery has been carried out in former slave-using areas, and therefore in spaces where the social trajectories of slave descendents were affected by their proximity with their former masters following abolition. However, as the Sahel region was on the boundary between Muslim sultanates and scattered groups of pagans, local dynamics cannot be fully understood without considering the slave reservoirs. In this chapter, I locate geographically and historically the issues described in Chapters One and Two; and present the methods I used to access information during fieldwork. After an initial explanation of the Trans-Saharan slave trade and its abolition, this chapter focuses on Chad, outlining the main dynamics of the precolonial period and the changes brought about by the processes of colonisation and decolonisation. It explores the structure of societies in the Guéra region, outlining its ethnic groups and the historical and political dynamics of the area. Finally, it discusses the methodologies used to access information about slavery in an area where this is not considered a topic with any relevance locally.

2. Approaching the topic and the context

2.1 Trans-Saharan slave trade and the abolition of slavery

Geographically, the Sahel is the semi-arid strip dividing the Sahara Desert from the more fertile savannas of the sub-Saharan tropical area. The historian Gregory Mann (2015) argues that humanitarian interventions since the late 1970s have radically shaped the importance and image of this area. Since then, the Sahel has recurrently appeared in mainstream media as the site of a series of humanitarian crises, the most recent being the droughts of 2010 and 2012 and the uprisings related to *Al Qaeda* and *Boko Haram* in Northern Mali and northern Nigeria, especially in the 2010s. Humanitarian interventions increased following the end of the cold war and the wave of formal democratisation that has affected the entire region since the 1990s. These were accompanied by the emergence of slave-descendants' movements fighting for citizenship rights (Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011). These movements originate in the way slavery abolition was implemented in the Sahel and to the appropriation of decentralisation reforms by local Sahelian elites. It is now important to explore the Sahel's history to better understand those assumptions.

The Sahel region played a central role in the wider networks of African slavery, as it was at the core component of the trans-Saharan slave trade. Wright (2007) explains that, although these trade routes never achieved the scale of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, they endured for a longer period and involved a variety of different routes, whose importance varied over time. Even when trading was at its peak, which Wright identifies as being in the 19th century, the number of slaves traded across the Sahara was never more than 8,000 per year, compared with 90,000 across the Atlantic in 1780. However, this route lasted for more than a thousand years, moving a total amount of slaves estimated at between 9.5 and 19.7 million (Wright 2007, pp. 167-168). The huge difference between the more prudent estimate, made by Wright himself, and Mauny's (1970) higher estimate shows how difficult it is to obtain reliable data on this topic.
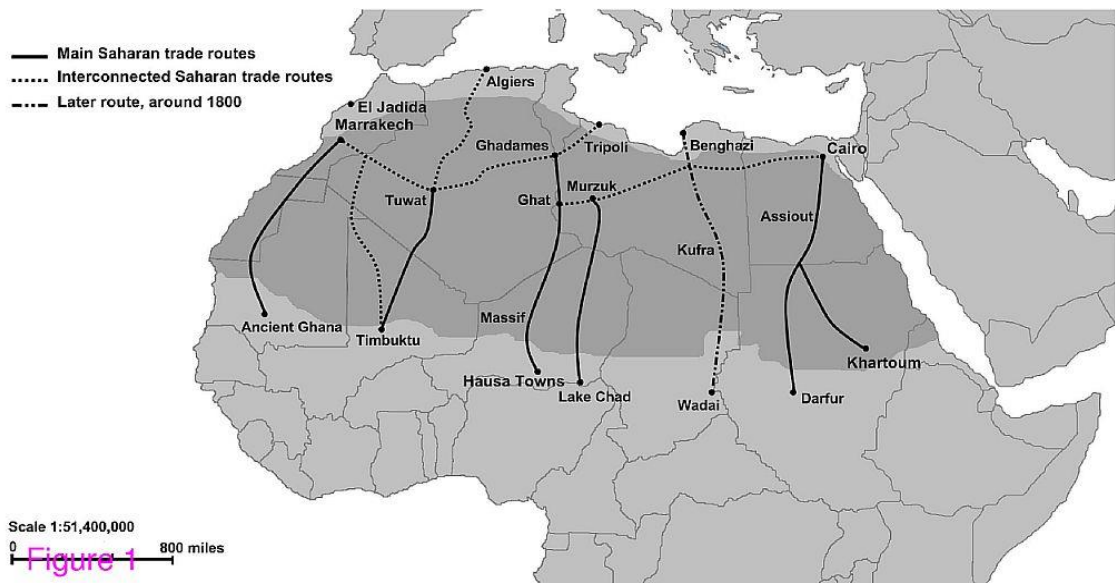
Figure 1: Map of Trans-Saharan slave trade (from Segal 2002)

Wright (2007) describes the difficulties of managing this trade, emphasising the importance of oases, the role of nomadic groups able to control them and the importance of safety on the road connecting the two edges of the desert. He focuses especially on the road through Murzuk, Ghadames, Ghat and Kufra (in contemporary Libya), whose importance peaked in the 19th century. However, he does not pay great attention to the connection between the control of the trade and the consolidation of powerful political powers in the Sahel. Meillassoux (1991) makes this point in the first chapter of *The Anthropology of Slavery*. The location of the Sahel facilitated the growth and consolidation of different kingdoms over time, while the diffusion of Islam created a common institutional framework based on Islamic law. The main distinction in Meillassoux's historical analysis – mainly focused on the western part of the Sahel – is between a first period when "empires" were handling these trades, from the diffusion of Islam until the 14th – 15th century, and a second period, lasting until colonisation, when this trade was mainly managed by local networks of powerful traders. In the first period, between the 7th and 14th centuries, economic resources related to the slave trade were used to create and sustain territorially vast kingdoms, such as ancient Ghana and Mali (Meillassoux 1991, pp. 43-66). The growth of these kingdoms required progressively more organised military and political structures, leading to the steady increase of enslavement practices and violent competition among the different political entities. However, when gold extraction and slave supply through raids were no longer able to fund the vast political structures, they gradually weakened and broke up into smaller political entities (Meillassoux 1991, p. 52), but the exchanges regarding slavery lasted, thanks to the networks of traders scattered all through the Sahel and Saharan regions.

Austen (2010) focuses on local factors of the exchanges throughout the Sahara, highlighting the role of Islam in reducing the conflicts on its southern edge, especially since the 16th century, when "the great days of the Sudanic empires were over" (2010, p. 39). During this time, a class of Muslim traders involved in this market spread across the area. These networks of traders continued their activities, progressively moving from the Western Sahel toward the East (Meillassoux 1991, p. 51). Usually, these networks of traders were protected by one of the various small kingdoms that spread locally in the Sahel region, without a main actor imposing itself over the others. Fisher (2001) analyses the nature and intensity of trans-Saharan trade, emphasising the variety of roles slaves were required to undertake, not only in North Africa but also in the Sahel, mainly in the army, or as concubines or domestic servants, while chattel slavery was rarer. A common aspect of these analyses is the emphasis on the variety of uses of slaves, who were of crucial importance for various political institutions that emerged through the centuries across the Sahel.

The spread of Muslim caliphates trading slaves in the 19th century is a later extension of these dynamics. Lovejoy (2016) locates its origin about one century after the collapse of the Songhay Empire, the first being in the Senegal valley in the late 17th century, and interprets them as a reaction by local Muslim elites to the growing influence of Europeans in Western Africa. More interestingly for this thesis, he emphasises how slavery and *jihād* are deeply connected in Western Sahel, as "enslavement and the use of slaves in the economy allowed the further consolidation and expansion of the *jihād* states while, at the same time, establishing the autonomy of West Africa from the European-dominated Atlantic world" (Lovejoy 2016, p. 99). Austen (2010) notes that *jihād* created new states in Western Sahel, while in the central Sahel the political dynamics were more centred on the actions of big ethnic groups such as the Kanuri and the Hausa, which replaced each other over the time as the leading power, without creating large states. The *jihadi* states appeared here during the 19th century through a shared claim to a "pure" Islam (2010, pp. 49 – 77), when the prohibition of the slave trade on the Trans-Atlantic route and parts of Western Africa contributed to an increase in demand for slaves through central Sahara. Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn (1993) analysed the Sokoto caliphate, created in 1804. Gabriel Warburg (1981) explored the case of the Mahdiyya in Sudan, which itself spread as a reaction against the prohibition of the slave trade in 1881. Jean Claude Zeltner (1988) analysed the kingdom of Rabih, which spread across western Sudan and Chad since 1880; and the creation of a solid trade route between the Wadai and Benghazi, based on the *Sanusya* Muslim brotherhood, and strengthening the Wadai sultanate on the eve of colonisation (Zeltner 1997) .

All these institutions based their wealth and power on the control of trade and the capacity to capture slaves in the neighbouring savannas. Colonisation affected heavily on this. The fight against slavery was on the official agenda of the European powers throughout the 19th century. At the Berlin conference in 1885 the main colonial powers divided up the whole of Africa between themselves, and in the Sahelo-Sudanese area most of the territory was allocated to the French (only contemporary Sudan and northern Nigeria fell under British rule). The Europeans gradually defeated the former pre-colonial kingdoms that refused to accept their authority, and by the 1920s the whole area was included in the European colonial empires (Miers and Klein 1998, pp. 18-32). The raids to capture slaves were no longer tolerated and the slave trade, though not totally blocked, dropped dramatically. On the one hand, this had a massive impact on the whole economic system, which had to be radically readjusted on the basis of the new institutions. On the other hand, other forms of subjugation that local elites could exert, such as forced labour, assumed more importance. Colonial governments sometimes even supported it. For example, Klein (1998) describes the French West African context, where forced labour imposed by the French with the active support of the local elites often involved former slaves, whose working and living conditions were similar to those of slavery.

The way the colonial powers tackled the slavery issue was ambiguous. Cooper (2000) notes that colonial decrees artificially isolated as "slavery" some specific practices embedded in other local hierarchies, while creating new forms of legitimate unfreedom, as emphasized by Bellagamba (2017a, pp. 1 – 9) and Rossi (2017, pp. 185 – 194). Because of this narrow definition, and the inability to radically redistribute power across the Sahelian territories, the eradication of slavery was ineffective. The colonial powers needed the cooperation of the existing elites to control the territories. This is particularly true for an area like the Sahel, where the territory is vast and difficult to control, while the local resources are few, making it very expensive to develop a heavy administrative machine. In this area, cooperation with the existing authorities, often close to local slaveholder elites, was crucial, and therefore the colonial government did not actively promote the emancipation of former slaves (Miers and Klein 1998). Both the French "politique de race" and British "native rule" in the respective colonial states recognised and empowered the pre-colonial aristocracies. Adam Mahmat's (2008) thesis about the legacies of slavery in the Lake Chad area emphasizes the role these authorities played in slowing down the emancipation of former slaves. His argument is that, as the colonial power needed a local centralized power to control northern Cameroon, it opted to empower the Fulbe, the only local group capable to fulfil this need. Fulani leaders kept doing

their raids well after colonization, as shown by the slave raids of Hamman Yaji, who served as Emir of the Fulbe of Madagali under the German and French colonial government, between 1902 and 1927 and recorded these raids in his own diary (Vaughan and Kirk Greene 1995). Meanwhile, the groups of Kirdi – meaning "pagans" in a variety of societies across Chad, northern Cameroon and northern Nigeria – constituted the main work force for the forced labour and were underrepresented in the colonial administrative machine. These policies have an important role in the contemporary struggles between Fulbe and Kirdi described by Saibou (2005) in the area, and recall the description of Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993) of the "slow death" of slavery in northern Nigeria.

The various systems of legal pluralism implemented by the colonial powers maintained, and in some cases strengthened, the unequal hierarchical relations in Sahelian societies. In Chapter Two, I explained how the policies following the legal abolition of slavery were generally ineffective in emancipating and empowering former slaves. These issues conditioned the social trajectories of former slaves and people of slave descent, strongly influencing the contemporary social landscapes in societies where slavery was widespread. Miers and Klein (1998) note that former slaves were able to break the dependency relationship and emancipate themselves thanks only to their own initiative. Legal abolition was a solution implemented by colonial governments to limit the worst effects of slave labour exploitation without getting involved in local social struggles. It was implemented together with new forms of workforce exploitation: forced labour imposed by the state (especially in French colonies) or sharecropping requested by the local traditional authorities, which acquired more importance under colonial rule. Moreover, local elites progressively shifted to the trade that was legally acceptable under colonial rule, developing new networks and activities, especially in area where market oriented agriculture spread (Austin 2009), while in the Sahel these processes were generally slower (Rossi 2015a).

Focusing on the case of Chad, Samuel Decalo (1980) and Robert Buijthenuijs (1998, 2001) explain that the struggle for power in colonial and postcolonial states was mainly been between small elites, a situation related to the weakness and uprooted structure of many Sahelian states. In such a context, it was often difficult for people with slave ancestry to be integrated into the state machine and access citizenship to the same extent as groups whose elites were previously involved in the colonial state administration (LeCornec 1963). As the slaves were at the bottom of the social order in pre-colonial societies, the permanence of pre-colonial aristocracies in Chad's administrative machine reduced the possibility of their

emancipation, even though there are also cases where former slaves, or people previously marginalised, took advantage of the creation of the colonial state (Issa Khayar 1977).

The groups subjected to enslavement in precolonial times were the inhabitants of the southern savannas and mountains. Most of them converted to Christianity or Islam under colonial government. In the southern savannas, they tried to integrate into the state machine using the memory of the previous raids as a tool to unite themselves as "southerners", against the "northerner" Muslims related to the slaveholders' elites. Rene Lemarchand (1980, 1986) and Mario Azevedo (1982) identify in this strategy, implemented since the French started to delegate powers to local authorities in the 1950s, the roots of the civil wars that affected the country after its independence, in 1960. In this respect, it is important to notice that these two identities are an ideological construction that does not necessarily reflect the historical dynamics related to enslavement.

Karen Haire Hoenig (2007, pp. 313 – 330) shows the heterogeneous sources of legitimacy in the foundational myth of Wadai sultanate. She notes how in the various narratives about the founder of the sultanate, Abdel Karim, there is a "tendency to an African and sometimes insider construction of identity" together with a "tendency to an Islamic/Arab and sometimes outsider construction of identity" and even a "tendency to a European and sometimes imperialist construction of identity" (Hoenig 2007, p. 327), as important information about Wadai is filtrated through the works of European explorers Heinrich Barth and Gustav Nachtigal, who visited Wadai in the 19th century. The narrative about Wadai founder and the identity claims related to it are so heterogeneous and reworked throughout the time that "it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a story element per se" (Hoenig 2007, p. 326). Tackling the legacies of slavery directly, Chadian historian Beyem Roné (2000, pp. 207-232) explains how the data about the trans-Saharan trade are vague and the dynamic on the ground was more complex, with a variety of smaller groups acting as intermediaries between the main Muslim sultanates and the scattered groups of the savannas. Therefore, this idea of the "southern people" as pagans enslaved by the "northerners" is more a result of the political struggle in postcolonial Chad than an objective historical reconstruction. It is also worthwhile to note that none of the leaders emerging in postcolonial Chad has ever claimed any slave ancestry. As happens in many other Sahelian contexts, the topic remained out of national politics, but strongly affected local arenas. Northerners often use the label Kirdi to insult people from the south of Chad. Moreover, various groups all over Sahelian and Saharan Chad are locally discriminated against because of precolonial cleavages.

It is difficult to get a clear picture of these groups, as the topic is usually avoided. Lemarchand (2005) mentions the story of a high school professor in N'Djamena who publicly said in a classroom that the Kamaya – a group of farmers speaking Tubu, a label indicating a variety of languages among nomadic groups in northwestern Chad – used to be slaves before the arrival of the French, and was stabbed by a group of Kamaya students for this. I often heard this story as an example of the difficulty of dealing with slavery in Chad. Moreover, the label *Kamaya*, even though it was considered by my sources as a synonym of "slave" among the Tubu, proved to be more ambiguous. Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele (2016) note how *Kamaya* covers the farmers of the oases, who were defined by the colonial government as "servants" of the *Anakazza*, the nomads controlling – but not working – the land of these oases. Locally, the Kamaya are distinguished from the slave descendants, regrouped in another canton, the canton *Mina*. Interestingly, the inhabitants of canton Mina have less conflictive relationships and fewer social constraints toward the Anakazza than the Kamaya. Brachet and Scheele (2016) concludes that, though the conflictive relationships between Kamaya and Anakazza may appear as a typical "post-slavery" situation between former masters and slaves, these conflicts have been reframed by the economic and political changes in the area. The label *Kamaya*, which emerged during colonial times, seems to be better described as a "particular mode of production (...) of probably limited historicity", as "none of the traditional explanations of slavery and unfree labour developed in anthropology and African history fit Faya particularly well" (2016, pp. 138-139).

Chadian scholars emphasise the importance of the legacies of slavery, even though this topic is not fully and explicitly explored. The locally published *Cahier d'Histoire* printed an edition dedicated to slavery. In the journal, there was a description of the role of slaves in a Fulani *Lamidat* (a political institutions among some Fulani groups) in the south-west of the country and the account of the forced labour imposed by the French during the construction of the railway connecting Brazzavile with Bangui in the 1930s. In the special edition of the journal dedicated to the Haddad (2010) – the Chadian marginalised caste of blacksmiths – Ngothe Gatta denounced a variety of discriminatory practices based on descent. He used the label *Yalnas* as a broader word to describe that suffered by the Haddad (2010, p. 5), even though its focus is mainly on the ethnic cleavages dividing Chad than on the specific legacies of slavery. Civil society actors in N'Djamena mainly confirmed these theories in the conversations I had with them. Nowadays, the focus of the Chadian Human Rights Association is on creating a community arena to deal with inter-community conflicts (land conflicts, herding conflicts,

refugees' autochthonous conflicts), while specific past events are ignored. In the next section, I try to better clarify these points with a detailed description of Chad.

2.2 The creation of Chad and its contradictions

The French united the territory of contemporary Chad into a single state at the beginning of the 20th century. Before this, there had never been a central power controlling its vast and heterogeneous territory. The Sahelian part of the country was the core area of three main sultanates: Kanem-Bornou, Bagirmi and Wadai. All these sultanates based their wealth on trade across the Sahara. Slaves were among the more important goods and were regularly raided or bought in the Savannas and the mountains of Chad. These areas were inhabited by various scattered pagan groups mainly involved in subsistence farming and were considered as a slave reservoir by the Sahelian sultanates. These dynamics lasted until French colonisation, which brought radical change to local life (Chapelle 1980, Yoyana and Magnant 2013). Chad, with its borders as they are today, was recognised as a state inside French Equatorial Africa in 1920[7]. The French administrative strategy was to keep in power, where possible, the existing authorities. The sultanates of Bagirmi and Kanem-Bornou had accepted French authority before the arrival of the French army and were, therefore, recognised as "customary authorities" within the colony. The French tried to use a similar tactic with the Wadai sultanate, but after the sultan they had appointed rebelled (between 1909 and 1911), they decided to eliminate this institution. Many aristocrats close to the Wadai family were killed during the 1920s and the sultanate was re-established only in 1935, with a smaller territory than in 1911 (Thompson and Adloff 1960). In the mountainous areas and the savannas, where there had been no strong pre-colonial political authorities, the French appointed "canton chiefs" (chosen from among the local leaders less hostile to them) who could act on behalf of the colonial administration in local communities (LeCornec 1963, Azevedo 1998).

Colonial rule implemented various administrative reforms, though the power was traditionally concentrated in the capital, Fort Lamy (renamed N'Djamena in 1973). These reforms had a deep impact on social organisation and led to a rearrangement of ethnic groups, leading to the emergence and fixing of different identities. Moreover, the colonial government brought a crucial change to the organisation of the local economy. They blocked the trade across the Sahara, for centuries the backbone of the wealth of Chadian sultanates, and the axis of economic exchanges moved towards the southern part of the colony, subsequently readjusting

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[7] Apart from the Saharan part of the country, which had never been under the French Equatorial Africa government, but remained a French military territory until 1965, when the French gave control to the Chadian army.

internal hierarchies (Arditi 2003). This set the context for the harsh competition for the control of central power that started after Chad's independence in 1960. Two main cultural identities emerged, pitted against each other, and became a central issue in Chad's national politics: the Muslim northerners, descendants of the pre-colonial aristocracies and marginalised by the French; and the Christian southerners, whose better knowledge of the French language made them more represented, politically, under French rule and in the aftermath of colonisation. The first clashes erupted in Guéra in 1965 and the war reached its peak between 1975 – when incumbent president Francois Tolmbabaye was ousted in a coup d'état – and 1982, when the northerner Hissene Habré finally entered N'Djamena. His former general – and current Chad president - Idriss Deby Itno, then overthrew Habré in December 1990.

Deby's victory signalled a turn in Chad's political life. He organised the National Sovereign Conference in 1993, when a democratic and decentralised system of governance was identified as a strategy to create social and ethnic cohesion in the state (Buijthenuijs 2001). Chad's central government has never been able to fully control the peripheries of the country, but ruled the territory through authorities appointed by central government, which had to cooperate with local customary authorities (canton and village chiefs). When a referendum approved the new constitution in 1996, Article 2 officially recognised the *Collectivités Territoriales Décentralisés* (CTD)[8] on four levels: the regions, the departments, the rural communities and the city councils. CTDs were to be ruled by locally elected representatives and have some autonomy from the central state. However, the dispositions about decentralisation have been enforced only partially, and so far all these institutions have been ruled by officials appointed by the central government, apart from 42 (out of 199) city councils elected in 2012. While the decentralisation policies did not reform the mode of selection of the local authorities, the central government has been active in redrawing administrative divisions, multiplying the existing administrative units, especially in the last fifteen years. Nowadays, there are 23 regions (6 more than in 2003), 68 departments (21 more than in 2003) and 230 city councils (31 more than in 2003). There are no clear statistics about the number of new sous - prefectures and cantons, but according to Ndjénodji Mbaïdédji (2008), their proliferation has been even greater.

Most of my sources in Guéra criticised this strategy as a way for the government to use the CTD to increase its centralised power: the government creates new administrative divisions

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[8] Decentralised Territorial Collectivity; this is a general phrase to indicate the range of local administrative institutions recognised by central government.

and appoints a new head of each, getting the support of a particular ethnic group who gains advantage from the new institution. This is particularly perceived at the level of the customary authorities; as the CTDs have not yet been effectively implemented, the interventions of the development organisations are mainly supporting canton chiefs. I directly observed this practice in Guéra, where the implementation of Local Development Plans was based on canton chiefs' involvement, confirmed by some NGO reports, such as GIZ (2006) in charge of the *Projet d'Appui au Developpement Local* (PADL) programme, and the report of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT 2010) that mainly involved customary leaders in their programs. Mirjam De Bruijn's research about civil society in Chad (2008) confirms these opinions, emphasizing how, despite new political spaces formally created for local organizations, the central government maintains a strong control on them, using all its layers of authority to increase its capacity to control, rather than fostering grassroots initiatives.

The above model of decentralisation based on government-appointed authority seems part of an effort by the central government to exert a stronger control over a territory where its authority has traditionally been weak. This approach differs from the dynamics described by Hahonou (2008, 2011) in northern Benin and impacts on the strategies implemented by local *Gando* groups to get access to citizenship rights. However, as I showed in Chapter Two, there are some similarities between the case of Gando and that of the Yalnas. The reasons that make the Yalnas' social trajectory different from that of other slave descendant groups is more related to the history of Guéra and the absence of local group capable to claim a past as masters in the area, as I will try to show in the ethnographic chapters.

In the Sahel, local discourses about slavery emerged thanks to a convergence between a growing, global discourse against present day slavery and local cleavages between groups coming from a past as slaves and groups coming from a past as slaveholders. In Chad, scholars and politicians avoid the topic of slavery at the national level. Moreover, the Yalnas' condition in Jujube did not seem radically different to that of other local groups. Politically and economically, they are living in very similar situations; they have enjoyed a similar degree of infrastructural development as the other groups in the area, and local issues such as land disputes or herder-farmer clashes are as widespread as in many other Guéra contexts. However, the very existence of this label, which designates a group without descent, shows that the past matters. Moreover, discourses about slavery emerge in the conflicts dividing one of the Yalnas cantons in Guéra from their neighbours, the Bidio. In the ethnographic chapters, I

explore this conflict in depth, explaining when and how the legacies of slavery emerge and what role they play in the local political arena. In the following sections, I will present in more detail the area in which I conducted my research: the Guéra department, in the Guéra region, particularly in the area around the capital of the Yalnas canton of Jujube.

3. The area of the fieldwork

3.1 The Hadjiray of the Guéra region

The Guéra region is a mountainous area located in the central part of the country, at the border between the Sahel and the savannas. Guéra has traditionally been at the edge of more powerful and structured states, like the Wadai or the Bagirmi, which frequently raided its territory to seize pagan captives. It was created as an administrative region in 1958 (Lanne 1995), after having been part of the broader Batha region. The name Guéra comes from the main mountain chain of the area, the so-called *Reine du Guéra* ("Queen of Guéra" in French), and was given to the region by the colonial government (Fuchs 1997, Seli 2013). Anthropologists mainly studied this area for its pre-Muslim religions: Jean Francois Vincent (1975) explored the political role of the *margay*, the site for the precolonial worship of mountain spirits, adored by all groups inhabiting the mountains. Charles Vandame (1975) and Jean Pouillon (1964, 1977) analysed the structure of political power among the Kenga, an ethnic group inhabiting in the western part of the region. Peter Fuchs (1997) explored the worship of *margay* over time and emphasized the changes brought by the period of civil wars, whose impact on Guéra is the core of Mirjam De Bruijn and Han Van Dijk (2007) research. Marielle Debos (2016) analysed the social trajectories of former rebels starting her research in Guéra region, while local scholars worked on Guéra languages (Alio 2008) and the diffusion of new communication technologies (Seli 2013). I used these sources to get important information about Guéra region and history, comparing it with the data collected during fieldwork.

As for the whole Sahelian belt in Chad, the Guéra region has one rainy season, which starts in June and ends in October. There are no perennial rivers, only *ouadi* – temporary rivers – and some ponds. Rainwater is the only source for agriculture and cattle watering. According to a census conducted by Oxfam in 2013, there are 546,945 inhabitants in the region as a whole. The regional capital is Mongo and there are four departments: Guéra (capital: Mongo), Abtouyour (in the west; capital: Bitkine), Mangalme (in the east; capital: Mangalme) and Barh Signaka (in the south; capital: Melfi). Within these four departments, there are 12 rural

communities and 21 cantons, although during my visit there were rumours of at least two new cantons very close by to be declared in Guéra department.

Figure 2: Administrative map of the Guéra region (Oxfam 2013)

The explorers Nachtigal, Barth and Al-Tunsi all visited Wadai and Bagirmi during the 18th and 19th centuries, describing the importance of the slave trade in the area (Fisher 2001). Guéra is briefly mentioned as a dangerous area inhabited by scattered groups of pagans. Fuchs (1997, p. 17), claims that the area was called *Dar Kodro* and that a group of *Dangaleat* – inhabiting the northern part of contemporary Mongo department - had agreed to pay a regular tax to them since the time of the Wadai sultan Saboun (1804 – 1815). I found a mention of "tributes" paid by the *Dadjo* – an ethnic group inhabiting Guéra – of the Abou Telfane - a main mountain range in northern Guéra - also in Nachtigal (volume 4, p. 155). The colonial administrator Henri Carbou (1912, p. 116), drawing on an episode from Nachtigal notes that the son of Saboun, Yusef, was defeated while attacking the *Diongor* of the Abou Telfan, (volume 4, p. 216). Abou Telfane is mentioned as uncontrollable also in Barth (volume 3, p. 544), while classifying the groups of people living around the Wadai area. Historians identified the *aqid* (a general of the Wadai army) of the various zones under Wadai influence, but there is no mention of an *aqid* ruling over contemporary Guéra. Apart from the Diongor and Dadjo, none of the other contemporary Hadjiray groups is mentioned.

Despite the frequency of slave raids, it is not clear whether slaves were locally exploited. Various sources reports the frequent use of slaves among nomadic groups, as well as the

relatively easy integration of slaves into those groups (LeBeuf 1959, Fuchs 1997). Vincent (1975) is the only author who openly took up the topic of settled groups. According to her, local groups mainly used slaves as a sort of "currency": people captured were kept and eventually sold to avoid attacks from more powerful groups. Moreover, escaped slaves used to be given back to their owners, to avoid retaliation. There is no evidence of slave labour exploitation in the Guéra region, apart from the nomadic Arabs who were seasonally inhabiting the area. However, because of the lack of written sources about the precolonial period, it is not possible to have an exact idea about the slave population in precolonial Guéra and the fate of the slaves once the French colonised the area. The first written sources describing Guéra are the French reports during the colonisation of the area. I did find a number of yearly reports collected by Louis Duault (1938), a colonial administrator. These include the reports written in Mongo during the 1920s and 1930s, when the colonial government did not have a clear idea about the different local groups. I found frequent inaccuracies in the names of both ethnic groups and villages; moreover, in my interviews, local elders often disregarded the information of these reports. My sources told me that during those decades local people easily deceived the French and the information they recorded should not be fully trusted.

The general picture found in the work of Vandame, Vincent, Pouillon and Fuchs fits well with the information I collected during my fieldwork. Before colonisation, hunting and gathering of wild fruit and vegetables was the basis of livelihood: as the plains were unsafe because of Wadai slave raids, people used to live in the mountains and survive on leaves, roots and game. People inhabited small villages composed of a few households: resources were quite scarce, as nobody could regularly farm the fertile land of the plains. The idea that in the past Guéra people were not farmers but hunter-gatherers is widely believed in the region. Local sources told me that people could survive just by eating hunted meat and the leaves from local trees, while Fuchs (1997) is more nuanced on this point, describing also the farming of local crops (millet and sorghum) and the exchange of local crops for dairy products with nomadic herders. Moreover, this general narration about livelihoods based on hunting is sometimes contradicted: I heard about cereals being paid to the slave raiders as taxes by groups that tried to make agreements with them, as well as attacks on villages aiming to raid their barns. I did not hear about regular markets in pre-colonial times, only about occasional agreements between local groups and nomadic herders, as well as between local groups and blacksmiths, who are an isolated caste all over Sahelian Chad (Monino 1988). The herders, mainly Arabic,

used to come seasonally with their cattle and were the only group that owned animals in the region.

Following colonisation, the French obliged local people to settle on the plains and start farming activities. Nowadays, most households base their livelihoods on subsistence agriculture, mainly sorghum and millet. Many families also own some livestock, usually goats or sheep and, more rarely, cows. Such animals constitute capital that can be partly liquidated when the harvest is not good, or for special events. Livestock can be quite easily sold, as the Guéra is at the core of an important transhumance route and there are important cattle markets. Only nomadic Arabs own camels. They migrate regularly in the rainy seasons, when camels need a drier environment. Usually, the cow owners organise shorter migrations inside the Guéra region, while the camel owners cover bigger distances (Almy Al-Afia 2006). Before colonisation, indigenous Guéra groups were not able to regularly farm livestock because of the general instability (LeRouvreur 1962). This is a practice that became common during colonial times and it is nowadays considered as a distinctive sign of Guéra people. "Here we have cattle; we are not like the farmers of the south; even if our harvest is not good we are not going to starve or work for someone else. We can do better thanks to our cattle," my fieldwork assistant, Annour, told me, while explaining the main differences between Guéra and southern people, in October 2014.

Nowadays the inhabitants of the Guéra region are called *Hadjiray*, a word that means "the people of the mountains" in Chadian Arabic. Le Rouveur (1962, pp. 121-123) used this term while classifying the population of Sahel and Sahara, explaining how it is the result of the unifications of the smaller communities living around the Abou Telfan and Ab Touyour mountain chains. I could not find sources using specific terms to distinguish between the different Guéra groups until the French arranged a local administrative system, and still some of the ethnonyms that emerged at the beginning of the colonial period were subsequently changed (Chapelle 1980). In the first colonial reports, French soldiers distinguished between a broader group of non-Islamised people called *Kirdi*, and those they referred to as whom they were calling "Arab", even though this label was used for every group of Muslims capable of speaking in Chadian Arabic (Duault 1938). The label of Kirdi in French means "paien" and I am translating it into English as "pagan". Nowadays, it remains only as an insult, often used by the Muslims of northern Chad against the southerners. The word "Arab" is still in general use to indicate the various groups of nomads presenting themselves as Arab, and is applied to various

genealogies, the more important ones being the Arab Rachid and the Arab Missirie (Marty et al. 2009).

Guéra fell under the control of the French in 1906, when the French started forcing Hadjiray to settle on the plains and farm. On 5th April 1923, there was the main administrative reform, the so-called *decoupage*, described by Duault (1938). The heads of the more powerful clans were recognised as "chefs de canton" (canton chiefs) by the colonial government, representing a set of villages speaking a similar dialect. The canton chief had the task of managing justice, guaranteeing order, and collecting taxes, as well as providing people for forced labour if required. From this point, the colonial government took all the decisions regarding cantons and land divisions, and formalised the labels defining local ethnic groups: every canton was given the name of the main ethnic group inhabiting it. Even during this process, some pejorative labels, such as *Diongor* - a word designating people who have not been circumcised – remained to indicate local groups who used to inhabit the mountains. Carbou (1912) did not know most of the contemporary Hadjiray labels, he only mentions the Dadjo and locates the Yalnas among the Arab *Dekakhire*. Another colonial administrator, Albert Le Rouveur (1962) distinguishes between *Kenga*, *Dangaleat*, *Diongor* (nowadays *Migami*), *Bidio* and *Yalnas*, while keeping the Dadjo apart in his classification, a distinction maintained by the historian Annie LeBoeuf (1959). Nowadays, scholars classify the Dadjo of Guéra together with the other Hadjiray (Fuchs 1997, Seli 2013).

Before these authors, I found no mention of the Guéra people as Hadjiray. These groups have never been united under a common political structure and their identity group appeared only after Chad's independence (Jedrei 2006, Seli 2013). After the pacification brought by the French, Hadjiray progressively converted to Islam (a huge majority) or Christianity (a minority). In addition, these groups adopted local Arabic as a lingua franca, which then became the lingua franca of the whole country. The diffusion of Islam and Chadian Arabic – the main religion and the mother tongue for most of the local herders – enabled a relatively collaborative relationship between herders and farmers. Though the tensions between the two groups are relevant, local institutions and civil society organisations usually seem more effective in handling them than in other parts of the country, where herder-farmer conflicts are one of the more serious problems.

The Sufi *Tijaniyyah* tariqa (brotherhood), which incorporated some elements of local religions, progressively replaced the pagan worship of the mountain spirit. The colonial government was generally supportive of this form of Islam, which was not challenging French political

domination (Coudray 1994). From the 1950s, Christian missionaries started working in the Guéra region, making it the only non-southern region with a significant number of local Christian groups. Cohabitation with the overwhelming Muslim majority has been mainly peaceful, with some intermarriages between the two communities. However, since the 1970s, the rebels, supporting a *Wahabid* vision of Islam, targeted Christian priests and groups practicing traditional religion. Following the peace of the 1980s, there have been growing inter-community tensions, in the region as well as in the whole country (Ladibeu 2017). During my fieldwork, I found that nowadays the importance of Islam is increasing among the indigenous groups that base their identity on *margay* or worship sites. They claim an initial migration "from the east" and a subsequent union with the people "who grew from the mountains", trying to strengthen their social links with the groups that brought Islam from the Arabia peninsula, arriving from the East. As Islam is gaining prestige in the country, in local stories people want to emphasise their link with this religion, while in the past the relationship with the mountain spirits and the related ownership of land was the priority. Peter Fuchs (1997) noticed this during his second fieldwork, in the early 1990s. The growing importance of Islam is an element that facilitated Yalnas' integration in this context, as they became Muslims before most local people, and is crucial in their choice to rename the canton after the Abbassid family.

As Guéra offered the shelter of a typical "frontier" area (Kopytoff 1987), a wide variety of different ethnic groups inhabit the area, with different languages and origins. Several waves of migrants came to the Guéra Mountains, some of whom mixed in the mountains following different agreements, while others started fighting against each other, trying to collect captives and give them to Wadai warriors (Fuchs 1997). This lasted several centuries, but the establishment of the Wadai sultanate, in 1635, dramatically increased these dynamics (Chapelle 1980). Various groups with different histories and experiences settled there, without having much contact until the French colonisation moved them all to the plains. The frequent distinction between *gens de la terre* and *gens de la chefferie* (Vincent 1975) among local groups is a legacy of this process, which I will explore in more depth in Chapter Four. The fact of living in the mountains and respecting mountain spirits was the only common element for these groups. All indigenous villages had their own *margay,* and, after they were forced to settle on the plains, they nonetheless tried to remain close to their mountain spirit. The two bigger groups with *margay*, Bidio and Migami, present themselves as migrants from the east who had intermarried with the indigenous people of the mountains at a certain point in the past. This union is represented by the existence, at the same time, of land chiefs, who know

who owns the lands around the mountains, and the political chiefs and marabouts, who mainly apply Islamic rules (Vincent 1975, Fuchs 1997). There are three groups that do not have a *margay* and present themselves as non-fully indigenous: Dadjo, nomadic Arabs and the Yalnas. However, behind these ethnic labels, there is a variety of smaller villages that often have tensions and rivalries between them.

The Hadjiray are difficult to locate in the nationwide dichotomy between northerners and southerners. They are mainly Muslim, but the other northern groups have generally marginalised them. Both the Habré and Deby governments militarily repressed them, despite their involvement in the rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s against the central government (De Bruijn 2007). According to the anthropologist Djimet Seli (2013), Guéra inhabitants initially embraced this label that fostered cohesion among them, especially in the communities living in the main cities. However, since the repressions of MOSANAT in 1986, the term *Hadjiray* was associated with the rebels, and Guéra people preferred instead to present themselves through their specific ethnonyms. Even though Hadjiray elites are not well represented inside the government, we cannot define the Guéra region as a totally marginal or neglected area. Increasingly, during the 1990s, it received support from international donors and a boost to its infrastructure. Three out of four department capitals are now on the main paved road connecting N'Djamena with the Sudan border, which has greatly reduced the isolation of the area during the rainy season. International NGOs implemented various development projects and Guéra is the only non-southern region with a significant number of local civil society organisations run by local people (EU 2014).

As in other parts of the Sahel, these changes came along with other major transformations. The droughts of the 1980s and the still-ongoing reduction in rains, together with the growing population, are contributing to competition for resources. Climate change has pushed the herders to move deeper into the south to find water and grazing areas (Almy Al-Afia 2006, Oxfam 2013). A consequence of this is a growing pressure on natural resources. Thus, continued group-identity politics, the growing importance of Islamic roots and increasing competition between local civil society associations are all happening at the same time. These issues are all related to each other and are leading to a reengagement of the past and the use of memories of the days of slave raids as a tool. The aftermaths of slavery are clearly a complex matter here; indeed, they contain dynamics much more complex than the contrast between descendants of slaveholders and slaves described in the south of the country (Lemarchand 1986, Azevedo 1998).

3.2 Department of Guéra and Jujube

Before I explain the strategies I used to explore this topic, it is necessary to give some more detailed information about the fieldwork area, the department of Guéra. This department covers the area around the regional capital, Mongo. According to the last census prepared by Oxfam (2013), there were in total 129,581 people living in the department. The census divides the inhabitants into the 6 official cantons: Dadjo (61,674), Migami (47,665), Bidio (14,062), Oyo (10,362), Yalnas (7,800) and Koffa (3,500). It records the inhabitants of every canton and the percentages of the different groups present, although data of this kind are controversial as the populations of many villages are divided, being allocated to different canton chiefs, and it is not clear how Oxfam's workers dealt with these cases in their census.

Migami and Bidio cantons occupy either side of the *Reine du Guéra* mountain chain, while the canton of Jujube is located in the middle of it. Koffa is in the southern part, Dadjo occupies all the plains around Mongo, and Oyo is a small district of Mongo; however, the people recognised under the authority of the Oyo chief are mainly nomadic Arabs who move all over the department. According to this census, in Guéra department there are 267 villages and 36 *féricks* (nomadic camps). Yet these data are always difficult to interpret. Some villages are divided between different communities, with two or more village chiefs under the authority of two or more canton chiefs; therefore, they may be considered as different villages, even though there is no separation between them. Sometimes groups settle permanently or temporarily on uninhabited plots of land, and even though they are effectively small villages, they are not officially recognised at the institutional level. The ferricks are always moving and are under the authority of a canton chief from the Guéra department even if they temporarily settle elsewhere. Finally, as the cantons have no set borders, there may be households or small groups of people that live in a village under the authority of a certain canton chief, yet declare themselves to be members of another canton, as personal affiliation is considered stronger than territoriality.

In the department there are two main groups of languages: Chadic languages (Dadjo, Kenga) and Nilo-Sahelian languages (Migami, Bidio, Dangaleat), while Chadian Arabic is used as a lingua franca and is the mother tongue of nomadic Arabs and Yalnas (Seli 2013). As the regional capital is in Guéra, this department's population comprises all the main ethnic groups of the region and there are also important communities of ethnic groups mainly living in the neighbouring department of Abtouyour (60 km east from Mongo), the Kenga and the Dangaleat. These ethnic labels are quite important in local political life: they are used by local

civil society organisations in their reports, as well as in the census carried out in 2013, and are also widely used in daily conversations.

Most of the villages in the department – including Jujube – are located in the valley around the *Reine du Guéra* mountain range, where the lands of Bidio, Migami and Yalnas overlap. The villages have often been moved, first during colonial times and then during rebellions, but they generally tend to be built not far away from the mountain range, as the land is more fertile in the valley. The mountains have also a role in ethnic identities. The Bidio and Migami define themselves as original native groups. According to their legend, their ancestors grew from the mountains and kept an ancestral link with the spirit inhabiting the mountains. Hence, these groups have "land chiefs" and base the legitimacy of their control of the land on the worship of the *margay*. The Migami claim the land located to the north of the *Reine du Guéra* mountain range, while the Bidio are considered the owners of the land to the south of this range. There are various valleys in the middle of the range where the ancestral ownership of the land is debated, as both Migami and Bidio groups used to live there. Yalnas cannot claim this kind of link. However, the group inhabiting Jujube has an old alliance with a Migami village – Djogo – that justifies their presence there and their ownership of the land. Land ownership in pre-colonial Guéra was not formally structured and is, nowadays, claimed through different and sometimes contradictory sources of legitimisation. This is one of the main issues for them, about which all the groups involved – Yalnas, Migami and Bidio – have different narratives.

The Dadjo are the biggest group. They are a part of a larger ethnic group inhabiting various areas between Sudan and Chad, and they migrated to Guéra during the 18th and 19th centuries as already-organised groups of warriors (Chapelle 1980). They claim they were able to occupy areas inhabited by other groups and raid them to steal food, crops and cattle, rather than farming the land or gathering fruits. The Dadjo's presence is sometime considered intrusive, especially by the people of Migami and Dangaleat villages. The idea of the Dadjo showing no respect for local institutions and stealing land is nowadays widespread, while land conflicts between them and other local groups are likely. These stereotypes are similar to those that emerge against Yalnas when there are tensions. Contrarily to the Yalnas, whose migration memories, according to Fathi, a local historian whose mother is Yalnas and father Dadjo, are based on "a legend", the Dadjo claim to have "a well-known story and many other villages between the Guéra and Sudan" (Fathi, Mongo, September 2014). The Dadjo base their claim on the fact that the plains were uninhabited when they arrived, as the local groups were living in the mountains. There is a clear dialectic between, on one side, groups claiming an ancestral

link with the mountains like Migami and Bidio; and the Dadjo, warriors that conquered those areas, rejecting the logic of the ancestral link. Since colonisation, the Dadjo have had the same lifestyle as their neighbours, basing their livelihood on cereal and peanut farming (Lebeuf 1959). It is difficult to know if their claims to have been warriors for the whole pre-colonial period are overemphasised nowadays; moreover, the other local groups in Guéra also present themselves as former hunters, whose targets were often other men.

I could not find any mention of the label *Yalnas* before colonial times. The first author mentioning this group is the colonial administrator George Bruel (1918). He indicates that in the recently built Fort Lamy one of the five quarters is the "Yalnas quarter", occupied by escaped or liberated slaves (1918, p. 213). Nowadays, there is no longer any trace of this quarter in N'Djamena, while there is a Yalnas quarter in the city of Sahr (the third largest Chadian city by population, in the south of the country), even though my sources from that town – Christian southerners – had no idea about the meaning of the name or the origin of it. Bruel also explains the history of a Yalnas group in southern Guéra, subsequently recognised as a canton. This history was derived from that written by Lieutenant Derendinger (1912) – who oversaw the first administrative arrangement of the area – and clarifies the origin of that specific group. A significant number of escaped slaves were able to unite in the mountains, and they negotiated for the neighbouring Arab groups – the Dekakhire – to pay them a tax (locally called *dime*) in order to be recognised as a free group. While usually the *dime* is a regular tribute, in this case it was presented as a one-off sum, liberating the group from any future request. Interestingly, in the agreement the Yalnas undertook not to accept any new escaped slaves into their group, confirming the position of giving back escaped slaves described by Vincent (1975). Before the agreement, various Yalnas from other mountains were allowed to join this group, supporting the idea that scattered groups of Yalnas were diffused all over the area, as stated in Duault (1938).

When the colonial government divided the territory, three cantons were given to three groups labelled as Yalnas: one with Jujube as capital (in the Guéra department, around 25km south east of Mongo); one with Lampo as capital (in Bahr Signaka department, around 150km south west of Mongo); the third with Lucepa as capital (in the Salamat region, around 100km south east of Mongo). People in both Lampo and Jujube changed the names of the cantons. In both cases, they renamed them after the ethnic group related to the canton chief's family: a group of Arabs in Lampo, a Wadai family (Abbassid) in Jujube. In Lucepa, they told me it would be impossible for them to change the name. It emerged that there was a variety of groups under

the authority of the Lucepa canton chief and the label *Yalna*s is the only one able to keep them united (Yalnas canton chief, Lucepa, December 2014).

According to the Oxfam (2013) report, there are 7,800 people living under the authority of the Jujube canton chief. This census counts 11 villages and 2 ferricks as part of the canton. There are some ambiguities about how many of these villages can be considered under the authority of the canton chief in Jujube. Some villages have mixed communities with two or more village chiefs in the same village, representing the different communities under the authority of different canton chiefs. Jujube is on the slopes of the mountains separating two big valleys: on one side, there are Nevio and Zola (Bidio villages), around 8 – 10 km away; on the other, there are Moro, Djogo and other Migami towns, a bit further (20 – 25 km). Around Jujube there are three villages very close by: Kuju, Tamar

Figure 3: The Reine du Guéra mountain chain and the main villages around it

and Cocoa, all less than 2 kilometres from Jujube. Jujube, Kuju and Tamar consider themselves to be the first villages of the Yalnas canton. According to their legend, the original settlers arrived here in 1818. They first settled in Jujube and shortly after created Tamar and Kuju. Though Tamar and Cocoa are nowadays considered villages, in Jujube they told me that they used to be quarters of Jujube before colonisation. When the French divided the territory in 1923, many people left Jujube, and Tamar and Cocoa became independent villages, inhabited by both Bidio and Yalnas. In contrast, in Kuju there are only people from the Jujube family. Jujube, Kuju and Tamar are under the Jujube chief's authority, while Cocoa and Zola are under the Bidio canton chief's authority (whose main village is Nevio).

In the Jujube area, Yalnas and Bidio live together in Cocoa and Tamar, while Zola, Kuju and Jujube have just one main group inside it. Intermarriages between the inhabitants of these villages are frequent. The families of the two canton chiefs have also intermarried, according to Jujube Jujube canton chief Assam "to show that we are friends and we don't want any issues" (Assam, Jujube, October 2014). In fact, conflicts spread easily in this area. In the 1970s,

there were reciprocal allegations sent between the Yalnas and Bidio canton chiefs, during the rebellions, while since the 1980s other issues have emerged. Between Zola and Kuju there is a long-lasting issue regarding land ownership, recently revived by the construction of a mobile phone antenna. In Tamar, the two communities inhabiting the same village – Yalnas and Bidio –are experiencing tensions over the use of the local water well and the cereal bank. Similar tensions emerged also when I moved my conversation from contemporary issues to the narratives of the past. Since the first meetings with the elders in Jujube I was told that "we and the Bidio don't really understand each other" and that I should not listen to their stories as they were just trying to "denigrate us" (Assam, Jujube, October 2014). Discourses about these issues were often permeated by references to slavery. Generally, the Bidio consider Jujube as a sort of former slave camp, where slaves were kept before being sent to Wadai, while in Jujube they claim to be descendants of the slave raiders attacking Bidio villages, attributing to this their bad relationship with them. The memory of slave raids is thus something that both groups re-elaborate according to the changing political situation. Their interpretations seem, in this moment, irreconcilable, but they offered me a key to exploring when and how legacies of slavery matter. I explain this in the following section.

4. Field access and research strategy

I collected most of the information during my fieldwork, even though my personal knowledge of the context is longer. In fact, prior to the start of this research project I had spent 14 months in Chad, mainly in the southern part of the country, working for an Italian NGO, *ACRA*. For my PhD research, I spent nine months in Guéra in total, from August 2014 to June 2015. I had visited N'Djamena for two weeks in January 2014 to get in touch with my previous contacts and to organize the fieldwork activities. The local *Centre de Research en Anthropologie et Science Humaine* (CRASH) provided crucial support both administratively and in term of advising me for the research. I also spent one week, in July 2014, at the *Archives nationales d'outre-mer* in Aix-en-Provence, looking for archival sources about the Yalnas. During my fieldwork, I spent four months (August to December 2014) in the village of Jujube, inhabiting in a compound offered by the canton chief; and five months (January to June 2015) in Mongo, renting a room in a small house managed by the local Catholic church. I visited 27 different villages, as well as the main cities of the area (Mongo, Ati and Abeche), and met with around 60 different elders[9], with whom I had collective conversations about the past, aided by my research assistant, Annour. I also had formal interviews and informal conversations with

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[9] Sometimes I had individual interviews with key informants, at other times I had open conversations with groups of elders of the village, who opted to talk collectively with me about their history.

members of the local association in Mongo, which helped me to complement the information collected in the villages. After the fieldwork, I visited twice Chad, in February and June 2016, for consultancies work with an NGO. I did not undertake research activities on these occasions, but kept in touch with my sources and was updated about Guéra issues

My overall strategy has been to triangulate written documents with the oral testimonies collected in the villages and in Mongo. Since the seminal article of Klein (1989), scholars on African slavery tried to reduce the gap between written sources – mainly reporting the voices of the ruling groups – and oral sources, where alternative versions may emerge (Bellagamba et al. 2013a). In the previous section, I have described the main historical sources on Guéra and the Yalnas, exploring the construction of local ethnonyms through the point of view of precolonial explorers and colonial administrators. The other and more important source of information for this research has been local stories. While written sources about the Guéra region are rare, there is a vast oral repertoire that ensure memories transmission across generations (Vincent 1975, Vandame, 1973, and Fuchs 1997).

Even though the older people I met were children during the early colonial period and had no direct memories of what was happening in the era that preceded it, talking with them about these topics can open a path to what Bellagamba defines as "environments of memory". With this term, she refers to "the social networks and contexts of interaction in which people learn about the past together with the genres, conventions and values that shape the ways they talk about the past" (2016, p. 176). Local people remember the stories about the precolonial period, as they have an important role in contemporary Guéra politics: in a context lacking a single central power, these narratives help in establishing political hierarchies. It was important to me to explore the variety of ways these narratives are reproduced and used, and to find a gateway to explore the contradiction between the general narrative of the slaves "alien to Guéra" and the existence of a group like the Yalnas, whose identity embodies a past as slaves. To overcome these challenges, I initially explored an important tool in post slavery studies: the collection of life-stories.

Scholars (Cortazzi 2001, Elliot 2005) considers life story collection an effective tool in empowering interviewees, giving them the opportunity to express their point of view about events of the past that may have been ignored or misinterpreted in the official history. My original plan was to collect life stories from the Yalnas group and triangulate their accounts with other information I could find on the ground. Different scholars have already applied this method to slave descendants. Mirza and Strobel (1989) and McDougall (1998) collected life

stories through multiple interviews and triangulated them with historical data. Their collections of narratives were not focused on grasping an objective history, but rather on opening a critical discussion of relevant topics. Their aim was to achieve shared and meaningful conclusions, exploring the topic of slavery from a point of view – that of former slaves – underrepresented in the academic debate.

The conditions for effective research on slavery through life stories are multiple: there should be people recognising that they have passed through this condition and willing to share it and discuss it with a foreigner. In many post-slavery contexts, this was not the case. Klein (1989, p. 207) noted that there are stories that "people would rather forget", especially when related to slavery. Sandra Greene (2003) and Marie Rodet (2010, 2013) both argue that stories about slavery survived over generations, but were "whispers" inside a closed group rather than something publicly shared. Moreover, memories are embodied in practices and social relationships that were transmitted between generations without a public debate about it. Rossi, building on Michael Taussig (1999), defines "public secret" as knowledge that is "widely shared within society, but hardly articulated except for comments, gossip, and fragments of recollections and oral traditions that might spontaneously surface in daily conversations" (Rossi 2009, p. 10). Hence, even in the absence of active subjects that suffered from a harsh practice like slavery and are ready to share their personal stories, there are various social signs that can be interpreted.

Some scholars have already explored the post-slavery context, applying similar strategies. Olivier de Sardan's (1976) book collects stories of slave descendants of the Touareg in Niger, who report their oral versions of that period as they heard it from their parents. Rosalind Shaw (2002) focuses on the hidden legacies left by enslavement practices in Sierra Leone. Interpreting various rituals through the lens of local groups, she interprets the connections between dances and rituals and the symbols of traumas left by the history of raids and kidnapping in the area. David Graeber (2007), in his research on the legacy of slavery in Madagascar, emphasises the strong relation between historical narratives and contemporary politics. He focuses on the descent-based divisions, trying to retrace the origin of them through local narratives, building a link between past and present. In all cases, the analysis was done by focusing on contemporary issues, such as political divisions among some groups or particularities of rituals in a community; by exploring the interpretation of this present case, the authors could understand more about a past that had been avoided in official local records. Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein's (2013a, 2016) recent collections of publications also

use a combination of these sources, considered a good strategy to grasp an alternative voice to the one recorded in the archives.

I tried to apply a combination of these methods in the Yalnas canton of Jujube. It was impossible to retrace personal stories of slavery: nobody, in Guéra, would admit to having been a slave because of the rhetoric of slaves being "something alien" that I described above. The general assumption about the "disappearing" of slaves from Guéra was sometimes challenged by individuals talking with me. However, nobody in recorded interviews or public discussions has ever presented this argument. Moreover, it was also difficult to find specific practices marginalising the Yalnas in the social arena. I explained how their lack of a local language and *margay* differentiates them from most other local groups. Nevertheless, as nowadays their mother tongue is the major lingua franca for the whole country, and because most local people are practising Muslims, these are not proper markers of previous enslavement.

During my fieldwork, I gradually elaborated a strategy to deal with these issues. I chose Jujube as the main site of my research mainly because I found good gatekeepers who introduced me to the area. This support in my initial entry was important, as my sources in N'Djamena told me that it was not easy for a foreigner to be introduced into the villages of people defined as Yalnas. During my first days in Mongo, in September 2014, I had the chance, through Fathi, to meet with Assam Adam, the canton chief of Jujube. Assam's approach to narratives of slavery was no different from that of most Guéra groups: he was not only denying the previous enslavement of its people, but also claiming that all the captured people in Guéra had either left or gone back and been re-assimilated into their ancestral groups. However, he seemed very willing to tackle historical topics. Almost at the beginning of our conversation, he told me "in Guéra nobody knows our real history, so they denigrate us, but if you are interested in it, I will help you to hear it" (Assam, Jujube, September 2014). I thought it would be a good chance for me to gain insights into the community and its members. Assam invited me to stay in Jujube and proposed that I meet the elders of the various families of the canton, to ask them the story of their group. The canton Yalnas of Jujube had recently changed its name, based on an old manuscript the canton chief had found among the old objects of the ancestors, which purportedly provided evidence of the group's migration from the east. This genealogy proves that they are not Yalnas, but a proper Muslim group. Hence, questions of their origins and current identities were very much in their minds at the time.

Assam introduced me to two of his younger brothers: Ibeth and Annour. He asked them to take me around all the villages under his authority, as well as to other villages with significant

communities of Yalnas, so that I could collect the stories from the elders of these villages and record them. At the end of these visits, I discussed a summary of my findings with them and left a written copy of my key notes. I arranged 22 different meetings with groups of Yalnas elders in different villages, who presented me with different – but similar – versions of the story of the group. During such meetings, there were always people able to talk directly with me in French while others communicated with me through a translator, usually Annour or Ibeth. There were sometimes conversations among the elders before they gave me an answer, but never obvious, public divergences of opinion between them.

This was the only way I could access this information, as when I tried to talk about this topic with other people in more informal situations, I always found resistance, because this was a "topic for elders". This is a common situation among most of the Hadjiray groups. A local scholar, Nossor Doungous, published a book about Migami history, but had to withdraw it because most of the Migami did not agree and protested. Therefore, local stories are transmitted mainly through the oral exchange between the elders of the villages and their heirs, giving these stories a crucial importance. People share these stories inside villages, but not between villages, as most of the versions diverge between them.

I have already written that during my first meeting with the elders of Jujube, they advised me not to believe what Bidio people might tell me about Jujube; however it was crucial for me to get both points of view and triangulate them. Therefore, I divided the research into two phases. Between September and December 2014, I stayed in Jujube and moved between the different Yalnas communities with Annour or Ibeth. This was the moment when I collected most of the Yalnas' stories. After January 2015, I moved to Mongo, the regional capital. I initially thought to settle in a Bidio village and try to have the same level of intimacy there that I had had previously. However, while planning this, I realised that most of my potential gatekeepers among the Bidio knew me as "a man of Jujube", and I was afraid this could have affected my permanence there. Therefore, I opted to stay in Mongo and get information from local elite leaders in the regional capital. They helped me to get a bigger picture of the social issues in Guéra, and thanks to them, I got various insights into development issues, where stereotypes about the different ethnic groups emerged. Moreover, through these informants, I got in touch with some youths of different ethnic groups living in the city, who also gave different interpretations of the issues I had explored in Jujube. Most of these youths are not fully aware of the old roots of local conflicts and, as they grew up in a mixed social

environment[10], their approach to these issues is freer. Mongo proved to be a good observation point for a broader approach to the issues between the Yalnas and the Bidio.

From Mongo, I also got the opportunity to access some Bidio villages and collect their points of view on specific stories. One of my young friends, Amat, who works for a local NGO, is from a Bidio village and his family has relations in Jujube. He was an effective entry point into this delicate area and, between April and May 2015, we travelled to five Bidio villages around Jujube organising the same kinds of collective interviews as I had done among the Yalnas. Among the Bidio, paralleling precisely what the Yalnas elders told me, one of the first pieces of advice they gave me was not to trust the Yalnas, and especially the stories they spread about their real origins. It was thus immediately clear that narratives of the past are important for both groups, as they justify their own versions about ownership of land and, therefore, the rights of their local authorities to the area. Each group had its own version of the past, divergent from that of the neighbours. At the beginning, I saw this as an obstacle for my research, but slowly I realised the potential of using such differences as a starting point, and to consider those dividing memories as a contemporary political tool used in current conflicts. Even though it was impossible to get a common version of the past, these narratives gave me a clue to explain the present. Narratives about slavery, ethnic identities and contemporary struggles for resources were all interrelated. Therefore, collecting the "official versions" of the narratives of the different villages, comparing them with the few written sources available, the contemporary issues I have directly experienced and a few biographies I found relevant, seemed to me the best method for understanding the various issues going on.

The conflictive situations between the Bidio and Yalnas constituted the main key to accessing legacies of slavery. Through this conflict, the narrative of the past of Jujube as a slave camp and of the Bidio as targets of raids is broken and the narrative of the slaves as "aliens to Guéra" challenged. I found it was the most effective key to tackle a locally sensitive topic, and grasp meaningful insights about its role in Guéra political life. However, this method also prevented me from fully exploring other sources of information. First, I mainly collected the points of view of recognized elders in the villages. The broader network I could develop in Mongo, where I had daily contacts with youths and girls who were more open to discussions than in the villages, somehow balanced the different voices in the thesis. However, in rural areas I could not fully explore points of views other than those of the elders. Therefore, I was

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[10] There are only two high schools in the department and only the one in Mongo has classes for all ages, so most of the youths from rural villages who continue their studies meet here.

not able to verify if and how youths or other marginal subjects produced alternative, critical narratives in the villages. I saw how the youths who grew up in Mongo are quite sceptical about the strict interpretation of the past in the story of the elders, and worried about the conflicts that it could trigger, but I could not assess in depth if similar criticisms existed also inside the villages. Moreover, I realized that among educated people there are also deep-rooted stereotypes about other ethnic groups. Because of my limited knowledge of Chadian Arabic, I probably missed some of those basic exchanges facilitating the reproduction of these negative stereotypes. Finally, even though I had frequent conversation with women in both Jujube and Mongo, I have never engaged in meaningful debate about the peculiarity of gender in relation to slavery. The lower status of female in the area under study was clear in most aspects of daily life, but considering their resistance in talking about the past, I concluded that exploring specific gender issues in relation to slavery would have not been a heuristically fertile line of research. These are the reasons why my findings mainly refer to the capacity of Yalnas to be integrated "as a group" within the Hadjiray, and the role of their "elite" (the elders of the villages and some successful member of the urban diaspora) in producing an officially accepted version of their past, alternative to those proposed by their neighbours.

4.1 A note on the term *Yalnas*

Before closing this methods section, it is important to clarify a point. Throughout the thesis, I use the term *Yalnas* to identify the people under the authority of the former Yalnas canton chief of Jujube. I found the use of this label one of the most problematic aspects of the research. All the inhabitants of the three Yalnas cantons refuse to define themselves as Yalnas. However, their neighbours dispute or simply ignore the alternative names they use. They know them as *Yalnas* and are reluctant to accept other ethnonyms. During the fieldwork, I frequently moved between contexts where, had I not used the word *Yalnas*, my interlocutors would have not understood to whom I was referring, and contexts where local people would be irritated by the use of a label they wish to eliminate. While I could manage to respect and interact with both points of view, I had to make a choice about the name to use in the thesis. I had to respect the sensitivity of the persons involved while also giving clarity for readers and anonymising my sources. Considering the different interpretations of the past and the potential tensions among the groups involved in the research, my priority has been anonymity. Therefore, I have changed the names of all the villages in the research, apart for the names of regional capitals and the cantons (which also indicate the names of ethnic groups). I use the label *Yalnas*, which was used both formally and informally for three cantons (two in Guéra and one in Salamat region) that were predominantly inhabited by Yalnas people, for the Jujube

canton, as it prevents recognition of the specific canton to which I am referring. By using this label, I do not imply that a group called *Yalnas* exists in contemporary Guéra or that I embrace one or another of the interpretations related to their past. On the contrary, I aim to show that all of these labels are tools that change over time, and I am using them in a similar manner as analytical keys, without assuming there are definitive, fixed meanings behind them.

5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the context of the research, explaining why it is relevant for the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two, and focusing on the strategies used for the collection of meaningful data. I summarised the main features of the trans-Saharan slave trade, which harshly shaped the social and political structures of political institutions all along Sahel. I then described the process of abolition, which left a variety of social legacies. I subsequently explored these dynamics from the point of view of Guéra, a mountainous region on the southern borders of the Sahel, which was considered as a slave-reservoir for several centuries before colonisation. I described the ethnic and social structure of the region and explained my efforts to access the area and grapple with this topic.

The variety of dynamics related to the trans-Saharan slave trade demonstrates the importance of having studies focused on its diverse contexts. Therefore, a study of a slave reservoir can contribute to enriching the debate, grasping dynamics not yet fully explored by post-slavery studies. The fact that local people do not consider legacies of slavery as relevant is common all over Chad and does not mean that slavery matters less than in contexts where it has been tackled locally. On the contrary, the difficulties in accessing the topic and the contradictions related to it show that, despite an apparent integration of Yalnas as Hadjiray in the Guéra region, their status matters and, therefore, the legacies of slavery themselves matters. The ambiguities related to the history and status of the Yalnas are emerging in the context of increasing competition in the area for land and other natural resources, together with growing discourses over autochthony similar to those described by Geschiere (2009). I will begin the ethnographic section of the thesis by focusing on the apparent integration of Yalnas as a group of the Hadjiray, before progressively moving towards the issues of conflict, where legacies of slavery matter more. The next chapter focuses on kinship and on the processes that enabled the Yalnas some sort of integration in the Guéra region.

Chapter 4

Genealogies and alliances among the Hadjiray of Guéra

1. Introduction

"We are like an island in the sea: there is the canton Bidio, canton Kafla, Migami; and then, like an island, us: Jujube, Kuju, Loba, Karda. (..) We all have Arab grandmothers and mothers. Apart from Mahmoun and his marriage to Dadda, all our mothers are Arabs; therefore, we are like an island in the sea, here in Guéra. But now our origin is not so relevant: we are Hadjiray, we are from Guéra. Mahmoun arrived here seven generation ago; we have all been born in Guéra for seven generations, so we are Hadjiray. I am Hadjiray, though I don't speak a dialect, I speak Arabic. Unfortunately, our Hadjiray friends don't like this, but we are all the same. Who can remember five generations born in Guéra? Nobody! But we can count many more than five, though our language is Arabic" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014).

In this way, Sheba – an uncle of the current Jujube canton chief –explained to me the origin of Jujube and its inhabitants. In his adventurous life, Sheba worked in France and fought for the rebellion against Hissene Habré. Now in his 60s and working in Jujube as a community teacher, he shares with the other inhabitants of the village his knowledge of the French language and his passion for local history. He firmly believes in the foundation myth of Jujube and narrated it to me in abundant detail. I find his metaphor of Jujube as "island in the sea" very effective; it could also be applied to other Yalnas villages scattered across various Hadjiray cantons. Despite this idea of the island, Sheba claims his identity as Hadjiray, emphasising the fact that everyone migrated to Guéra at a certain point, and stressing the extreme blending among the various Hadjiray groups. "My father is Yalnas and my mother Bidio. We are a heterogeneous blend here. Among the Yalnas there are people with Arabic, Hausa, Migami, Bidio, Kenga, Sara, and Bornou mothers. There are many kinds of mothers – we are so very mixed" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014) he told me to stress this point. Sheba was one of the first people I met in Jujube. We talked often as he was very happy to share his knowledge and very fluent in French. He drew a clear distinction between the indigenous group of Guéra, who all have a local dialect and a spiritual link to the mountains, and the people of Jujube, who lack both these elements. However, he emphasised the knowledge they have about their genealogy: they can trace their origins and pinpoint the exact moment they came to Guéra, unlike other groups. He also added that they have been in Guéra for seven generations and their

forefathers have always been able to marry other people, to the point that it is nowadays pointless to distinguish them from other Hadjiray.

This point seemed to me very interesting, as it somehow contradicted the frequent interdiction for people coming from former slave groups to marry free-born people in the Sahel. Since the formal abolition of slavery, the descendants of previously enslaved people faced strong resistance when they sought to build social ties with the descendants of free-born people. The more recent work on slave descendants and the forms of marginalisation they suffered in contemporary Sahel confirms this point, showing how generally they cannot marry outside of their group. Such a point has become progressively more analysed by post slavery approaches. In the introduction of *Reconfiguring Slavery,* Rossi (2009) argues that it is no longer possible to assume slave descendants are groups without kin or memory, mentioning the works of Botte (1994) in northern Senegal, and that of De Bruijn and Pelckmans (2005) in northern Mali, where groups labelled as slave descendants created their own alternative narratives, renegotiating their social identities toward their former masters.

The fact that Yalnas can intermarry with all the other Hadjiray would initially suggest that legacies of slavery are not relevant in a former slaver reservoir and that Yalnas survived as an ethnonym only as a sort of vestige of the past. Hadjiray give importance to the choice of partners, as shown by the discrimination against the blacksmiths group, obliged to strict endogamy. Therefore, Yalnas' intermarriage with other Hadjiray is not related to a general lack of attention to kinship relations in Guéra, but to the strategies implemented by the group to be integrated as Hadjiray in the region. This chapter focuses on the integration of the Yalnas among the other Hadjiray, arguing that this has been possible thanks to the peculiarities of the region and of the idioms used to describe kinship. However, I will show that their integration is based on different interpretations of the past from those of their closest neighbours, the Bidio. Therefore, Yalnas' status as a local social group is still likely to be criticised in certain circumstances. The chapter presents the main findings related to kinship, emphasising the capacity of Yalnas to be recognised and integrated as a local group, despite the historical association between their name and slavery; and the contradictions lying behind Yalnas' acceptance, which can lead to conflicts in some specific situations, especially when land ownership and political representation are involved. It starts with a brief summary of the main theoretical tools used to analyse the Yalnas' position, then analyses the trajectory of the Yalnas in Guéra and the main local social categories used for their integration, as well as the limit of this integration, which emerges in their complex relationship with their neighbours, the Bidio.

2. "Gens de la chefferie" and "gens de la terre"

In Guéra, different sources of political legitimacy coexist among the various local groups. In Chapter Three, I presented Jujube and its inhabitants, as well as the ambiguous label *Yalnas*. I emphasised the peculiar position of the people defined as Yalnas, whose social position is between self-defining local groups – like the Migami or the Bidio – and groups of more recent migrants – like the Dadjo or the Arabs. This situation is quite common in what Kopytoff (1987) defines as a "frontier area", where relationships between local groups articulate through the discourse on "firstcomers" and "newcomers". These discourses are flexible and may related to different narratives of the past, as well as principles, such as seniority or divisions between religious and political power (1987, pp. 57 – 59). The processes of "ethnogenesis" started by colonials' government in their effort to create homogenous administrative units have been particularly arbitrary and unstable in these kinds of context, as shown by anthropologists during the 1980s (Amselle, M'bokolo 1985, Amselle 1998). In the case of Guéra, colonial creation of ethnic categories was combined with local hierarchies and cleavages based on precolonial slave raids, somehow similar to the processes described by Hall (2011) in Mali.

Scholars of Guéra worked mainly during the 1960s and 1970s, attracted by the survival of animist worship of mountain spirits. Their political analysis focused mainly on the differences between the clans and the self-defined local groups within which they exist. Pouillon (1964, 1977), Vandame (1975) and Vincent (1975) explored the clans' distinction within the Kenga (Bitkine department) and the Migami (Guéra department) and acknowledging a main divide between what they define as *gens de la terre* and the *gens de la chefferie*. The *gens de la terre* are those they considered to be the pure indigenous people, while the *gens de la chefferie* were invaders that, at a certain point, took over political power from the indigenous people, whilst leaving them religious authority, through the worship of the *margay*. Nowadays, these divisions are present inside most of the local ethnic groups in Guéra department, even though the local political authorities are in most cases descendants of the *gens de la chefferie*.

It is worth emphasising that the same word, Hadjiray, nowadays considered as synonymous with "Guéra inhabitants", is a relatively recent ethnonym created by Arabic speakers (as it comes from the Arabic word *Hadjar*, used for "rock" or "mountain") to indicate a scattered variety of people speaking different languages, but united by the fact of inhabiting the mountains. This word is now universally accepted in Guéra and outside, having progressively replaced the label Kirdi. The conversion of almost all the inhabitants of the mountains from their previous worship of *margay* to either Islam or Christianity erased the label of pagans,

which in precolonial times automatically indicated potentially enslavable people, and developed a new identity, nowadays accepted even by an Arabic-speaking group such as the Yalnas. The transition from the label of Kirdi to that of Hadjiray and the progressive emergence of specific ethnic identities amongst the Hadjiray are all related to the stability brought by the French and the related occupation of Guéra plain. The various narratives deployed by local groups to support their political claims have emerged progressively since colonisation. However, under the broader label of Hadjiray I found groups with a longstanding tradition of nomadism, people who claim to have migrated and conquered part of their land under the leadership of important ancestors, groups that migrated and united with fully indigenous people, respecting their traditions and, finally, groups whose foundational myth is related to a link with mountain spirits.

The peculiar position of Guéra, on the border between the Sahel and the savannas, as well as its mountain, may have contributed to the variety of local ethnic people, although similar kinds of division are reported in other parts of the country (Chapelle 1980, Zeltner 1997). In my fieldwork, I noticed that all nomadic herders base their identity on genealogies – an element explored by Zeltner in his analysis of Chadian Arab groups (1997, pp. 34 – 51) - and have no land chief or *margay*. They use the Arabic word *kachimbeyt* to define their kin groups and usually a *kachimbeyt* takes its name from the ancestor that founded that specific group. Nowadays this word is used by most of the Hadjiray, as Chadian Arabic is the lingua franca for all local groups. However, both my Yalnas and Arab sources stressed the fact that the word comes from the Muslim tradition and could be properly applied only to the groups who arrived in Guéra already as Muslims. In the case of Yalnas, they may also call themselves *ouled*[11] *Mahmoun*, "sons of Mahmoun", from the name of the Jujube founder, Mahmoun. This was explained to me by a well-educated member of a Yalnas family in Abeche, but I never heard any Yalnas in Guéra using this label, even though it is quite common among Arab clans to define themselves as an *ouled* of an important ancestor.

These categories are all useful to analyse the rich ethnic landscape of the Guéra region, but none of them is fully appropriate for the area. In fact, not all Hadjiray farmers have an ancestral link with the mountains. The groups who were already Muslim when they settled in Guéra tend to emphasise more their migration from the east rather than an ancestral link with the land. Migration is important also in groups who claim to be local, as all the *gens de la chefferie* came

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[11] *Ouled* and *Yal* are both plurals of the word *wal*, sons. *Ouled* is an older form, used by the nomads to indicate their *kachimbeyt*, while *yal* is used in current language and was used to create the ethnonym Yalnas.

from somewhere else, before settling together with the *gens de la terre*. Power and ownership over the land are related to the coexistence of these two elements: the political power of the *gens de la chefferie* is legitimate because it respects the religious power of the *gens de la terre* (Vandame 1975). Thanks to this union, the *gens de la chefferie* also present themselves as the "first-comers", as this narrative is not strictly the prerogative of the pure indigenous people, but applies to whoever accepted and recognised the spiritual supremacy of the *margay* and of the *gens de la terre* in charge of its protection.

Even in the case of a relatively recent village like Jujube, its alliance with a previously settled group is a crucial element: they present themselves as the owners of their land, like their neighbours, the Bidio and Migami. They relate their rights on the land to an *ahalié* ("alliance" in local Arabic) with a Migami group living on the other side of the valley, the people of Djogo. At the same time, they emphasise their own genealogy, which relates them to the Wadai royal family, clearly a non-native Guéra group. These two different dimensions coexist in Yalnas narratives, just as the presentation of their villages as an "island in the sea" coexists with the claim that "nowadays we are all Hadjiray". A focus on the malleability – to use Carola Lentz's (2013) term – of these narratives can help in the comprehension of this apparent contradiction.

Exploring the relationships between belonging and ownership in the Volta area – between northern Benin and Ghana – Lentz emphasises the importance of the "first-comer narrative" that allow "for significant changes in the nature and scope of claims to land ownership while upholding the basic principle of an order based on precedence" (2013, p. 34). This narrative was fit to develop local ideas about ownership in contexts marked by a prolonged and intense mobility and the absence of a strong central power. In such contexts, "property orders had to be negotiated, and conflicts solved, at the local level" (2013, p. 44); a flexible narrative made this kind of local negotiation easier to achieve. There are some similarities between the Volta area and the Guéra region: these areas have never been under the control of a central state and remained marginal even in the context of the colonial state; moreover, they both underwent a transition from an economy primarily based on hunting and gathering – with small and temporary agricultural exploitation of plots of land – to a mainly subsistence-oriented farming society. The main difference is that while in the areas studied by Lentz the local population was not living under the permanent threat of military raids, the people of Guéra had to deal with this issue for centuries. Moreover, invading Muslim groups mainly based their authority on another principle – that of genealogy – which also allows some degree

of malleability, but is based on different assumptions (Hall 2011). In contemporary Guéra these different principles meld and coexist. The pacification brought by the colonial government obliged all local ethnic groups to settle together in the plains and the different groups interacted through these contradictory narratives.

The main argument of this chapter is that this peculiar context enabled the integration of the Yalnas as an ethnic local group, despite their ambiguous origins. In Chapter Three, I explained how the history of the Yalnas is entrenched with that of slavery, and most Hadjiray consider them as an assortment of former slaves. The condition of former slaves would thwart their integration through either a link with land or a belonging to kin. Patterson (1982) showed how a fundamental aspect of slaves is their "natal alienation" from any previous kin group. Even in the case of escaped or liberated slaves, their subsequent integration into local societies is usually as second-class citizens, which cannot totally reverse this alienation related to the enslavement. Meillassoux (1991) states that a crucial element of the slaves in the Sahel was their lack of possibility to socially reproduce, as they were excluded from any kind of social interactions with the groups of free men. In Miers and Kopytoff (1977)'s more nuanced account of African slavery, the category of slavery still appears as the opposite of kin, even though in the "continuum" of social rights they describe as facilitating a future absorption of former slaves in slaveholders ' societies.

Since colonization, recognition as an ethnic group was an important strategy to secure rights, "particularly attractive and useful to 'displaced', 'uprooted' subjects", quoting Lentz (2000, p. 131). The "ethnicization" of former slave groups such as Haratin, Bella or Gando, as well as the effort of the diasporic communities of former slaves to be recognized or integrated in other groups in northern Mali (Rodet 2015) confirms how groups of slave descendants often deployed this strategy, even though it has generally been ineffective in getting rid of stigma and limitations of rights. Ethnic groups indicated by a name showing a servile origin struggle to enjoy the same rights as free-born groups. Whether following a narrative of first-comer or of belonging to a genealogy, it is difficult for people of this descent to be fully integrated in the local context.

This conclusion was apparently contradicted by my observations in Guéra. Yalnas do not seem to be suffering the discrimination that usually affects slave-descendant groups. However, their status remains ambiguous: using all the possible sources of political legitimacy, it is difficult to locate them as a proper local group. Yalnas have no *margay*, but they also differ from the other migrant groups: they did not come to Guéra as invaders – like the local Dadjo group –

conquering parts of the territory that became theirs thanks to their military strength. They are present in Guéra in different "islands", and the legitimacy of their presence is based on local alliances with local groups, as they are too small to violently impose their presence.

The metaphor of "the island" was used only in the interview with Sheba, one of the better educated informants I met during the research. However, I have often found a contradiction between the claim that in Guéra everyone can define himself or herself as Hadjiray and, therefore, marry without any ethnic limitation, and the distinction between the indigenous people coming from the mountains and the newly arrived, usually lacking a local language and a spiritual link with the *margay*. All these facts make it clear that the Yalnas' status in Guéra is ambiguous. The interesting point is that, despite these ambiguities, they have been able to be accepted as a local Hadjiray group and their status seems to matter only in certain situations. This thesis explores the level of integration this group has achieved and the role legacies of slavery play in their social trajectories. The "malleability" – quoting Lentz – of the narratives locally used to claim ownership and recognition may have a role, together with the peculiarities of the Guéra social context. Therefore, the role of kinship and marriages in integrating people and groups into the local social context is one of the first elements to be assessed in this analysis.

3. Kinship in Guéra

This section explores the meaning of kinship and genealogies in Guéra, aiming to understand how local ethnonyms have emerged, and through which processes local groups arrange social ties between themselves.

3.1 Genealogies and narratives among Guéra groups

An important aspect that quickly emerged from my interviews and conversation about Guéra is that, despite the foundational myths of the *gens de la terre*, there is a common recognition that every ethnic group, at some point in the past, migrated to the region. Sheba stressed from the beginning that in Guéra everyone migrated from somewhere, even though some of these migrations were in the very remote past and various groups continued to arrive in Guéra for centuries. Most the villages' foundational myths that I collected are based on the alliance between a bigger group of migrants and a smaller group of indigenous people, following the dynamics described by Kopytoff (1987) on frontier areas: groups of first comers agreed to give political power to newcomers, to the condition that they accepted their religious belief and left them a sort of spiritual power. Often, in Migami, Bidio, Kenga or Dangaleat village there is a

distinction between the quarters of the *gens de la terre*, in charge of the *margay* ritual, because of their ancestral links with the mountain; and the *gens de la chefferie*, who have the political power, as they arrived later and strengthened the group with their military abilities. This point was already made by the first anthropological research in the area which focused on these topics and was further confirmed in interviews and conversation, where I always found an acknowledgement that every Hadjiray ancestor came from somewhere else. The growing Islamisation of the region at the expense of the traditional religion, described in the second field work of Fuchs (1997), further stresses the importance of migration from the east.

Analysing local stories, I would argue that the point they aim to prove is not about being a pure, indigenous Guéra, but about claiming to have a legitimate link with the land on which they are settled. According to the Protestant priest Assane, who collected various foundational myths of the area and shared them with me, "Bidio, Migami, Dangaleat and Moubi came together as a whole group from the east" (Assan, Mongo, February 2015), the scarcity of resources and the insecurity of the environment led to a division of the various groups in the mountain. According to his model, there was a first nucleus who settled and then separated in the mountains, progressively hosting new waves of migrants, who settled, accepting the authority of those who arrived first. Assane told me that it is impossible nowadays to effectively retrace the waves and dynamics of different migrations, in part because of the length of time, and in part because of the complex social networks created by these groups once they arrived in Guéra.

This topic is very sensitive, as it could affect the "first comer" narrative used to legitimise the political power of local groups. A local scholar tried to reconstruct the story of his canton, Migami, and published a book about it (Doungous 2013), based on stories collected in different Migami villages. A friend in Mongo gave me a copy of this book, so I had the chance to read it. The book did not explicitly take any political position, but described the different waves of migration of the Migami clans, declaring whose clan came first and whose joined in a second movement. It was explained to me that I cannot find a copy of this book nowadays: after a few weeks, the author decided to withdraw the book from the bookshops, as it created too many tensions between local clans. My friend Abdel, an uncle of the current Yalnas canton chief, gave me a copy of it, as he personally know the author. He told me that Doungous came back to Guéra to explain his choices in the story reported in the book. However, despite his effort to calm the tensions, there was no way to publish the story of the group without awakening unresolved internal issues (Abdel, Jujube, October 2014).

The waves of migration to Guéra affected the area for centuries. As it was important for local groups to have allies, helping in the event of fighting with other groups, and with hunting, the new arrivals were generally integrated through swearing an oath to the *margay*, which had then a crucial social function. This process was increasingly repeated over the last two centuries. The increasing pressure of Wadai raiders, following the 19th century inclusion of this sultanate in the trade with Benghazi (Wright 2007), pressurised local people to develop more intense forms of cooperation, while some of them decided to cooperate directly with the Wadai soldiers, especially in the northern part of the region (Fuchs 1997). This is the moment when both Yalnas and Dadjo settled on the Guéra plains. Their migration is more recent and well-remembered at a local level. Wadai obliged many local groups to negotiate with them a quantity of slaves to give as tax, and, at the same time, increased the numbers of people looking for shelter in the mountains, some of which were very difficult for the sultanate soldiers to access. This is the moment that emerged most often in local people's stories: while visiting different villages, I was often told about the strategies used against the raiders. Sometimes there were caves where people used to hide, in other cases there were narrow passages through the mountains used by local people to attack raiders, or underground rivers and bonfires that enabled basic communication between different villages. The village of Moro, now the main village for Migami, claim to have been created after the Migami defeated Sultan Yussuf's military incursion, and there are a variety of legends about this battle, also mentioned by Carbou (1912).

The existence of a group called *Yalnas* is itself a legacy of this period: the raids and displacement related to Wadai attacks created various scattered groups of escaped slaves, defeated soldiers or other individuals who for various reasons were detached from their original groups and in need of protection. My oral sources told me that often soldiers of brigades defeated in combat or people sent away from their villages for crimes may also have joined these scattered groups. These people could finally make themselves visible through the label, *Yalnas*, when the French imposed peace on the area. In the written sources discussing these people, I found mention only of escaped captives, with a more detailed account for the people of Mapita (Djidinguer 1912, Bruel 1918). In this specific case, the nomadic Arabs recognized the group of Yalnas as such, after they paid a tribute for their independence. This is the only case of a Yalnas group's story properly described by written sources – and, according to my research, the only group that settled as *Yalnas* before the arrival of the French. Despite the throwing-together of such a range of people seeming to be an automatic consequence of the violent pre-colonial context, the way Yalnas have been accepted and integrated into the

political landscape is the outcome of a more complex social process and is related to the way the memories about this past have been elaborated in Guéra.

I noted how narratives of the pre-colonial past still endure, and how slave-raids were openly and frequently described to me. It seems that resistance against a slave-raid is a crucial moment in the stories of most Hadjiray groups, as the story of Moro or the competing narratives of Bidio and Yalnas show. Their sense of self as a group is somehow based on their survival of that period of violence. Sheba and the other Jujube people stressed to me the capacity of Yalnas to settle as those "small islands" of Arabic speakers in the land of pagans, both creating social ties with their neighbours and hunting slaves for the Wadai in the other valleys. For the neighbouring Migami group, the crucial element is the battle of Moro – their main village, located at the confluence of two separate mountain ranges – where they defeated a group of Wadai raiders and stole their arms and horses. Their legend says that the current canton chief's family owns the descendants of the horses stolen from Wadai soldiers. In both Bidio and Dangaleat villages, I heard the myth of a baby who spontaneously left his mother's belly in the night and then quickly became a great warrior, able to lead the villagers in the fight against Wadai. Finally, I heard from different sources among Dangaleat and Migami that a grandfather managed to escape from their captivity among Wadai soldiers and informed the French about the position of Wadai army, facilitating their victory in 1906. I could not find any written evidence of these stories, but three different families claimed to be the descendants of this fugitive captive who enabled French victory.

While visiting the mountains with both Jujube people and friends from other villages, I was impressed by the number of stories related to those mountains. I visited old villages, called *doungous* in Chadian Arabic which were abandoned at the time of the French *découpage* or following rebellions in the 1970s; I have also seen the site of the old *margay* and other caves used for shelter or to secretly store food. All these sites are still under the protection of local land chiefs and cannot be visited without authorisation: even local people who want to go there need to ask the family of the *gens de la terre* in charge of them for authorization and eventually must leave a tribute to them. I myself had to buy some gifts for one of these informal chiefs when I was visiting some caves on the slopes of the Reine du Guéra Mountain nearby Moro. In fact, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of Hadjiray are nowadays Christian or Muslim, the sites related to the precolonial past (and, in most of the villages, the pre-Muslim religions) still have an important ritual value. The family of the older

priest in charge of this site still exerts a spiritual control over them and their mediation is necessary to access them.

The capacity to resist raids is important in both the stories of rooted local groups like the Migami and Bidio, who build their communities around a *margay* and proudly resisted the slave raids, and those of more recent migrants like the Dadjo, who used to attack other groups and negotiated with the raiders from a stronger position. In Chapter Three, I presented the main ethnonyms currently used in the Guéra region that were created by the French in their effort to regroup the Hadjiray under a consistent central authority. These ethnonyms which survived as the cantons have rarely been changed in postcolonial Chad. However, behind these ethnonyms there are potentially numerous kin rivalries, as the case of the book on Migami history showed. They continue to have an important role in both political and social life. Marriages are often described through these ethnonyms. I was told that there are locally specific areas in conflict whose inhabitants are less likely to marry. The survival of a Bidio-speaking community in the village of Tamar – almost attached to Jujube and full of Yalnas – as well as the clear distinction between the inhabitants of Jujube and those of Cocoa, another Bidio village very close to Jujube, may indicate some resistance to melding at the very local level[12]. However, in general all Guéra ethnic groups – Dadjo, Migami, Bidio and Yalnas – would intermarry, the only exception being the Haddad, who are considered a low-level caste. Therefore, despite their late arrival, Yalnas are recognised as a group, and have normal marriage relations with most of the other Hadjiray. In the next section, I will analyse in more depth the label Yalnas and the strategies that enabled the group to integrate.

3.2 Emergence and role of the *Yalnas* label

As mentioned before, Yalnas means 'sons of the people', indicating that they are an assortment of persons with varied origins. Local sources agree on the fact that the villages of the Yalnas were full of captives in pre-colonial times, and this is also consistent with the Jujube narrative of their past as slave hunters. The theory that the head of the Yalnas of Jujube may have been a Wadai *aqid* in charge of supervising a Wadai slave camp is also commonly believed. The members of the ruling family of the Yalnas' canton claim that this shows their

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[12] During my stay in Jujube, I tried to explore this topic further, but I could not achieve definitive results. In Tamar, there was an ongoing conflict about a cereal bank (see Chapter Six), therefore it was difficult for me to have direct contact with Bidio in Tamar, considering that I was a guest of Jujubes. I visited Cocoa a couple of times and their relationships with the Jujubes seemed to me less problematic (my second visit was together with some Jujube elders, who came there to show solidarity in a case of death), but local people carefully avoided sharing with me stories about precolonial times.

past as warriors, while their neighbours emphasise the fact that often Wadai *aqid* were often chosen from among former slaves (Cordell 1985), further strengthening their conviction that Yalnas are all slave descendants. Yalnas cantons were created only in Guéra and in the neighbouring Salamat region, while there are no mentions of other groups with such a name in Chad. Outside Chad, the only mention I could find was the label *Awlād al-Nass*, used to define the second-generation descendants of Mamelukes in Egypt, who were recognised as free born and integrated into the state machine, but kept a denomination indicating their servile origin (Levanoni 2006). Also, in the reports of travellers to the Sahara in the 17th and 18th centuries I have never found the label *Yalna*s used to indicate any groups. Therefore, the only strategy to unpack the meaning of this label and its origin was through local stories and colonial documents.

The first written references about Yalnas are in Djidinguier (1912) and Bruel (1918). In the archives, I have found in the "rapport d'ensemble" of 1912[13] a mention of the ethnonym *Yalnas.* In that document, a Colonel Hirtzman used to it indicate a Guéra group speaking Arabic and made up of Muslims. He considers them more civilised than the other pagan groups, whilst, at the same time, not hostile towards the colonial government like the other Muslims. The author appreciated their willingness to work, while Duault (1938) noticed their commitment toward the French government in Guéra. All the following authors (Le Rouvreur 1962, Vincent 1962, and Chapelle 1980) describe them as a race of former or escaped captives. Apart from these brief mentions, I have not found any other analysis of their origin, or reference to them. In the collection of reports made by Louis Duault (1938), there is also an explanation on the creation of the canton in Jujube. This Yalnas canton is mentioned among the cantons created in 1923. Duault claims that they deserved it as a reward for their loyalty, even though he feared the authority of their chief was too weak and many of its inhabitants would leave it. However, at that time most of local groups did not yet understand the functioning of the canton as an administrative unit, and the situation described for Jujube was also reported in many other villages.

Focusing on local narratives, there are various contradictory opinions about the origin of Jujube as a village and of its inhabitants, among both insiders and outsiders. During my fieldwork, I travelled throughout the various Yalnas villages in Guéra and collected a variety of narratives about the meaning of the label and the origin of the people inhabiting Jujube and its canton. Interestingly, I heard the same explanation about the label in Jujube and in Lucepa. In

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[13] Archives Aix-en-Provence, FM/SG/TCH/I/8

both cases, *Yalnas* is described as a strategic label: as the French were fighting against Muslim slavers and proved to be strong and effective, groups of Muslims in Guéra and Salamat who feared them decided to hide their origin and opted for this label, *Yalnas*. This label had a double effect: it hid from the French the fact that there were slave hunters among them, and it developed an ethnonym that enabled the integration into the group of a variety of different people. In Jujube, this was explained quite clearly to me:

"When the French arrived, they divided all the people depending on the language they spoke. When they asked Al Ada from where he came from, he was afraid to tell he was from Wadai. The French had just come from the Kousseri battle between General Lamy and Rabih, so he was afraid to say "I am from Wadai". So, he said "all these sons of nobody (Yalnas) are under my authority". (...) This is why the canton got a bad name at the beginning, it was called "canton Yalnas", the canton of the "sons of the people"." (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014)

In Lucepa, where the canton is still called Yalnas, unlike in Jujube, the chief also decided to explain to me the reason why they kept this bad label:

"The name Yalnas came from the fact that our ancestors did not want to tell the French their origin when they arrived. In fact, we were open to all the people who wanted to hide. They could come and join us: this is why we chose the name Yalnas. Thanks to this, our canton became very big, with all these foreigners joining. (..) We could call our canton "Arab Rachid Black" rather than Yalnas, as we are from this family, coming from the east, but if we change the name we could have enemies who would try to steal control of the canton, or to divide it" (Lucepa canton chief, Lucepa, December 2014)

Both groups identified a sort of nucleus of people who founded the village: a Wadai *aqid* in the case of Jujube, a Tounjour chief – an Arabic speaking ethnic group ousted from the area when the sultanate was created in 1635 – in the case of Lucepa. These groups were Muslim and allied with Wadai sultans, therefore they had to hide their identity when they met with the French, in the first decade of 20th century. The bad label of Yalnas guaranteed they would not be attacked by the French, and involved in the same group all the individuals who had for some reason lost contact with their original group. I heard some alternative versions in conversations in Jujube: a young man studying as a nurse told me, in Jujube, that it was not a choice, but a misunderstanding, as in the first meeting the Jujube chief sent some of his slaves to talk with the French and they used to present themselves as "sons of the people"; others blamed the French, who misunderstood local discourses, either from actual slaves in the group or from neighbours aiming to stigmatise all Jujube people.

Outside the Guéra and Salamat regions there are no Yalnas cantons, but this label is used to indicate a person whose origins are not clear. Among my informants familiar with Chadian Arabic, the negative meaning is immediately clear, while my friends from the south sometime just ignored it or think that it is an Arabic word used to make fun of a person who pretends to be more important than he/she actually is (Joy, N'Djamena, June 2015). While this version emerged in informal conversation with people with a relatively low level of education, when talking with persons with a university degree I was always told that the label Yalnas relates to people who have been enslaved and then tried to integrate into their previous group or into the group of the previous master[14].

This negative connotation of the word was confirmed in the conversations I had in the Bidio villages surrounding Jujube. I found a widespread uncertainty about Yalnas' origin, the only common elements being that they were not a "real" local group like them. In Zola, the closest village to Yalnas canton, they consider Yalnas as effectively guests on their territory. Moreover, they claim that the name was given to them as they were all people whose origin was unknown, and therefore there was no other possible ethnonym for them than Yalnas. In this tale, the label is not a strategic choice made by the Yalnas, but an external choice, as nobody knew how to classify them. However, not all the Bidio I met agreed on this theory: some of them just had no idea; others told me that the name was created by the French even before the canton, while some others – especially among those I met in N'Djamena – thought it was just another word to say "slaves"[15].

The same uncertainty regarding the Yalnas' name affects their story. Their neighbours – Bidio and Migami – state that, as they are escaped or liberated slaves, there is not much to know about their past. The only common ground between insider and outsider Yalnas' version of Jujube's origin is its past as a slave-camp. According to various local sources[16], there were some basic settlements where slave raiders used to stay and store the slaves captured during their raids. These settlements were managed by Wadai generals called *aqid*, who could be aristocrats from Abeche or slaves trained for this task. They were permanently involved in

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[14] I heard this explanation in N'Djamena, when meeting with local scholars who often heard this label used in this way, especially in political debate, while in Guéra it tend to be associated with the people of the Yalnas cantons.

[15] Interestingly, the idea that *Yalnas* is just a synonym of "slave" was told to me in N'Djamena by members of the Bidio group, who probably have more access to written sources and less to local oral stories.

[16] In the written sources explaining slavery in Wadai (Barth and Nachtigal), I have found explanations about their raiding strategy, the presence of *aqid* in some specific area collecting taxes from local groups, and their alliance with local Muslim leaders, but I have never found mention of these "slave-camps", which, by contrast, emerged often in Guéra local stories.

capturing people, eventually forging alliances with other groups in the area, and then giving the slaves to the Wadai military missions, which regularly came to Guéra. Both Yalnas and their neighbours acknowledge that Jujube was originally a settlement like this. However, this element is used to reach opposite conclusions: for people outside the community of Yalnas, this means that most of them are descendants of slaves. After hiding in the mountains during precolonial times, they were then hosted by local Guéra groups, who allowed them to settle there after the arrival of the French.

By contrast, the Yalnas claim to have a much more complex story, which Sheba and the other members of his family present as the true story of Jujube. Despite the difference in details, I could summarize a basic version of Jujube history, based on the coherent elements of the narrations I collected in the various Yalnas villages. Jujube was created by Mahmoun Djalloul – a member of the Wadai royal family – in some of the versions because he had to flee after inciting the jealousy of his brothers; in other versions, because he was sent to spread Islam in the pagan region of Guéra. The founder came together with his mother and one or two brothers, depending on the version. The mother was an Arab woman and, thanks to her, the two brothers were protected and helped on their journey by the various nomadic Arabs moving around between Abeche and the Guéra. Jujube people still have alliances and contacts with those nomadic Arabs. At the end of the journey, one of the two brothers remained with the Arabs, while the older settled in the Migami village of Djogo and married one of the daughters of the Djogo chief. After him, there have been seven chiefs, the last one being the actual canton chief, as shown in the table below.

Canton chiefs of Jujube canton, and their stories	
Mahmoun Saboul	Son of the sultan of Wadai Sabul, he left Wara, married Dadda from Djogo and founded Jujube, in 1818
Hadjar Mahmoun	I heard no stories about this king
Djalloul Hadjar	He had various sons and a fight with one of his brothers, Ibeth, who left him and created another village, closely allied with Jujube: Kuju.
Mahreb Djalloul	He was the chief when the French arrived, in 1906, but, as he was old, he left the office to his son Al Ada in this period

Al Ada Mahreb[17]	The chief who first negotiated with the French and is mentioned in Duault's (1938) reports, he died in the 1920s and had only two sons. One fled to Sudan, the other, Adam, became chief
Adam Al Ada	He cultivated social ties with the other chiefs, forced his relatives to study at the French school and revitalised the alliance with Borock. Died in 2003
Assam Adam	He was appointed on March 2003, when the canton Yalnas was renamed Abbassid

Table 1: List of the chiefs of Jujube

Before the foundation of Jujube, Mahmoun arrived in Djogo, on the northern part of the Abou Telfane mountain chain. Djogo is one of the first villages that people would come to on their way from Wadai when entering Guéra. At that time, the Migami were not united under a unique power and the people of Djogo ruled over that part of the mountain, as they had their own *margay* in that area. Mahmoun was a warrior and used to hunt with the people of Djogo. There is often an ambiguity in the use of the verb "hunt" in Guéra: people claiming to be warrior descendants use it for the hunting of both animals and captives, while in a village like Djogo – whose identity is rooted in the spiritual link with the mountain, rather than in their military strength – the use is more nuanced: they did hunt wild animals, so therefore they had the weapons and abilities also to hunt other men, but this capacity is less stressed in their stories. Hunting collaboratively is one of the activities local groups used to do together in the past. During one of his hunts, Mahmoun saw a nice location on the other side of the mountain and asked the chief of Djogo for permission to settle there. Once he was authorised and, through marriage with a Djogo woman, entrusted with the ownership of the land, he moved and built Jujube. This part of the story was confirmed to me also in Djogo:

"Our chief of the land gave that place to Mahmoun to build Jujube. We still have the chief of the land and the margay, they are the descendants of those who were in charge at that time. Since Jujube was created, the marriages between us have been frequent. Mahmoun helped us in the defence against Wadai raids. There have been many exchanges between them and us,

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[17] Since "Al-Ada", I am using pseudonyms, to guarantee the anonymization of the person involved in the research. All the previous chiefs are reported as mentioned in the stories collected during the research. My reasoning is that, as they are known only among insiders of the community, then using the names I collected during the research would not affect the anonymization of the other actors involved in the research.

both before and after the arrival of the French. Still now, there are Yalnas living here and Migami in Jujube" (Djogo village chief, Djogo, October 2014).

In that conversation, the Djogo chief explicitly praised the behaviour of the Yalnas, who asked for permission before establishing their village, while the "Dadjo have no proper place and they have no land chief; nobody knows exactly where their territory is" (Djogo village chief, Djogo, October 2014). While Djogo elders could only confirm the part of the story involving Mahmoun and the creation of Jujube, the Yalnas elders' story also accounts for the creation of the other villages. It is said that a few years after the founding of Jujube, Mahmoun's younger brother decided to join him and created a second small village, Kuju, a few kilometres to the east of Jujube. Since then, the inhabitants of the two villages remained there, cooperating with their allies from Djogo and capturing slaves for the Wadai[18] in the other valleys. During my story collection, I heard about many other temporary "war alliances" between local groups who decided to "hunt" together (Assane, Mongo, February 2015). The alliance with the Dadjo of Borock is the only one that is now remembered and revived through intermarriages and regular visits. In Chapter Six, I will explore further this alliance and the importance for Jujube people to be involved in local civil society activities. Hunting in cooperation with neighbours was a major Jujube activity, according to its inhabitants' version. This lasted until the arrival of the French, which radically reshaped the local political landscape.

In Chapter Three, I have explained the role of the *découpage* and how it led various groups to unite under a recognised authority and be recognised as a legitimate group by the state. This had a major impact on the Yalnas. People both inside and outside the Yalnas group agree on the fact that Jujube used to be a bigger village before colonisation. As the French priority was to block the slave trade and eradicate slavery, slave raiders had to hide their real activity and many slaves were liberated. In Jujube, many of the captives who knew their origins were reabsorbed into their original groups, a point confirmed by people both within and outside the groups. According to my Bidio informants, in Jujube only the slaves remained and therefore they were called Yalnas; according to Jujube informants, only the family of the *aqid* and some allies absorbed into their clan remained there. This is why the village became much smaller than in precolonial times.

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[18] In the version claiming that the Jujube founder had to flee because the sultan wanted to kill him, there was conciliation between the two afterwards, and the sultan gave him a mission to spread Islam in the region, as in the other version.

In these stories, I cannot find a fully shared explanation about their origin. However, it seems likely that many Yalnas are former captives who lost contact with their original group over time and were progressively absorbed into the Jujube chief's clan. Some people in Jujube acknowledge this, even though the elders made clear in the stories I collected that all the slaves were liberated and only the descendants of the warriors remained. Moreover, for the captives who lost their ties it would have probably been convenient to pretend to be related to the recognised canton chief, as they had no other affiliation. A final point that needs to be considered is the nature of slave raids in Guéra and of lineages: both local sources and Wadai documents (Fisher 2001, Wright 2007) agree on the fact that most of the captives taken in Guéra were women, easier to transport, and in demand for harems in North Africa. The fact that the lineage system is patrilineal, meaning a woman is quickly absorbed into the family of the husband, may have further facilitated the assimilation of former captives into the chief's kin group.

The local narrative of the slaves as goods taken and sent away that I explained in the introduction does not enable me to track with clarity the trajectories of the former slaves in the area. The category of Yalnas is likely to be a tool for their "disappearing" from the local social context as slaves and being absorbed as members of a local – though ambiguous – ethnic group in Guéra. Polygamy further facilitated this process. Hence, marriages likely facilitated the consolidation of ethnic groups around some more respected families, as happened among Yalnas around their *aqid* families.

The recognition of the ruler of Jujube as a canton chief by the French may have had an important impact in making absorption into this group a convenient solution. I have explained how complicated it is to track the migration of local groups in Guéra and the various episodes in their past. Moreover, in a group like the Yalnas I found less in-depth knowledge about the different families inside the group, compared to the cases described by Vandame (1975) and Vincent (1975), where local groups show deep knowledge of the different families and the distinction between *gens de la terre* and *gens de la chefferie*. Among the Yalnas village chiefs I interviewed during the fieldwork, showing their connection with Jujube seemed a priority. In the 11 villages whose chiefs are recognised as Yalnas, the stories I collected were focused on finding a link connecting them with the ruling family of Jujube: in some cases, it was a migration; in two others, there were brothers of Mahmoun who joined Guéra later; finally, there were some marriages which enabled the union of villages in the *aqid* family. The only village chief who presented an alternative explanation was the chief of Ibis, on the border

between Salamat and Guéra, who claimed to be an Arab, whose ancestors had joined Yalnas canton as it was the only one made up of Muslim Arabic speakers in the region, and since then they have accepted being part of the same family (Ibis village chief, Ibis, November 2014).

Marriages may have had a role in creating a relatively homogenous Yalnas group in the Guéra department, although I have already explained how ambiguous this label is: the lack of a real genealogy, in a context of local groups basing their legitimacy either on "first-comer" narratives that need a continuity in the lineage of a group, or on recognised Muslim kin, make Yalnas a possible target of political attacks as foreigners. In Chapter Three, I explained how complex the divisions are between different cantons and ethnic groups. Guéra is full of villages composed of mixed ethnic groups; official geographic canton borders do not exist and often villages of different groups are mixed in the same territory. Therefore, ethnic divisions are more nuanced on the ground than they appear in official documents, based on the ethnonyms created during the colonial time. The *découpage* in 1923 created broader labels, such as Migami, Bidio, Dadjo and Yalnas, appointing a few leaders at the head of them. Through these labels, the French rulers tried to simplify a scattered landscape of different groups that migrated in various waves over time and alternate a certain degree of integration among them with the memories of differences.

In this process, the unification of dispersed people under the label of *Yalnas* and recognising the authority of a leader claiming a warrior past was relatively successful, as well as their integration in the territory through socially recognised alliances. However, the recognition and integration of Yalnas were not straightforward. Despite their local alliances, the Yalnas kept their negative label and are recognised as a group that arrived in Guéra later and kept its distinctive aspect: the lack of a local language and the lack of a site for mountain spirit worship. Moreover, despite their claim to have received the land from a local land chief, their village is nowadays situated among villages of another local group – the Bidio – whose inhabitants do not have the same close ties that Jujube people have with Djogo or Borock. The relationships with the Bidio show all the contradictions in the Yalnas' status: they do not recognise the Jujube foundational myth and refuse the claim of Djogo's people – Jujube allies – that the land belonged to them in precolonial times until they allowed Mahmoun to settle there and create Jujube.

The Bidio are a smaller group compared to Migami and Dadjo, whose legitimacy over their land is based on *margay* worship and is widely accepted and respected by the other local groups. Their canton capital is Nevio, just 8 kilometres from Jujube. I have never heard of

alliances between Jujube and Nevio or other Bidio villages, although intermarriage between Yalnas and Bidio is frequent. Even at the ruling families' level there have recently been mixed marriages, in what has been described to me by Abdel as an effort to improve their relationships with them. In N'Djamena, I met a couple of local scholars from Bidio, and they described Yalnas people to me as a group of former captives "brought by the French".

During my fieldwork, I witnessed various political conflicts between Bidio and Yalnas, showing that the two groups have serious difficulties in cooperating: over the management of water wells and cereal banks, the right to use land and take an income from it, the right to be involved in development projects affecting the territory: all these situations created issues between the two groups, as I will show in the following chapters. Moreover, despite the frequent intermarriages between the two groups, the status of those born from these marriages may be problematic. During my research, Bidio elders met to elect a new canton chief, who needed to have the support of different village chiefs. I was told by Abdel that a good candidate was a nephew of the old canton chief, very popular among village chiefs, but because his mother was a Yalnas, it would have been hard for him to get appointed. Finally, he was not appointed, Jujube people claim, because of his Yalnas origin[19], while my Bidio sources denied this conclusion.

The complex relationships between Bidio and Yalnas offered me a lot of contradictions to explore. Moreover, while usually discourse about slavery is only tackled when talking about resistance against Wadai, Bidio and Yalnas sometimes use it to describe their relationships. I was told that in the past the Bidio used to make fun of their relationship with the Yalnas by saying that they were "marrying slaves" when marrying them. On the other hand, the Yalnas told me the Bidio's bad attitude toward them is related to their past: as Jujube people carried out many of their raids in Bidio areas, they disliked them and ever since the French blocked these practices, they have tried to denigrate them as a sort of revenge. In the controversies between Bidio and Yalnas I often perceived a general sympathy of the other actors towards the Bidio, who were considered by most of my friends – mainly people living in Mongo and working in state or NGO institutions – as the true natives of the area. I found stronger support for Yalnas among Arabs, both in Mongo and in rural areas.

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[19] Usually, but not necessarily, the chief is chosen from among the sons of the previous chief; therefore, the half-Yalnas candidate was in a lineage less likely to be elected. There was a recent marriage between a member of the Jujube canton chief's family and the wife of the current Bidio chief, so therefore there is still a possibility that the next Bidio chief will be half-Yalnas.

Village	Canton location	Groups with whom they have intermarriages
Jujube	Yalnas	Bidio (mainly Nevio), Dadjo (Borock), Migami (mainly Djogo)
Tamar	Yalnas	Nowadays, Yalnas and Arab Falaite, but in the past also Bidio (they say intermarriage with them reduced after the *découpage*)
Kuju	Yalnas	Yalnas and Bidio (mainly Zola)
Loba	Bidio	Yalnas, Arab Inenat and Bidio (Zola and Sameh)
Karda	Migami	Yalnas and Bidio (Okat)
Bala	Migami	Yalnas and Migami (especially those defining themselves as Dogangue)
Mitele	Bidio	Migami and Bidio (large village created during the rebellions uniting different groups)
Sagal 1	Bidio	Yalnas, Migami (Dogangue), Bidio and Arab Rachid
Sagal 2	Bidio	Yalnas, Migami (Dogangue) and Arab
Ibis	Bidio/Dadjo Eref	Yalnas and Arab Salamat
Erancia	Dangaleat	Yalnas and Arab Imar
Kalab	Migami	Yalnas and Migami (mainly Djogo)
Mapita	Migami	Yalnas, Migami (mainly Djogo), Bidio (Sameh) and Arab Inenat
Barag	Dadjo	Yalnas, Dadjo (Borock) and Kenga

Table 2: Intermarriages between Yalnas villages and other Hadjiray

Despite this general sympathy for their rivals, today Yalnas can intermarry with any local groups (as confirmed by the table above) and their canton is officially recognised by state institutions. Moreover, they have been able to protect their rights in most of the issues I experienced while I was there. This capacity is the result of a strategy implemented by the first Yalnas, and marriages have played an important role in it. I already mentioned the fact that the

Yalnas have had alliances outside their clan since pre-colonial times: with the inhabitants of the Migami village of Djogo, with the Dadjo people of Borock, and various alliances with some of the nomadic Arab groups. These alliances helped the Yalnas to avoid being marginalised because of their origin.

4. Marriages, ahalié and diya: the role of local social institutions in Yalnas integration

This section further explores these alliance building ations of Yalnas groups by analysing the various social institutions – marriages, social alliances (*ahalié*) and the price of the blood (*diya*) - in Guéra, focusing on what local groups have done to adapt them to their needs and create a relatively peaceful social context in the region.

4.1 Yalnas marriages and alliances

In this chapter, I have summarised the stories related to the origins of the Yalnas, looking for relevant elements that can help me to explain the social trajectory that the Yalnas as a group had in Guéra. I have found that social links with other local groups have a crucial importance in the story of Jujube. Derendinger (1912) explained that Yalnas could settle peacefully in Lampo thanks to the recognition of their groups by the neighbouring nomadic Arabs. A local agreement is also present in the story of the Lucepa people, who claim to have got the land they inhabit as a *diya* (the price of blood in Chadian Arabic, which is the compensation paid for a murder) after a clash with a group of Goula – another Guéra ethnic group– who then decided to leave and move further south.

In the alliance Mahmoun made with the Djogo chief, marriage was a crucial element: the two groups became tied and, therefore, the people of Jujube could receive from the Djogo land chief the right to settle there as an indigenous group. The Djogo chief told me that at the site of Jujube "there were already a few people living there, all under the authority of Djogo; they were all our relatives" (Djogo village chief, Djogo, October 2014). Since the wedding between Djogo chief's daughter and Mahmoun, they all became the same family and so they are still, despite the language differences. During my stay in Mongo I met other people from Djogo and they remembered this story, emphasising the ease with which foreigners can integrate in Djogo. The watchman of the Catholic mission – Samir - is from Djogo and when I told him I was going to stay in Jujube he proudly introduced me to his wife, a woman from Jujube, telling me that Jujube people are brothers with their people. Every time I travelled to Jujube, he asked me to greet some of his in-laws there. He told me that a village very close to Djogo, Mapita,

had been created by people from Jujube who decided to settle there. Nowadays, they present themselves as Migami, because they are under the authority of this canton, but in fact most of them were from Jujube. However, the issue does not matter so much, as thanks to mixed marriages "we are all the same family" (Samir, Mongo, March 2015). This story was then explained to me in more detail by another friend from Djogo, Ousman, who is now a teacher in Mongo. I met him while I was interviewing the chief of Haddad in Mongo and, as he also was passionate about local history, he decided to share with me the main points of the Djogo and Mapita stories. It was a very interesting conversation, as he spontaneously entered onto some relevant topics that other people had been more resistant to dealing with.

"The people of Mapita, they want to show they are Migami and we are glad to have them with us, but we know they are not Migami: they were slaves, even though they want to be called differently. We allowed their chief to come and collect tax from them, even though now they prefer to be under Migami administration. The Migami also used to have a bad name: they were called Diongor, which means people who are not circumcised. We used that name to call these people in the past, because at that time they were not yet Islamised. Everyone here has a difficult past, but in the Djogo we adopted many foreigners from various communities and we forget about their origins" (Ousman, Mongo, May 2015)

Interestingly, he explicitly used the word slaves (*esclaves*, as we were talking in French) when referring to the people of Mapita, as if it was a synonym for Yalnas. He emphasised the importance of marriage making them part of the same group, even though he noted that people are aware of their different origins as compared to the rest of the group; and the fact that they preferred to be called Migami, rather than Yalnas. I already knew about the previous ethnonym used for the Migami (Diongor), but he was the first member of the group that spontaneously told me about it. He emphasised the fact that "everyone had a difficult past in Guéra" and that bad labels had been used in the past, but nowadays the Hadjiray are building on their previous alliances to create a more cohesive ethnic landscape.

The existence of a pre-colonial network of alliances in the region had already emerged in my research. During the visits to various Yalnas villages, I often found accounts of old alliances with neighbouring villages, which lasted only for short periods and were forgotten, both between small local villages and with groups of nomads coming regularly to Guéra. In his analysis of the Kenga in the neighbouring Bitkine department in the 1970s, Vandame (1975, p. 92) stated that "every Kenga village has his own Arabs", who come every year in the dry season to exchange products and settle in a protected area. Among this variety of alliances,

the story of Djogo was the crucial one for Jujube elders. That marriage legitimised the presence of Yalnas through a local social institution: an alliance with a land chief that entrusted the land to a group even in the absence of a local *margay*. The other interesting point surrounding this story is that it has been confirmed by other people I met outside the formal interviews with the village elders. Moreover, while explaining it, Ousman spontaneously related it to the broader issue of slavery. While in the official version there is a recognised Yalnas leader – Mahmoun – who made an alliance with the Djogo chief, Djogo sources stress that in Djogo all foreigners were welcome; that people of Mapita were like people of Jujube, of unknown origin, but through marriages were integrated with the Djogo and preferred the Migami identity to the ambiguous label of Yalnas; and, finally, that also Jujube people used to integrate foreigners into their community, but with time the memories of the origin can be forgotten and people fully integrated in the new village.

These stories point to the fact that in Guéra there have traditionally been waves of people moving from different regions and needing to be integrated and protected in some broader groups. I discussed these issues with another key informant: Mahmat, a local Member of Parliament (MP) from the Dadjo canton. When I met Mahmat I had not yet collected all the local stories, but I had already visited Djogo and heard about the alliance between Jujube and Borock, a village that part of Mahmat's family comes from. Mahmat told me something that was very important to refocus my own research when I asked him about the nature of Yalnas and the relationships between them and Borock.

"There are various stories about this group. What I know is that the canton was the canton Yalnas and I am personally not interested in all the stories behind this name. I know that the old chief was a big warrior and at that time all those who were strong enough, they just came and collected as many people as they could. So, he used to have many captives in the village; some were sold to Wadai people, other remained with him in the village for internal work, but finally he transformed all of them into citizens. There are many people who came there and decided to remain, so they became citizens under his rule. We also had common grandparents: our grandparents used to help them to protect themselves, as they were all involved in the same kinds of practices. When they arrived, they were a small group, but then they became a big one. We have a tie since a long time ago. We also used to have mixed marriages in the precolonial period: I had relatives leaving among them" (Mahamt, Mongo, February 2015)

The alliance between Jujube and Borock was mainly a military alliance, which did not necessarily involve marriages between groups. According to Assane, these kinds of alliances

were quite frequent, but tended to be quickly forgotten, as they were created to deal with specific situations. This explained the variety of temporary alliances described to me by local people in their stories, but apparently forgotten. However, the alliance between Borock and Jujube is still remembered and it has been effectively exploited by the Jujube chief to strengthen important political ties with the people of Borock, as I will explain in Chapter Six. Moreover, Mahmat introduced another important topic about Guéra local politics: while confirming that Jujube was likely to be a village with many captives captured by local warriors (as well as Borock, as they were basing their survival on such practices), he explained how many of those captives may have decided to "become citizens" through accepting the Jujube chief's authority when colonial power was formalised, in the 1920s.

The need for a chiefdom to be recognised as a legitimate group in Guéra, as well as the role of marriage in creating alliances and assimilating people into groups are all elements that have played a crucial role in the Yalnas' story. Moreover, they emerged in many formal and informal conversations I had in Guéra: I was told that the Haddad could not be recognised as a canton, nor can intermarry with other ethnic groups, because they are not "a real family" (Ibeth, Mongo, February 2015); a similar point was made to describe the effort by a group among the Migami – the Dogangue - who used to be recognised with their own canton and nowadays are fighting to have it back, showing they "are a family"(Ousman, Mongo, April 2015). Finally, even the Haddad chief used this idiom, claiming that they are a local family, therefore should be recognised as "real citizens" (Haddad chief son, Mongo, April 2015). In the next section, I will focus in more detail on the functioning of these institutions, the use Yalnas have made of them, and the contradictions left since colonial times that are now emerging in a context of increased competition among local groups.

4.2 Importance of marriage in Guéra

In Guéra, the choice of wife is a central issue for a family. Mixed marriages among different ethnic groups are becoming more frequent recently. It is important to emphasise that when I say intermarriage, I refer to marriages between the different ethnic groups currently recognised under the label of Hadjiray. In Chad in general marriage between groups from different regions is rare. The nomadic groups (Tubu, Zakhawa and Arabs) are known for practising strict endogamy. This applies also to the Arabs and the Fulani inhabiting Guéra, who rarely mixed with farmer groups, even though it seems that there has been an increased tendency toward the sedentarisation in the last decades. Moreover, there is a great divide between Christian and Muslim groups in the country, with mixed weddings rare and generally

involving the conversion of the women to the husbands' family religion (Azevedo 1982, Lemarchand 1986). Since my first meeting in N'Djamena, I was told that Guéra is a special case: somehow, it represents a small version of Chad, a point also made by Seli (2013, p. 37). Christian, Muslim, farmers and herders sharing the same social space, but with a much broader attitude to marriages involving different ethnic groups and different religions than on the national level. This is particularly clear in Mongo, where, despite a division into quarters based on ethnicity, marriages involving different groups are very common, apart from the nomadic Arabs and the Haddad.

However, the control exerted over marriages by elders of the families is strict, and not every kind of union is possible. An agreement between the two families is necessary and the father of the bride – or an elder brother – is expected to give his consent. Once consent is obtained, the groom's family should pay a dowry to the bride's family. This dowry is expected to be used for the bride, who will buy clothes and tools to bring to the new house. Once the dowry has been paid, the two families agree the marriage in front of the *faky* – the local imam. I mainly discussed marriage procedures with local Muslims; however, my Christian sources in Mongo told me that Christians respect similar rules, the main difference being that the ceremony is arranged in the church. The family of the bride should confirm in front of the *faky* that they allow their daughter to join the groom's family, confirming the process started with the payment of the dowry. The lineage system is patrilineal, and therefore, from that moment, the bride is considered as part of the groom's family, even though this does not mean an immediate move to his house. Sometimes the bride remains with her family for some months, sometimes she moves to the groom's family whilst waiting for him to have his own house, and sometimes she remains with other family members.

The moment when groom and bride move together to their new house is called *rajula,* and often the *rajula* ceremony is bigger and considered more important than the marriage, as this is the moment when the new household is really starting. The more likely option is that the groom finds a space to build his own house in his village, but it is not unusual for the groom to move to another village or even to the bride's village, according to the availability of land. Because of the dowry, it is easier to arrange marriages within the same community or between groups that already have an alliance which regulates reciprocal relationships. However, as already stated, marriages between different groups are not rare. The first marriage is more likely to be between people of the same group and arranged by the family, while the following

ones have fewer constraints, as the groom already has his own house and, therefore, the control exerted by the family on him is weaker.

I have often heard the expression 'to give a girl', describing marriage as an effort to build stable relationships with other groups. Abdel used this expression when he explained to me the effort they made to improve their relationships with the Bidio (Abdel, Jujube, October 2014). For the family of the man, the ethnic origin of the girl is usually less important as, through the marriage, she will be integrated into the husband's family and will adopt its language and religion. On the other hand, a family may feel some resistance before arranging a marriage for their girls, as she will become part of the husband's family, accepting his religion and behaviours. Agreeing to marry a girl to a husband from another family is an important sign of friendship.

The discourses about marriage often did not fully reflect the way they were implemented on the ground. I was generally told that intermarriage is something recent, while in the past people only married within the same village or neighbouring villages. Moreover, both in Yalnas, Bidio and Migami villages, the elders told me that they were ready to marry someone else's girls, but much more prudent before giving away their girls, as they were not sure the other group was trustworthy enough for this kind of relationship. I heard these discourses in almost all the villages I visited. Even Djogo and Jujube people, who were both proud of their hospitable approach to foreigners, told me that it is one thing to adopt a foreigner in your community, and another thing to send a woman somewhere you don't know very well. However, I took some time, at the end of each interview, to ask local elders about the genealogy of the village chief. In many of the cases, intermarriage between different villages were more widespread than people liked to admit. This emerged clearly when contrasting the information about the wives of the various village chiefs: while distances seemed to be effectively an issue for intermarriage in the past, still it was rare for a chief to have only wives from his own village, and having a mother from another ethnic group has never been a problem in terms of the opportunities for their sons to acquire some customary role. More recently, marriages between distant villages have also increased, and among people living in Mongo ethnicity seems to matter much less.

These findings confirmed for me the initial conversation I had with Sheba about the fact that nowadays Hadjiray are so mixed in themselves that there is no reason to focus on ethnic distinctions between them. Even though their language makes Yalnas an "island in the sea", nowadays there are more common elements than differences. However, the discourse about

the importance of knowing your in-laws and claims that women could be given only between groups who recognised each other through an alliance are very common. Assan explained to me that there is a Chadian Arabic word for this kind of alliance, which is *ahalié*. He told me that there are two kinds of alliance described by this word: marriage alliances, when "two groups become the same family" (Assane, Mongo, February 2015), and war alliances, whose purpose is just mutual protection from an external enemy. However, on the ground this distinction seems more nuanced: the alliance between Borock and Jujube was described to me as a war alliance, but I have found mixed marriages between the two villages both in the past and more recently; at the same time, even though Djogo has a wedding alliance with both Jujube and Mapita, in neither case did the two groups become the "*same family*": the Mapita village chief told me they are all Migami, but the people coming from Jujube remember their origin; in Djogo, they told me they are happy to call Mapita people Migami, but remember that their stories are different. Finally, people of Jujube never tried to acquire the Migami name, as they had been recognised as a canton since colonial times, and therefore it was more convenient to stick to their own identity than look for another chief's protection.

Another area where alliances have an important role is the so-called "blood-price", *diya* in Chadian Arabic. Whenever an individual commits a blood crime, his group is required to compensate the family of the victim. According to my sources, *diya* and *ahalié* were the only two local institutions commonly accepted in pre-colonial times. Every time there was a controversy between two different groups, the *diya* enabled the problems to be regulated peacefully, while when the problem was between members of the same community, the only solution was to expel the guilty. This is another element sometimes used to denigrate the Yalnas, as I was told that they collected among them all those people who had lost their link with original community, therefore including persons sent away from their villages because of accusations of murder or sorcery.

The Yalnas canton of Lucepa bases its ownership of the land on a *diya* agreement. According to Lucepa elders, their land was given to them as a *diya* from the original owner, the Goula. After a Goula committed a crime against one of their Arab fellows, they had to pay their *diya*. At that time, there was a big group of Arabs living under the authority of a Tounjour chief (who was also an Arabic speaker) and they were all entitled to a *diya* for that crime. The Goula gave all their cattle as a payment to a group of Arabs – the Red Oumar Arabs – who still live as nomads, and all the land to another group – the Black Oumar Arabs – who then decided to create

Lucepa and settle, under the authority of the Tounjour chief[20]. The name of Yalnas arrived later, to enable the assimilation of all the foreigners who came under a new, shared ethnonym.

This is the only story of *diya* I have heard of from pre-colonial times. However, both *diya* and *ahalié* were presented to me as the oldest social institutions in Guéra. Moreover, I have found that the links created by this practice are still strong: in all the villages under the authority of a canton chief from a different ethnic group, I was told that they were paid local taxes to the canton chief in charge of that territory, but they paid the *diya* to their family. The distinction between the person to whom they pay taxes and the person to whom they pay the *diya* was important in how the inhabitants of the villages presented themselves. During the pre-fieldwork in N'Djamena, various civil society actors complained to me about the *diya*, as they considered it a practice of some groups from the north which had been introduced in the whole country since the 1980s and guaranteed the more powerful groups the capacity to exert power over the powerless. This criticism seems inappropriate for the Hadjiray, who apparently consider *diya* to be a local institution. While I was in Guéra, the Bidio of a neighbouring village had to pay the *diya* for one of their family members who had committed a crime in Abeche, while a similar issue happened among Yalnas a few weeks before my arrival. In these cases, someone from the group oversees the collection of money among the various family of the group until they are able to compensate the family of the victim of the crime.

Ahalié and *diya* provided some sort of union between different groups and the ties created through these institutions were sometimes deeper than local leaders want to remember these days. In the case of the Yalnas, I have found their relationships with Djogo to be very important as a tool for legitimising their presence on their territory, while in Chapter Six I will show how the *ahalié* with Borock has been recently used to improve the participation of Jujube in NGO projects. The network of the *diya*, still cutting across different formal administrative divisions, maintains contact between members of the same family who find themselves separated over the time, but do not forget their original ties. It shows how, despite the importance of the colonial power's administrative divisions, pre-existing social links have not been totally erased. Moreover, it shows how, despite the claim that a marriage alliance implies the union of two

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[20] In all the stories I have collected, there is often some confusion between Tounjour (the dynasty ruling in Wadai before the arrival of the Abbassid), who were Arabic-speaking farmers, and various groups of nomadic Arabs, who claimed to be from the same family, but with some difference. The ruling family of Lucepa defines itself as *Tounjour*, but, at the same time, claims that the Arab Oumar are the same family. They kept the name *Yalnas* to integrate other Arabic speakers who were neither Tounjour nor Arab Oumar, but I had not the time to visit the neighbouring villages and collect their stories.

groups and the widespread conviction that most of the marriages happen within the same family, various Hadjiray groups had more interrelations than they now like to admit. The stress on the fact that each group is like a family seems more a statement to justify the actual distribution of power than a real explanation of the way local ethnic groups and their leaders have been recognised over time.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I want to show how some contradictions of this local rhetoric about kinship and power recently emerged between Yalnas and Bidio. The efforts of Yalnas to be integrated in Guéra achieved some results, as shown by this chapter, but was based on a different interpretation of the past from that of their closest neighbours, the Bidio. In a context like Guéra, with multiple sources of legitimacy over land, property and power, as well as the lack of a unique central power, this integration has been possible to a certain degree. However, the changing of social and power relationships in the area, especially following the national and global transformations that are affecting the governance of local goods since the 1980s, are making those contradictions more relevant. The tensions between Bidio and Yalnas and the reference to slavery in their dialectics are a privileged point of view for assessing this process and the impact of the legacies of slavery on it. In the next two chapters, I focus on the contemporary arena of political struggle to demonstrate this point and its implications.

5. Conclusions

This chapter focused on the creation of kin and the development of their social relationships in the Guéra region. The purposes of the chapter were to describe the social dynamics that enabled the integration of Yalnas into the new social and political arena created by the colonial state, and to assess if this integration is effective or if Yalnas' past still matters. Understanding the possibility of Yalnas intermarrying with other Hadjiray is a key to comprehend if and how legacies of slavery matter in Guéra. The chapter moved from the pre-colonial past, when the inhabitants of Guéra were mainly described by outsiders as Kirdi – pagans – and there were no strong social relationships between the groups behind this label. It described the changes brought by the imposition of the colonial state, which blocked raids against the Kirdi and forced them to settle in the same political space. A common definition of *Hadjiray*, a Chadian Arabic word to indicate the "people of the mountain" progressively replaced the denigrating label *Kirdi*, while the administrative division of the region led to the emergence of various local ethnonyms that distinguished between the groups of Hadjiray according to their languages. Various criteria were used by local groups to assert their identities and the related rights to

land and political representation within the frame of the colonial state. This facilitated the emergence of alternative narratives and sources of legitimacy which are still present in Guéra. In this process, a group of people without a clear origin and genealogy was recognised under the ethnonym of *Yalnas*. This name is mostly considered a marker for a group of slave descendants, even though both historical sources and local informants have no clear idea about their past.

Despite the term's negative connotations, the people defined as *Yalnas* have been able to achieve a certain degree of integration into the Guéra political system, both through a cooperative approach with the French colonisers and efforts to create friendship ties with the other groups of Guéra. The presence of a recognised leader among them who had created alliances since pre-colonial times, as well as the lack of a dominant local group capable of imposing its own version of the Yalnas' ambiguous past, enabled their integration with the other indigenous groups. On one hand, the "frontier" nature of the area of Guéra (Kopytoff 1987), the "malleability" (Lentz 2013) of the local narratives deployed to describe a context of intense mobility, and the lack of a central power for centuries, facilitated this process. On the other hand, the nature of Guéra as a former slave reservoir, without clear hierarchies among local groups and where slavery affected, in different ways, all the contemporary Hadjiray, may have facilitated the Yalnas' acceptance. Social institutions such as marriage, *ahalié* and *diya* guaranteed some continuity in the relationships between different groups, creating a common ground for the Yalnas' acceptance among the Hadjiray.

Looking at the social behaviour of the Yalnas, as well as that of the other Hadjiray groups, marriage practices and alliances seem to have been an important strategy. During pre-colonial times, such practices were more frequent than people today like to admit, and were intended to increase the size and strength of local groups for resisting slave raids. Then marriages became both a strategy for presenting local groups as real kin in front of the other groups, claiming to have implemented a selective choice of partners, and a tool for developing alliances and gaining support in case of local conflicts. Through this strategy, an assortment of scattered people could unite and be recognised as Yalnas; and subsequently, taking advantage of the kin of their chief – who had some alliances with other local groups – they were able to develop a network of alliances facilitating their access to mixed weddings.

The Yalnas took advantage of the colonial state-building process and enlarged their social network. As result, all the people originally recognised as Yalnas are currently relatively well integrated in Guéra. The ambiguities related to the Yalnas' past have long been overshadowed,

but not totally forgotten. The complex relationship that they have with their neighbours – the Bidio – which is the closest one involving more frequent exchanges, but which also lacks any kind of locally recognised agreement between them, seems the main social context when these ambiguities may emerge. The argument I aim to develop in the next chapter is that the tensions between Yalnas and their neighbours (mainly, but not exclusively, the Bidio) are based on opposite interpretations of the past themselves intended to exert stronger control over local resources. These tensions have been rising in the last two decades and revived contradictions and misunderstandings that were obscured in the process of integration among different Guéra groups that followed colonisation. In the next chapter, I will explore in more detail the issues related to the Yalnas' past, moving on to a local political arena whose importance has been growing in this recent years: the land tenure system.

Chapter 5

Slaves, masters and land ownership. Struggles about rights over land in Guéra

1. Introduction

"There is a lot of land around here. We don't have a land chief, and also we don't need one. Everyone makes his field where he wants around the village; we don't need rules or authority, you just choose where is free" (Annour, Jujube, October 2014).

"We would like to settle here, but these days land is becoming scarce and nobody would allow us to do this. We have to remain nomadic, even though it would be better to have some lands for us to settle" (Férik Djalloul chief, Kuju, March 2015).

"In our canton, land is abundant and there are various land chiefs who manage it. However, this region is getting full of herders and there are even cantons, like Oyo, that do not have land, so we must help them and solve their problems. Land is not an issue for us, but there are other groups that we have to take care of" (Migami canton chief, Moro, October 2014).

During my stay in Jujube, there was a contradiction that struck me quickly and for which it was difficult to find an explanation. When talking about land with Jujube people, I was often told that the land was so abundant around the village that they didn't need to have formal divisions or local leaders in charge of it. Every head of a family could just go and farm where they wanted, without any conflicts arising. Even though Jujube is surrounded by Bidio villages and sometimes the fields are overlapping, there are no strict divisions to respect. At the same time, I met many nomadic groups who would have liked to settle, but it was very hard for them to find land. Moreover, I often heard about disputes over land between villages, sometimes with fights and even murders. The border between Kuju and Zola, a few kilometres west of Jujube, is one of those areas where conflicts can easily arise.

A point I have progressively become aware of is that, even though land is abundant in Guéra, good agricultural land is becoming scarcer. The region has often been in agricultural deficit over the last decade with production unable to satisfy local food needs. Nowadays, vast portions of the region cannot be used for farming and the places where water is easily accessible are also rare (Oxfam 2013). Although the main issue, in colonial times, was to prevent unused or partially used land being claimed by the central government (Roasngar

2008), since climatic changes have affected the area from the 1980s onwards, and with the more recent demographic boom, fertile land is becoming scarce and controlling it more strategically important.

Land issues have historically marked slave descendants' communities, with groups labelled as slave-descendants often prevented from formally owning land. However, from the beginning of my fieldwork, it was clear that Yalnas were not suffering the same kind of discrimination. They had a canton chief, who had a small area legally considered as his territory. Moreover, even when Yalnas villages are located on someone else's land, they don't need to pay rent or give part of their harvest to the owners of the land. This evidence also suggests that in the area of land tenure the social legacies of slavery in a former slave reservoir are not as serious as in areas where slave manpower was effectively exploited. However, in this arena I have found more contradictions and local conflicts than in dealing with kinship. The reduction of farmland is at the root of intensifying conflicts for its control. In this framework, Yalnas' land rights have sometimes been questioned. I have heard people from other Hadjiray groups telling me that, like Yalnas, they cannot own land, but can only be guests of someone else. In the previous chapter, I stated that through intermarriages and alliances with other Hadjiray, the people labelled as Yalnas came to be recognised as a local group. These discourses about the impossibility of them being land owners contradicts their apparent acceptance as a local group, implicitly giving them a lower status.

During my fieldwork, I explored land issues in Guéra, trying to understand how the Yalnas' presumed past as slave descendants is used in the competition for land access, and how Jujube people and their fellows deal with these problems. In this chapter, I first set out the theoretical framework of my analysis, emphasising the crucial link between land tenure and the political system described by the more recent research on this topic (Berry 2009, Lund 2011, Lentz 2013). Then, I present the situation of Yalnas in the Guéra department, explaining their arrangements for land use. I explore in more depth two specific land conflicts, arguing that what matters is the recognition of land ownership Yalnas claim for the Jujube area and its neighbouring areas. Finally, I examine the historical and contemporary context of land tenure as a way of interpreting these conflicts, to show how the land tenure system in Guéra was built along with the local administrative system in colonial times, where different memories of the past were produced to legitimise the presence of certain groups in certain areas. This process enabled the integration of an ambiguous group like the Yalnas but, at the same time, created a

very scattered context, where conflicts, particularly as access to fertile land has become more scarce and precious, are likely to arise and the Yalnas' status likely to be contested.

2. Land, resources and slavery

In Chapter Two I explained how land ownership is one of the most critical social aspects of slave-descendants' integration in the contemporary Sahel, drawing on a range of ethnographic sources. Among the examples mentioned, Diop (2003), explored in depth the case in Guinea Conakry of a project that aimed to develop agriculture in previously unfarmed lands in the late 1980s triggered a competition for the legitimate control of the land. This competition revived old divisions between the descendants of slaves, who were trying to exploit this opportunity to increase their wealth and secure their land ownership; and the descendants of their masters, who revived their own older claim on land ownership to maintain their local power. Similar situations are mentioned in most of the post-slavery literature, the main exception being the GannunkeeBe (translated in French as *Gando*), a group who proved capable of taking the control of the land independently from their previous masters Fulbe[21] and acquiring a strong political and economic status (Hardung 2009). Land, therefore, is crucial to assessing slave trajectories and the opportunities of slave descendants, and in most cases is a factor that contributes to their marginality or forces their migration.

The limitations to the rights of slave-descendants to own land are generally related to their non-recognition as full kinship groups. Moreover, the link between belonging and rights in most of African societies, reified by colonial policies (Berry 2009, Lund 2011, Lentz 2013), further affects slave descendants' capacity to own land. In Chapter Four, moving from the flexibility of the concepts used to build a link between land and belonging (Lentz 2013) and from the variety of modalities used to build it in the Guéra (Vincent 1975, Zeltner 1997, Jedrei 2006), I described the Yalnas' strategies for overcoming any such limitations and securing the possibility to intermarry with other local groups. I emphasised how some local alliances, and careful handling of their relationships with the colonial government allowed them to be accepted as a local group. However, their ethnonym has an ambiguous meaning, whose ambiguity sometimes emerges in their relationship with their closest neighbours, the Bidio.

I found the topic of land tenure important in further exploring the issues related to the legacies of slavery and better understanding the actual role of Yalnas in Guéra region. Land

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[21] As in most of the groups indicated as slave descendants, not all the GannunkeeBe are necessarily former slaves, even though as a group they tend to be labelled as such.

tenure is a significant political topic in many African contexts and in Chad is acquiring importance (Benan 2004, Ablaye Roasngar 2008). Sara Berry (2009. P. 24) defines land as a "political space – territory to be controlled both for its economic value and as a source of leverage over other people". Christian Lund (2011, p.71) emphasised the important link between "property and citizenship", whose core element is "recognition". He argues that in many post-colonial contexts there is not just one strong, single actor defining citizenship criteria, but different sources of legitimacy for both property and political rights. These rights are not definitively acquired, but need to be constantly consolidated (Lund 2011, p. 74 – 75). Therefore, problems related to land emerge often in Africa and tend to be related to other political struggles, such as those related to citizenship and ethnic identities.

These conclusions fit with the description of the "malleable" first-comer narrative, used as a strategy for dealing with land tenure and belonging in the politically marginal African contexts discussed in the previous chapter (Lentz 2013). Exploring the meaning of "property" in such narratives, Lentz emphasises how this concept has a broader meaning than the one it has acquired in the Western world and should be considered as a "continuum of rights, ranging from mere access to the right to alienate land, as well as a continuum of rights holders, ranging from individuals to extended family and larger communities" (2013, p. 10). These rights "pertain to different economic and ritual activities, such as hunting and gathering, grazing animals, cultivating food crops or commercial plants, planting or felling trees, conducting sacrifices, building houses, or cutting the sod for burials" (2013, p. 128), and can be exerted by different actors at different moments, following different agreements.

As mentioned, there is a wide literature describing how, an ideology of autochthony has been built on local narratives in various contexts, following governance reforms implemented across Africa since the 1980s. This has increased local conflict for power and resources (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009, 2011;). The application of local rules on property and land tenure is an arena where often slave-descendants have found themselves in a weaker position; therefore, these wider changes are impacting on their condition in various ways, making their status increasingly politically relevant (Botte 2000, Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011; Hardung and Pelckmans 2015). This is the framework to consider when exploring the case of the Yalnas and its link with history of Guéra as a slave reservoir. From the start of my fieldwork, I witnessed various land conflicts: between herders and farmers, between groups claiming to be the owners and others considered as simply users, because of different interpretations of land

boundaries or because an area considered unused by one group constituted a land reserve for another.

In contrast to other Hadjiray groups, in Yalnas communities – as well as among the Arabs and the Dadjo – there is not a specific land chief in charge of the allocation of cultivable land. The heads of families choose a plot around the village and mobilise the household for farming activities. Usually men take care of cereals (millet and sorghum), while women farm peanuts and sesame, trading a small part of it. I was told that heads of families tend to farm the same areas. The main issue for youths wishing to create their own households is to find a space to build their houses and a space to farm. The various local arrangements depend on the availability of land for the village, which may be related to various factors. It is worth remembering that all these villages settled in the plains during the 1910s and their authority was formally recognised during the *découpage* of 1923. It is difficult to know whether there were effectively enforced agreements before that day, although since the *decoupage,* all the resettlements have had to be formally recognised by state authorities (colonial and then postcolonial).

During my fieldwork, I visited various Yalnas villages and talked with their elders. The topic of land emerged quite often while discussing the stories of the villages, although in different ways. In Chapter Three, I explained that cantons in Guéra do not have clear boundaries and, therefore, canton chiefs' authority applies to defined groups of people, but not clearly within a territory. In the case of Yalnas, most of the villages under the authority of the Yalnas canton chief recognise that the land where they are located belongs to another group. Sagal 1, Sagal 2, Loba and Mitele live on land under the authority of the Bidio canton chief; Kalab, Karda, Bala and Mapita are in areas under the authority of the Migami canton chief; Ibis is in an area whose authority is contested by the Dadjo and Bidio chiefs, while Erancia is in an area officially considered as the Arab Inenat canton, but whose land is locally considered to be owned by the Dangaleat canton chief. The land whose ownership is claimed by the Yalnas canton chief – thanks to the old alliance with Djogo described in the previous chapter – is that of Jujube and the area around it, which includes the villages of Kuju and Tamar. In the table below, I summarise the situation of the villages whose official chief – or one of them, in the case of bigger villages with multiple ethnic group – is a Yalnas.

Village	Ethnicity of village chief	Canton where the village is located	Agreement on the use?
Jujube	Yalnas	Yalnas	Both Jujube (Yalnas) and Zola (Bidio) claim ownership of the land
Tamar	Yalnas	Yalnas	
Kuju	Yalnas	Yalnas	
Loba	Yalnas and Bidio	Bidio	Recognised Bidio ownership
Karda	Yalnas	Migami	Recognised Migami ownership
Bala	Yalnas and Migami	Migami	Recognised Migami ownership
Mitele	Yalnas, Migami, Dadjo	Migami	Various groups united since the 1970s, each group has its farming area
Sagal 1	Yalnas, Bidio, Dadjo	Bidio	Recently allowed to settle there
Sagal 2	Yalnas, Migami	Migami	Old agreement with Migami
Ibis	Yalnas	Bidio, Dadjo	Boundaries between two cantons not yet set

Table 3: Land agreements in villages ruled by Yalnas

Sagal 1 is a quarter of Amene, a town inhabited by five different ethnic groups. This town grew dramatically during the civil war (1960s – 1980s), when small neighbouring villages had to congregate in Amene for security reasons. The people of Sagal 1 migrated to Amene in this period, but had no plots of land to farm in the area, nor was it easy for them to find any. According to their story, they had to struggle for some years, until peace came to the area and they could go back to using their former plots of land for farming. Nowadays, there are no struggles for land among the different groups inhabiting Amene, but often their fields are far away from the village, as they are for Sagal 1 people. Therefore, they have built some huts in the area they farm, where they can stay during the seeding and harvest periods. However, the ownership of that land has never been a problem. In Sagal 2, Karda and Bala, the situations are less complicated. All these villages are in Migami canton and there were originally mixed Yalnas-Migami communities that decided to split when cantons were created, but kept living

and farming in the same territory. Loba is in a similar situation, but in Bidio land, while the story of Mitele is similar to that of Amene, with different groups gathering together during the rebellions and dividing the land around the village. The cases of Jujube, Kuju, Tamar and Ibis are more problematic and will be further explored in the next section. In the following table, I present the situation of compounds of Yalnas that are not officially recognised as villages or quarters, but where there are important Yalnas communities.

Village	Ethnicity of village chief	Canton where the village is located	Agreement on the use?
Erancia	Arab	Dangaleat	Yalnas joined Arabs, who accepted Dangaleat ownership
Kalab	Migami	Migami	Agreement with Migami
Mapita	Migami	Migami	Agreement with Migami
Barag	Dadjo	Dadjo	Yalnas settled at the beginning of colonial period

Table 4: Land agreements in villages where Yalnas are a minority

Kalab is a very small settlement a few kilometres outside Mongo, where some Yalnas moved shortly before colonisation to join some of their family members who used to live as nomads, but decided to settle and were looking for some support. They remained there throughout the colonial period and, during the rebellion, were joined by a group of Migami from Djogo, the owners of that land, who were already allied with them. Since then, they remained together; when, after the rebellions, the Yalnas canton chief Adam proposed to its inhabitants to move to and settle in Jujube, they decided to remain where they were, as they had very good relationships with the Migami and enough land for their farming activities. Mapita has a similar story, even though the Yalnas living in this village migrated in a more remote past. In Erancia, a village very close to the capital of the neighbouring department, Bitkine, all the land belongs to the Dangaleat canton chief. However, the Arabic speaking people are under the authority of an Arab canton chief. I was told that the agreements between Arabs and Dangaleat had existed since the pre-colonial time and there have never been issues related to land. Yalnas of Erancia village migrated there from Jujube at the beginning of the 20th century. During the *découpage*, they chose to stay under the authority of the Arab canton chief, as they are Arabic speakers. As those Arabs already had an agreement with the Dangaleat, who are the local owners of the

land, they can farm there without any issue. Barag is a small settlement on Dadjo land that was occupied by a group of Yalnas looking for more fertile land shortly after colonisation. The arrangement with the Dadjo was agreed some years later; since then, they have recognised Dadjo authorities, without any issues.

In these cases, the Yalnas communities have good political relationships with their hosts. I personally visited all these villages with the purpose of collecting the stories of their creation. Interestingly, in all the meetings, the topic of land came up spontaneously. Often these Yalnas groups recounted having had to leave the Jujube area to find better land to farm. Once they found new areas to settle down in, securing their farming rights was among their first concerns. This was done through agreements with the local owners of the land, nowadays recognised as canton chiefs. The story of the migration of the group to the territory they inhabit and the authorisation to settle there from some local groups was the means to show this legitimacy. While in the case presented below, Yalnas seems to be well accepted, I have already described how tensions exist between Bidio and Yalnas in other situations. In the next section, I will focus on one of the roots – if not the main root – of these tensions. In contrast to their land ownership in the aforementioned villages, Jujube and two other Yalnas villages – Kuju and Tamar – are in a portion of land that the Bidio of Zola consider to be theirs. The story of the marriage with the queen of Djogo is not recognised by this group, and thus two different ideas about the past are put forward often in the interactions between the two groups.

3. Land conflicts in Guéra: the story of Kuju and Ibis

When I heard the story of the Yalnas for the first time, the marriage with the Djogo queen who gave them the ownership of Jujube land was one of the first and more heavily emphasised elements, together with the aristocratic origin of Jujube's founder, Mahmoun. However, the Bidio generally claim that the land of Jujube belongs to them, as, in their version, the land where Jujube is located was not under the Djogo *margay*, but under that of the Bidio village Zola. Therefore, even if the story of Mahmoun's marriage is true, it does not give them ownership of that portion of the territory. Outside Djogo and the villages under Jujube authority, in most villages I visited the elders would say that the Jujube area belongs to the Bidio. The only reason this area was awarded to Yalnas was because they were clever in their relationship with the French colonial government. According to both Bidio and Migami informants, many Arabic speaking groups tried to do this in the 1920s. When the French arrived, their soldiers could only speak Arabic, and therefore some of the Arabic speaking groups who wished to settle managed to be rewarded with land for cooperation with the

colonial army. This is a widespread opinion among Hadjiray local groups, which emerged in various situations during the fieldwork. These controversies become important when there were initiatives requiring some authorisation from the "land owners", or that would lead to financial compensation, such as construction or development projects involving direct actions on the land. In these moments, the contradictions that are usually avoided emerge and foster disputes. These are also the situations when the category of slavery appears as a political tool to denigrate the opponents on both sides: the Bidio accuse the Yalnas of being slave descendants and, therefore, guests on their land; the Yalnas accuse the Bidio of being the descendants of the people they used to raid, seeking revenge through this allegation. This issue is not limited to Yalnas and Bidio: Ibis, a Yalnas village in contested land between Bidio and Dadjo, was claimed by the Dadjo. However, the narrative involving slavery emerges clearly only when the disputes involve Bidio and Yalnas, whereas with the Dadjo, slavery does not seem relevant. I will explore these issues through two cases: the tensions between Kuju and Zola, and those between the inhabitants of Ibis and the Dadjo canton chief.

3.1 The story of Kuju and Zola

Kuju and Zola are two villages very close to each other, in the plains dividing the *Abou Telfane* mountain chain – the main mountain chain of the department – from the small mountain chains behind Zola and Nevio, inhabited by Bidio. Kuju is inhabited only by Yalnas people and is on the land that the inhabitants of Jujube consider theirs, but which is also claimed by the Bidio. In fact, the two mountain ranges converge toward this plain, where villages were created at the beginning of the 20th century. Kuju and Zola are nowadays in a central part of the valley. In the past, the two groups inhabited the mountains on opposite sides of this valley, so it is not clear which group has rights over the plains.

I visited Kuju with my research assistant, Annour, in October 2014. Kuju elders told me that their village was created by a nephew of the founder of Jujube a few years after Jujube, and that, therefore, the land of Kuju belongs to them, because they are from the family of the Yalnas canton chief. The elders told me the story of this village:

"At a certain point, there was a split in Jujube between two sons of Mahmoun, Jujube's founder. The younger wanted to create a new village, but he also wanted to keep good ties with his brother, so he moved a few kilometres away and built Kuju. At that time, the people of Zola lived on the mountain; they came down after we arrived and guaranteed the security of the area" (Kuju village chief, Kuju, October 2014)

According to this story, Kuju is on the plot of the land entrusted by the Djogo people to Mahmoun and was built by the members of his family. As with Jujube people, the root of their right over the land is their alliance with the people of Djogo. During the conversation, I was initially told that the people of Zola were already there when Kuju was built, but as they stayed on the opposite mountain, there were not many relationships between them. However, after the recorded interview with all the elders, there was a more intimate conversation about the past relationship between Zola and Kuju. I heard that there was a fight between Zola and Sameh, a village under the authority of the Bidio canton chief, 5 kilometres south of Zola. Kuju people, like Jujube people, claim to be former warriors, who used to take captives from other Guéra villages. They told me that during this war their ancestors supported Zola against Sameh, because Zola people were peasants, and therefore not very good in fighting. Thanks to this battle, the Kuju chief became the ruler of Zola, too. This happened shortly before the arrival of the French, who separated the two groups at the time of the *découpage*. This story was told to me by the chief and by his brother, and they warned me that the people of Zola would feel ashamed to remember it and for sure, if I asked, would deny this account.

I then arranged a visit to Zola through Ahmat, a young Bidio friend I met in Mongo, in April 2015. I knew that if I had visited the village with Annour, Zola's inhabitants would have been more reluctant to talk to us. During that journey, I was focused on collecting the stories of their village and checking if there were common aspects to triangulate with the stories I collected in Kuju and Jujube. The people of Zola are all Bidio and claim to be the real owners of that area. They have a *margay* on a mountain opposite to Kuju and, according to their land chief, all the land under that mountain is under the protection of their *margay*. They told me that they allowed Kuju people to inhabit the area where they are now, but did not give them the ownership of the land. I heard no mention from them about the conflict with Sameh and the support they got from Kuju, which was a crucial event in the area according to the Kuju chief. The elders of Zola were mainly focused on their previous conflicts with Nevio – the other important *margay* and the capital of Bidio canton – and did not spontaneously mention Kuju, until I asked them about it. At this point, they told me that Zola was already there when Kuju people arrived and, as these newcomers were landless, "our ancestors allowed them to settle on our land, as our guests". Since that moment, there were normal relationships between the two villages, including intermarriage, even though during the conversation I was clearly told "Yalnas means *abid* [slave in both classic and Chadian Arabic]: if they are called this, it is because they were slaves in the past" (Zola village chief, Zola, April 2015). On this point, I often heard the word *abid* when Zola people were talking about Kuju, though Ahmat tried to avoid

translating these conversations in any depth. However, one of the village chief's sons understood that I wanted to explore that point and was quite clear with me:

"We don't know from where they arrived or who first called them Yalnas, but Yalnas for us is like abid, there is no real difference. They arrived alone and we had no problems with marrying with them from the beginning, as we are all Muslim, but of course they have a bad reputation because of the name. Here everyone has his hypotheses, but I read a paper in Mongo and it was clearly written that they were liberated captives" (Ibeth, Zola, April 2015)

The document in which he read about them is the same as I found in N'Djamena – the collection of reports from Louis Duault (1938) – and it seemed clear to me that Zola elders do not have a solid knowledge of Jujube or Kuju stories. They consider them to be guests on their territory and assume, from their ambiguous name, a past as slaves that reinforces the claim that they should not be considered land owners. However, they seem to have always had normal social relationships with them. All local sources on both sides agree on the fact that since Kuju and Zola were created, there have been no tensions between the two villages. In precolonial times, they inhabited the opposite sides of the mountains. In the aftermath of colonisation, when farming became the more important activity in the area, the major need for a couple that wanted to marry and live together was to find a plot of land to farm and some support to build a house. Marriage between close villages spread and, as fertile land was much more abundant than it is now, there were no issues in finding new plots to farm.

The land problems started in the second half of the 1980s[22]: according to local stories, two families, one from Kuju and one from Zola, had an issue about the limit of their respective fields. I could not obtain precise information, as in both villages there was a reluctance to talk about it. In Jujube, I was told that, after the initial incomprehension, the situation escalated into violence and people were killed on both sides. "These things happen often in Chad, but with Zola people it was shocking, we have so many brothers living there" (Nora, Jujube, November 2014) said Nora, the sister of the Jujube chief, after we stopped in Zola to greet some friends on our way back from Mongo. Ahmat is a Bidio from Nevio and he also knew this story. He told me that it is difficult for him too to explain the reason for these tensions, as part of his family is from Jujube and he used to think they were just the same family (Ahmat, Mongo, February 2015). During the conversation with the elders in Zola, they clearly told me

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[22] I received different and contradictory explanations about when the first conflict happened and when the government forbade farming in the neighbouring area. In any case, here I am trying to summarise the main points with a broad chronology, based on the various versions.

that, even though they can marry Jujube and Kuju people, when they made their alliance with them, they allowed them to "farm our land, as they had no land" (Zola village chief, Zola, April 2015). The divergent memories of the past in Zola and Kuju do not seem to have been relevant before this incident.

After the clashes, local heads of families and respective canton chiefs failed to reach an agreement. The prefect established a border, where nobody could farm. However, I could not find any written confirmation of this decision, nor was it clearly explained to me which area was considered neutral. Apparently, with this restriction, there were no new conflicts between Zola and Kuju for some years. Then, at the beginning of the 2000s, a local mobile phone company decided to install an antenna very close to Kuju and, therefore, to compensate this village, gave some money to its authorities and hired a local family as watchmen for the antenna. Apparently, there should have been no doubt, as the antenna is in the land farmed by Kuju people, quite far from Zola. However, this decision provoked the reaction of Zola elders. They claimed that, as they were the real owners of the land, all the benefits related to the installation of the antenna should go to them. In this case, the conflict was handled from the beginning at the customary authorities' level, without violence between people.

The chiefs of the two cantons mobilised their elders – many of them occupying roles in the administrative machine – trying to persuade the prefect about who was entitled to the money. Abdel at the time of this crisis was serving as a sous-préfet in another area. He was called by the Jujube chief because of his bureaucratic knowledge. He told me "they recognised that the land is for Jujube, therefore for our brother from Kuju" (Abdel, Mitele, November 2014). However, he could not provide me with detailed information, to the point that I doubted he was seriously involved, or that Kuju rights were recognised in the end. A few months later, in Mongo, Jaime, the head of a local organisation, confirmed to me the story as it was presented by Jujube elders. He told me that the issue was solved through colonial-period written documents[23] proving the existence of Kuju and the fact that it was under Jujube authority. These documents proved that Kuju was recognised by the colonial state as a village of the Yalnas chief, who had, thus, the right to receive compensation. State authorities should respect their own documents, in this case the administrative divisions established during the colonial time and never changed, although the general perception at a local level may be very different. The open refusal of Bidio elders to recognise Yalnas' entitlement over land was

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[23] Though Jaime could not tell me what document was used, I suspect it is again the Duault (1938) reports collection, as those are the only written documents I could find about *découpage* in Guéra and they were describing Jujube, Tamar and Kuju, recognising that they were part of Yalnas canton.

approved by many of the local leaders who told me about this issue in Mongo: as they are Yalnas, they are locally considered to be guests allowed to settle – but not to own – that land. However, according to official documents, the Yalnas chief was the recognised leader of that area and, therefore, the owner of its land.

As I noted previously, I found a political environment generally supportive of the Bidio claim. Almost everyone among the local leaders in Mongo[24] told me that Kuju people arrived later, so the land should not be considered their land; however, thanks to the agreement between colonial state and local authorities, they are officially recognised as owners of that land. Jaime told me that Jujube is not the only case like this:

"Many nomadic herders or slave descendants cheated the French. As they had just arrived, they did not know who these people really were, like we do. They got some documents written and now they can use them, but what is written is not the truth" (Jaime, Mongo, May 2015)

Nowadays, a Kuju family lives around the antenna area and receives regular income from it, while the money for the compensation was divided between the Yalnas canton chief and the Kuju chief. The issue of the border between Kuju and their neighbours is still unresolved, though the two communities continue to mix through intermarriage. The issue between Kuju and Zola is the only land issue I have found in the Jujube area, even though the root of the problem – the right of Yalnas to be considered owners of land – is emerging in other political issues. I have found other tensions between Bidio and Yalnas in Yalnas canton, based on other issues, such as the access to water wells or the management of cereal banks, which I will explore in Chapter Six. While, as I stated in the previous section, most of the Yalnas living on someone else's land have a peaceful agreement with the group locally recognised as the owner of the land, I have found another land tenure issue involving a group of Yalnas far from Jujube: the village of Ibis, in the southern part of Guéra department.

3.2 The story of Ibis

Ibis is a village composed of about ten households on the border between the Guéra and Salamat regions, in a scarcely inhabited area, which has been long under the control of the rebels and since then neglected by central state intervention[25]. Ibis is the last village on the paved road to Salamat region and is at least 10km after the only other village in the area and

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[24] The only local civil society leader openly supporting the Yalnas' claim was Ibrahim, whose family has an old agreement with Jujube, and he himself was married to Nora, one of the chief's sisters.

[25] This information comes from conversations with local people; I did not find written sources about it.

30km from Amene, the biggest town of this zone. Even though the area is scarcely populated and has some important resources for local livelihood, a formal dispute arose between the inhabitants of Ibis and the elder of a Dadjo canton (Dadjo Ere), whose authority formally covers the neighbouring department of Mangalme.

According to its inhabitants, Ibis was a camp of Arab herders, who decided to settle at the beginning of the 20th century. I collected its story from the village chief, a former soldier who could talk directly with me in French. He was the only elder of this small village, the other inhabitants being mainly younger relatives who followed him when he left Amene, in the 2000s. He cannot remember if his group originally decided to settle there before or after colonisation, but the two events were very close. When the French arranged the administrative division, Ibis remained isolated from all the other Arab villages, which were located in the neighbouring region of Salamat. Thus, they asked to be placed under the authority of the Yalnas canton chief, because of the common language and despite the long distance – almost 90km – separating Jujube from Ibis.

"Unlike in Salamat, there were no Arab cantons in Guéra and, as we were nomadic Arasb, and not Hadjiray, we wanted to stay with people speaking our language. When Yalnas was recognised as a canton, we already knew about Jujube people - some of our ancestors cooperated with them - so we decided to join that canton, even though we know we are not from the same family" (Ibis village chief, Ibis, December 2014)

After the *découpage*, Ibis people strengthened their friendship with the Yalnas, through marriages and regular visits, as they were their only allies in Guéra. Even if the inhabitants of the village defined themselves as "Arabs" and recognised their difference from the group of Yalnas, they found it convenient to ally and merge with them.

Ibis is mentioned in the colonial documents describing the region in the 1920s (Duault 1938), when they decided to settle and accepted the authority of the Yalnas chief. When I discussed this topic in Mongo, I was told by Mahmat (a local Member of Parliament) that "many Yalnas or other landless people started cooperating with the French when they were building roads or rearranging the land, so that the French would allow them to stay there, even if that land really belonged to someone else". He told me that for a long-time land was not a problem and the issues related to these practices were not important, at least until local leaders started to "rent or sell the land, which is something quite recent" (Mahmat, Mongo, February 2015). This objection is like those I have heard about Yalnas' land rights in Jujube and Kuju, and they told

me it could also apply to many nomadic Arabs who are trying to settle nowadays. Ibis people chose an area that had a lot of fertile land, was close to a mountain and far away from the main towns. During the 1970s turmoil, they were evacuated to the bigger village of Amene, together with other small groups. As the population dramatically increased in the 1990s, land and water around Amene became scarce. Therefore, the group decided to rebuild Ibis in the previous location, where land was still abundant.

There is a lot of fertile land and we can farm millet berberé, which grows in February and is less dependent on rain than the other varieties that are harvested in October. We are close to a ouadi [a small river that dries during the dry season] *and there is a lot of water, while in our previous location we had to walk very long distances to farm land* (Ibis village chief, Ibis, December 2014)

This was the chief's explanation for their choice. He told me that since rebuilding Ibis, he started arranging various *groupements* (a word often used by development actors and that can be translated into "interest groups"), hoping to attract NGO support; and tried to keep strong ties with Jujube, as the canton chief is a crucial ally in these kinds of issues. In a few months, Ibis was rebuilt in its previous location. Some of the canton chief's family members also moved there from Jujube, helping with the rebuilding of the village and looking for new, fertile land. Moreover, thanks to the pension he receives from France and the knowledge acquired while working for the French government as a soldier, the chief of Ibis is considered an important elder of the canton and has the ability and resources to lead his own initiatives.

A few weeks after the rebuilding of Ibis, a neighbouring group of Dadjo Ere asked the prefect to evict them. The customary leader of this canton had no alliances with the Yalnas and considered Ibis land to be under his jurisdiction. In this case, the issue was not strictly about ownership and borders, as it was between Kuju and Zola, but about the very existence of the village. The Dadjo Ere canton chief could not accept the creation of what he considered a new village in his land, while, according to the Ibis canton chief, they were just settling back in an area that had temporarily been unused, but that was the land of his village. In this case, there were no locally known agreements between the two groups: the Dadjo Ere were accusing Ibis people of being squatters, while they, in turn, claimed they were just rebuilding an old village in its previous location.

After fruitless efforts to find a solution between the two chiefs, the prefect of Mongo organised a field mission to solve the problem. The meeting between the chiefs and the

prefect was described to me by the Mongo police commissioner who accompanied the mission. He told me he had no idea about the Ibis story, but was impressed by the knowledge of the past shown by the Ibis chief, "there are not many elders like him left in Guéra"(Mongo police commissioner, Mongo, April 2015). The Ibis chief, together with the canton chief from Jujube and his elders, discussed the case with the local prefect and the representative of the Dadjo Ere canton. The Ibis village chief had a lot of information about the decisions made by the colonial government about Ibis since the 1920s. He demonstrated all the family connections that led the Arabs of Ibis to come under the authority of the Yalnas chief in the Guéra region, and they found colonial documents recognising the existence of Ibis and the villagers' contribution to the construction of the first road there, in the 1930s. The authorities, therefore, decided that the village of Ibis could be resettled in its original location, and the chiefs of the neighbouring cantons also agreed with this decision. The farming land available for Ibis people will be established by a government mission, which will set an official border between Ibis land, under the authority of the canton chief from Jujube; and the neighbouring Dadjo Ere area. At the time of my last visit to Chad, in August 2016, the borders had still not been finalised.

Even though the people with whom I have discussed this case in Mongo told me to ignore the Ibis situation[26], the categories they used to describe the case were like those of the Kuju-Zola case. In the conversation I had with Jaime, he told me both groups are definitely squatters who cheated the French, while in other conversations with people from Guéra local organisations, such as the Cereal Bank Federation or Foi et Joie (a local Catholic NGO working with community schools), people laughed when I told the Ibis story, assuming it was surely invented to steal some cultivable land. On the contrary, when I came back from Ibis to Jujube, the elders in Jujube were aware of the story and told me that is important for them to have a chief like the Ibis chief, as many Hadjiray groups tend to forget about the past, but, quoting Annour, "for us these memories are very important and the father of our chief did his best to collect and transmit knowledge about all the Yalnas village*" (Annour, Jujube, December 2015).

4. *Land tenure in Guéra*

I have addressed land tenure as it seemed to me a local political arena where the issues related to divisive narratives were most likely to emerge. My starting point was the fact that all

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[26] In fact, the Dadjo who are claiming that land are from another department and I could not directly talk with them. I talked about it mainly with people from Jujube and Ibis, and with officials from Mongo involved in the case.

the stories I collected in the various Yalnas villages served the purpose of legitimising their settlement on the land they were inhabiting. Yalnas were officially recognised as a canton during the *découpage*. The fact of having been formally recognised by the state was crucial in the conflicts between Zola and Kuju as well as in the Ibis case. In fact, Yalnas' formal rights over the land proved to be contested. When discussing these tensions with local leaders in Mongo, I often heard that Yalnas cannot own land, as they are not a local group. As long as small groups of them have local arrangements recognising the host group's ownership, their presence is not problematic. However, if they claim to be the owners – as they do in Jujube area – or settle in a territory without local agreements – as in Ibis – then issues arise and the negative stereotypes local people have of them emerge.

A common aspect of the stories I presented is the divergence of opinions about land legitimacy and related political rights. In Kuju, what is at stake is a plot of land in the mountains separating three cantons: Migami, Bidio, and Yalnas. In the case of Ibis this is an uninhabited area at the boundary between two different cantons (Dadjo and Bidio), where a group of people under the authority of a Yalnas canton chief tried to settle. In all these cases, the conflict divided the group labelled Yalnas from their neighbours, confirming my initial assumption that Yalnas land rights may be more problematic than those of other groups. The element that makes these cases – Kuju and Ibis – different from the other villages is that the Yalnas group claims to be the owner of that land, presenting a divergent story about that area from those of the other groups. The nature of Guéra as a former slave-reservoir contributes to this uncertainty about ownership. In fact, the lack of a single power ruling over the territory created a shattered context, with different groups claiming different parts of the territory according to different legitimacy sources. When the French colonial government tried to impose a single power in the territory, different groups competed for recognition by the new power as cantons and built alternative stories to legitimise their power. This is the context in which a group like the Yalnas were able to achieve recognition and inclusion, despite their ambiguous past.

4.1 Land tenure in precolonial and colonial Guéra

As I explained in Chapter Three, the administrative divisions of the *découpage* were the first time this area was organised under a single power and were built upon a variety of flexible narratives and contradictory interpretations of the past. In the Guéra Mountains, different waves of people progressively came and mixed with others that were already located there. There are various legends of "original" Guéra people who were born from the mountains –

according to local myths - and had a special link with the spirits inhabiting those mountains. Talking with local people about history, insecurity is the main aspect of pre-colonial Guéra. The main issues for local groups before colonisation were protection and access to forest resources. Migrants were often allowed to settle close to already existing villages and share the resources. The Protestant priest Assane explained this process to me.

"Our forefathers were very shrewd. They needed people, so they easily allowed them to settle in the neighbourhood of the first villages, but they always wanted them to respect their margay and, therefore, the fact that the land ownership was not for them" (Assane, Mongo, February 2015)

In 1906 the French took control of Guéra and in 1911 Wadai capitulated to the French army, putting an end to slave raids and trade in the area. For the first time, the mountains of the Guéra region were all under a single political authority. From 1906 onwards, the French forced Guéra people to come down from the mountain and settle on the plain. Even though Guéra were clearly not suited to projects of market oriented agriculture, the government could more easily control people on the plains and some local production was needed to pay taxes to fund the newly created colonial institutions. Moreover, since colonisation, Islam gradually became the main religion in Guéra, and the original migration from the east of Guéra groups acquired more prestige and local genealogies were reshaped to it, creating the variety of contemporary narratives that exist in the department (Fuchs 1997).

In such a context, the French army also had to organise an administrative system, to control an array of groups who were not used to having a centralised authority. During the 1910s, local groups slowly abandoned the mountains and created new villages on the plains around them. In this period, local groups chose their own customary leaders, acting as local representatives under the authority of the French colonial government. These agreements were formalized in the *decoupage* in 1923, when all the decisions regarding cantons and land divisions were taken. An ancestral link with the mountains' spirits was the main socially accepted criterion for claiming ownership over a territory, according to ethnic groups claiming to be autochthonous. Therefore, the *margay* was the element that gave the right to own the surrounding territory. However, the power relations when cantons were created also played a role. The Dadjo had no formal rights according to this logic, as they had come more recently than any other groups, but, as they were a big and powerful group, the government recognised their control of a big portion of land. Dadjo canton borders are often controversial, as they "just came and settled,

without asking anyone, differently from other non-local groups" (Djogo chief village, Djogo, October 2014).

The names of contemporary cantons, still used to indicate the more representative ethnic groups in the region, were fixed in these years. The canton chiefs were appointed by the French as representatives of an array of villages, but the geographic borders of their cantons have never been officially established in Chad (Baniara Yoyana, Magnant 2013). In fact, the only interest of the colonial government was to have some local people able to collect taxes and guarantee order among the Guéra groups. Once they had found some local authority in charge of it, they had no interest in arranging a socially accepted division of the land. Sheba, one of the elders in Jujube, explained to me that "the chief here rules over people, not really land, and the fact that nowadays many people are focusing on land is dangerous" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014).

Many local groups did not understand the meaning of the new institutions and "sent their slaves, or the less important families, to the French, as they were told they would have been captured by them" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014). In such a context, the colonial government had a major impact in drawing up administrative divisions and, therefore, land use; and the Yalnas were able to be formally integrated in the new state system, even though the way the land issue was tackled by the central government left many unresolved problems. While, in the Volta region, Lentz (2013) emphasises that colonial divisions were implemented on pre-existing agreements and could not be totally arbitrary, I claim that the lack of any sort of central power in Guéra make precolonial agreements particularly weak and unstable; therefore, the degree of malleability of previous arrangements and the related capacity of colonial rule to have an impact were much stronger and led to recognition of very controversial administrative divisions. These problems did not matter for several decades: initially, the land on the plain was abundant and all Hadjiray could easily access basic resources. After a long period of civil war, when security was the priority and the territory could be only partially exploited, when Guéra had finally found some political stability and economic growth, conflicts are more likely to emerge. This is the framework within which to interpret the stories of Kuju and Ibis.

4.2 Postcolonial Guéra and the issue of Yalnas land

The recognition of Jujube, Kuju and Tamar as Yalnas villages under the rule of Al Ada in 1923 is the root of contemporary tensions in this area. Al Ada was appointed as chief of Jujube, Kuju

and Tamar, but a clear border for his canton was never set. Since the 1920s, the colonial government tried to impose nationwide a European approach to a land tenure system, but had progressively to reshape its policies. Initially, it applied the French civil code, whose articles 538 and 713 state that all non-registered and unused land belong to the state. This solution met with strong resistance from Chadian elites, as most of the land was not used, but was considered "reserve" for some groups or "transhumance corridor" for others (Roasngar 2008, p. 52 – 53). Two government decrees in 1935 and 1955 changed the original approach, giving to the government the responsibility to demonstrate that the land had been unused for at least ten years (Roasngar 2008, p. 52 – 53). These laws gave an incentive to groups used to some degree of mobility to settle in a specific area and secure their rights over it, starting that process of "Arabic speaking" groups creating their own villages, something which has often been criticised by other local groups as an opportunistic strategy to take land. This approach was maintained by the land tenure laws approved by the Chadian government in 1967 and never changed insofar as it related to rural areas. It stated that customary land belongs to local communities, which choose their representative to be in charge of handling it. Rural communities must exploit this land to keep their rights, even though selling or renting of customary plots is permitted. If sold, the land will be considered private property and state laws would apply; rent is handled by local chiefs, according to their own procedures.

According to Chadian scholar Benan (2004, pp. 39 - 40), since colonisation, there were four main factors that radically changed the land tenure management system and whose contradictions are now emerging: the monetarisation of land value, demographic growth, urbanisation and climate change. These phenomena have increased dramatically in the last three decades. Land has acquired a higher economic value and become more often a good to be sold or rented, generating new issues. Moreover, these phenomena happened in Chad at a moment of extreme fragility of the state, contributing to the breakdown of local social institutions: nomadic herders started fighting bitterly with the farmers in the southern part of the country, as the central power was not able to control the transhumance corridors or the management of water resources (Arditi 2003). The cities – especially the capital, N'Djamena – grew in a extremely unplanned way, exerting severe pressure on land and water (CEFOD 2004). Nowadays, the government and international donors are trying to develop a management strategy for land tenure and local resources through local communities' involvement, but these projects are relatively recent and the tensions in the country related to these issues already very high (Nahoungar 2004; Fass, Desloovere 2004).

Guéra region, because of the low value of its land, was less affected than other regions by land disputes (Benan 2004). However, canton boundaries and land ownership are often unclear and can foster tensions. These tensions may arise when a farmer tries to improve the surface of his field or a development project is about to increase the value of some contested plots of land. Nowadays disputes seem more likely to arise than in the past. According to the stories I collected, during the whole of the 1970s and the first part of the 1980s, the state was not able to fully control the area and local villages quite often had to be relocated. In such a context, people were just trying to farm enough for their own survival. The situation progressively became harder, because of the frequent droughts in those years. Meanwhile, despite the civil war, the population suddenly expanded, growing from a density of 2.7 inhabitants per km^2 in 1964 to 5.2 in 1993 (Ougadjo 2004). The stability of the country, finally achieved after 1990, and the economic growth related to oil extraction in the 2000s, gave a further boost to population density in Guéra, which reached 9.4 inhabitants per km^2 in 2012 and is expected to surpass 10 inhabitants per km^2 in 2015[27]. Hence, even if land tenure issues are less serious than in the south, today land management presents new difficulties that were not relevant in the past.

Together with these changes, the government has tried, since the 1990s, to modify the governance of land tenure. In the 1996 constitution, the central government created the *Collectivitès Territoriales Decentralisés* at a local level, to deal with various issues, including land. The former prefect of the Guéra overseeing the whole region was replaced by a governor, while prefects and sous-prefects were deployed to smaller departments, where their capacity to act was much stronger. These new institutions, as well as local civil society organisations, set the political landscape of the Guéra region in the last three decades. Their interactions with customary authorities became crucial in boosting political activities in the region and led to a transformation of the local political system. This is the general context where competition among groups spread and, therefore, land issues that used to be quite marginal in local political life became more important (Ablaye Roasngar 2008). According to my interviews and conversations, land is a recent issue: during my first meeting with Jujube elders, Abdel told me that "chiefs exert their power over their people, but the use of land has usually been quite free; this importance of borders is recent" (Abdel, Jujube, October 2014). I think that this position could also be related to the fact that Yalnas people are not a fully indigenous group, hence they do not have a land chief. However, other sources confirmed this

point and in Duault's (1938) description of the creation of local cantons it is clear how local chiefs were chosen according to their ability to coordinate different people, rather than because they were grounded in a specific area. This seems to confirm the conclusion that land became important more recently, because of all these general changes.

I explored this topic further in an interview with Mahmat, a local Member of Parliament (MP) who has also been the Dadjo canton chief for a few years.

"Until 15 – 20 years ago it was unusual to buy land with money. Since this was made possible, many problems started. We are all aware of many inconsistencies of cantons and land use here, but it became a problem only when people started buying and selling the land" (Mahmat, Mongo, February 2015)

He added that nowadays in Guéra it is not as common as in other regions to see people selling land, but whenever there is money involved, issues are likely to emerge. I could not find exact data about financial transactions concerning land. In the 2000s the government implemented new rules for land management in urban areas, the importance and value of which has constantly increased (Ablaye Roasngar 2008). The creation of city councils and their enforcement in 2012 set up specific procedures and institutions and all urban plots of land have subsequently been recorded. Regarding customary land, the 1967 law has never been changed. However, it has become easier to buy or rent for money, according to local informants. One reason is that the nomadic lifestyle is getting harder with the climate, increasing the number of households ready to pay money for land access. Moreover, since the central government is dominated by northerners, getting recognition as a new customary authority and, therefore, becoming the official owner of the land is less complicated than in the past, especially for families from the north of the country. Through the creation of new cantons, groups that bought or rented long term customary land from other groups can be recognised as groups, with their own authorities and a formal entitlement to the land they are using.

In such a context, cantons became a crucial arena for local political struggle. Disputes over cantons are often debated in daily conversation. The recognition by the state as a canton chief seems the main venue for political promotion in contemporary Guéra. Since the 1990s, it has become easier to gain recognition as a new canton, as well as to have the opportunity to change the names of old cantons, as it was for Jujube in 2003. Because of the strong link between recognition as a customary authority and rights over land, local leaders are more

jealous than ever about their land. The story of Ibis is a demonstration of this. In Jujube, the issues regarding land between Zola and Kuju, as well as the other minor incidents involving Bidio, are described in an effort to undermine their political power.

Territorial divisions were something irrelevant in Guéra until colonisation, when the old narratives used by scattered local groups to claim some specific rights became political tools. This dynamic had a decisive boost in the last thirty years, in part because of global dynamics, such as the droughts in the Sahel, demographic growth, and new models of land governance; in part because of local changes, such as the revision of old customary institutions, and the consolidation of a stable central government for the first time in Chad's history. The important link between political recognition and ownership of land emerges in various ways: the stories I collected are all intended to legitimise the presence of local groups on the land they inhabit, as well as their political identity. Disputes over land emerge when these stories are contradictory and are related by my sources to efforts by some local powerful families to achieve new recognition, taking advantage of the political spaces recently opened by the central government. Yalnas speak about the name change of their canton as a way of demonstrating that they have officially been granted their rights, considering the local widespread assumption that "a Yalnas cannot be an owner of land", evident in their tensions with the Bidio. In the stories of Kuju and Ibis, the fact that Yalnas had a political leadership which was recognised by both colonial and post-colonial states enabled them to win their legal cases. The emphasis on their genealogy and the new name of the canton – related to this genealogy – seems an effort to reinforce at the local level those contested rights. In fact, the ownership of land is not just a problem of local resources management, but in a broader sense a problem of recognition as a legitimate local actor. This point has been emphasised and related to local narratives about ownership by recent research in different contexts in Africa (Berry 2009, Lund 2011, Lentz 2013). My research confirm the applicability of these findings to a context like Guéra.

5. Conclusions

This chapter explored the topic of land tenure in the Guéra region, with a specific focus on the Yalnas communities. During my visits to various Yalnas villages, I found that the narrations of their stories were intended to legitimise Yalnas' presence in that territory. Often the villages were on other cantons' land, but as long as there were agreements with the land owners, their presence there seems not to have mattered. However, I found some situations where Yalnas' land was more problematic, especially, but not only, in the area around Jujube, recognised by

the state as the canton of the Yalnas people. In these cases, different Guéra groups criticised the ownership of the land by villages labelled as Yalnas, as well as their right to manage the resources of these lands. In the conflict dividing Kuju and Zola, the problem concerns the status of Kuju people and the rights related to that status: as they are not considered the owners of the land, they cannot expand their fields or obtain revenue from the use of the land. In Ibis, the very existence of the village is not accepted: after that land had been uninhabited for decades, the right of Ibis people to resettle there was questioned by the local group that claim ownership over the area.

The issues presented have common roots. In Guéra, there has never been a commonly shared land tenure system, establishing rights and duties over land and natural resources. In such a context, the division of the land has ambiguous and contradictory sources of legitimisation. When the French created the cantons, their only interest was to have local leaders accountable for tax collection and order. While cantons were created and canton chiefs appointed, there was no formal division of the land. Since then, the previously inhabited plains have been slowly cultivated, with a progressive setting of informal borders. Different groups based their legitimacy on opposing principles. There is a range of local groups that claim an ancestral link to the mountain. These groups all have a *margay*, which established a connection between the group and the land. Yalnas, as well as other groups that arrived later in Guéra, have no *margay*. However, they were the first to convert to Islam and use this as an argument to increase their status. Moreover, in their case, there was an alliance between the first Yalnas chief who landed in Guéra and a local group inhabiting the mountains. The rights inherited by the first chief passed to their descendants and, as Kuju and Ibis are nowadays under the rule of that family, they claim the ownership of the own land. This claim was implicitly recognized, but never formalized, by the creation of the canton in the colonial period.

The system created by the colonial government slowly led to a monetarisation of land value. Since the droughts and the demographic growth following the 1980s, land became more rare and precious and previous contradictions emerged. In the case of Ibis, I have not heard any direct reference to slavery. The accusations against them were that they were trying to occupy a territory that did not belong to them. The fact that Ibis people were Arabic speakers under the authority of the Yalnas canton chief made them more likely to be considered squatters. Their status was at the core of the struggle and the past was used by their chief as a resource to protect them. By contrast, in the tensions between Kuju and Zola memories of slavery

emerged in both villages: in Zola, they argued that a group called Yalnas was axiomatically made up of slaves, and hence could not own land; in Jujube, they claimed to have been slave hunters raiding Bidio villages too, and that is the real reason why Zola people and the other Bidio are so aggressive towards them.

This thesis has so far demonstrated that the nature of the Guéra region as a slave reservoir facilitated Yalnas integration in colonial times and makes it more difficult for their rivals to find legal and political tools to marginalise them. At the same time, the lack of a shared memory, and the internal divisions left by slave raids, have created a very fluid political context where different ideologies are progressively readapted to changing conditions. In the last section of this chapter, I have outlined the main changes that, since the 1980s, have fostered increasing competition for land. In a region like Guéra, it is not the economic value of land that matters, but the potential to manage the resources of the land, and the political entitlement over the land, which makes a customary leader the recognised authority for any intervention in the area. This last point fostered competition and made contradictions about Yalnas status more relevant than they had been in the past. The connection between belonging, political power and resources is the area in which the legacies of slavery emerge most clearly, even though in a peculiar way, compared to contexts with a clear former masters/slaves dialectic. In the next chapter, I explore this aspect focusing on the emergence of new political actors in Guéra – civil society organisations and decentralised authorities – and analyse how narratives about slavery have been used in this arena, a crucial point to demonstrate that strong connection between legacies of slavery, decentralization and autochthony I outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapter 6

Between conflict and cooperation. The variety of Guéra civil society organisations and their impact on political life.

1. Introduction

"When I first met Adam, the chief, he knew we came from Borock and he told us about the alliance between his village and ours. […] *He explained the strong tie between us and this made easier for us to mobilise people, and we are also more motivated in our work.* […] *I was there when they celebrated the new name of the canton. It was a big ceremony with all the authorities, civil, traditional, military, the workers of development organizations. The head of department read the decree giving the new name of the canton, so the people started screaming and sounding the drum.* […] *The people of Borock, my family, came with three trucks from the canton full of mangos and onions to give to the people. I remember this very well, it was a very nice and important moment"* (Ibrahim, Mongo, June 2015).

Ibrahim is a man in his late 40s, from the village of Borock in Dadjo canton. I met with him several times, as he is the leader of a local NGO that has been involved in various activities with the people of Jujube. In this quote, he described to me the origin of his firm friendship with the people of Jujube. He told me that, during his first meeting with the Yalnas canton chief in Jujube – Adam – the chief reminded him about an old alliance between Jujube and Borock. This meeting happened in the 1990s, when Ibrahim was in his thirties and was starting his activities in the field of development. The alliance was confirmed to him by the elders in Borock and since then he worked to constantly improve his relationships with Jujube. I found that his friendship had a relevant impact on the involvement of Jujube in various local projects. It facilitated cooperation between the people under the authority of the Jujube canton chief and the development initiatives coordinated by Ibrahim, first as a working agent of an International NGO, then as head of a newly created local NGO. This cooperation was precious for a group like the Yalnas, who can become the target of political attacks if they try to improve their role in the local political arena. The old alliance between Borock and Jujube emerged at a moment when local associations progressively became one of the more important arenas for Guéra local leaders, making personal relationships between customary authorities and associations' leaders a clue for resources access.

In Chapter Five, I showed how memories related to slavery may emerge to thwart Yalnas and affect certain rights they want to enjoy. As their legitimacy over the land is not fully accepted,

whenever there are activities involving a financial benefit or the expansion of farming activities, they risk confrontation with their neighbours. I argued that the land tenure tensions were not just related to the control of the land, but to their effort towards a broader recognition as a legitimate political authority over a certain territory. Often it is this complex bundle of rights and resources that is at the basis of Guéra community conflicts, in the cases where land is the main issue, as well as in other situations where the causes seem more complex. This situation confirms the strong link between land, identity and power already described in the literature (Berry 2009, Lund 2011) and is consistent with many other African contexts with considerable local mobility and weak central institutions (Lentz 2013). The global changes affecting the region since the 1980s – climate change, demographic growth, and reforms of governance supporting new local actors – are impacting on this context and making conflicts more likely to arise. This is the general political context within which Yalnas rights have sometimes been challenged.

In this chapter, I explore these dynamics focusing on another aspect that proved to be crucial during my fieldwork: the role of what I define as "local civil society", whose importance has globally been growing since the governance reforms of the 1990s. Through this term, I indicate the assortment of local associations, including both NGOs directly negotiating with donors, and community based organisations such as agricultural *groupements*, committees for the management of water wells, schools, or cereal banks, cantons or village associations for development. These organisations play a crucial role in distributing resources and inter-linking the various local political actors, such as customary authorities, local authorities and state officials acting in Guéra. I tried to understand if the people of Jujube were involved in local development activities like the other groups, and if there was a relationship between contemporary conflicts and narratives of the past. Moving back to the initial research question, exploring if and how Yalnas's status affects their participation in local politics is another important step in assessing the impact of legacies of slavery. The issues related to land ownership are not isolated from the broader status of the Yalnas and their presumed slave past. Similarly, the involvement of Jujube people in local projects is likely to create controversies. Interestingly, the arguments used against the involvement of Jujube people in local projects are similar to those used in the land tenure issues. As Yalnas are not "the owners" of the area, they cannot be involved in activities affecting local territory. The tensions I found in this field made me aware that, when there are conflicts, stereotypes depicting Yalnas as a small group of unknown people with fewer rights emerge among local elites, mixing traditional arguments of autochthony to stereotypes related to a past as slaves.

In this chapter, I describe the main findings concerning the social interactions related to local civil society activities. I argue that what is at stake in many local controversies are the rights of local groups to be fully recognised as political actors. Only ethnic groups whose "customary authorities" are officially recognised by the state can interact direct with the heads of decentralised authorities and local civil society organisations. A strong link with those elites is crucial to insert villages into networks of support. Hence, there is intense competition around local civil society activities, as well as for recognition as customary authorities. This chapter first describes the process of formation of civil society in Guéra and its main characteristics. Then it explores some stories related to project implementation around Jujube and the dynamics and discourse related to it. Moving from these examples, I draw some conclusions about the nature of civil society in Guera and the role played in it by local narratives about the past.

2. Civil society and Guéra political arena

In Chapter Five, I claimed that local changes about land tenure management, as well as local narratives about it, are handled to assert ownership or other kinds of rights over plots of land, and are progressively becoming more divisive. Among the various reasons for this, I emphasised broader changes that are affecting many rural contexts in Sahelian Africa. The reforms of local governance and the spread of local and international NGOs are some of the more relevant ones. In the last thirty years, new models of governance have been implemented, giving more space to a vast array of organisations (Jacob and Lavigne Delville 1994, Bierschenk et al. 2000, Lewis 2002). The wave of democratisation following the end of the cold war and the growing focus of donors on human rights and good governance further fostered this process. Since the 1990s, all the Sahelian countries tried to move towards officially multiparty republics, to decentralise some powers from the central state to local institutions and to boost a network of local organisations promoting grassroots participation. Consequently, new political spaces and actors have acquired importance, even though the outcomes of these policies have been controversial (Bourgeot 1999, Boone 2003, Geschiere 2009).

I analysed this topic on Chapter Two. Research on civil society has progressively paid attention to its role in social and development policies, especially since the 1990s (Carhoters and Barndt 1999), showing that there are various aims and expectations behind the label "civil society". The organisations of civil society can be very different, and are often locally appropriated for other purposes than those promoted by donors (Lewis 2002). In this chapter, I focus on the

way this category has been used by local elites in Guéra to access new resources and build a local support network interrelated with national and local politics. These findings are consistent with most of the literature about civil society in Africa, where these organisations look more like brokers between international donors and recipient communities than agents of social change (Bierschenk et al. 2000). Civil society organisations are not a set of fixed institutions, but a public and not fully defined space where heterogeneous groups negotiate among themselves and with other actors. Therefore, exploring the variety of organisations that claim to be part of civil society and their different agendas may help to explain local political dynamics, and show how the buzzword of "good governance" can be easily appropriated and used by different actors according to their own agendas.

In order to have a clear idea of what the actual institutions are behind this vague label, it is crucial to focus on the peculiarity of the research context and the process that led to the creation of a local civil society. As I explained in Chapter Three, in precolonial Guéra there were not local societies with complex internal hierarchies, such as warrior groups, trader groups or professional castes, apart from the blacksmiths. A single central power was imposed by the French since 1906. As Guéra is not a fertile area, the colonial government had no interest in supporting any form of local peasants' organisation. Their interest was to appoint a local elite able to collect taxes and guarantee order. This policy increased the power of an emerging class of traders close to the pre-colonial Muslim elites. After the slave trade was abolished, these traders could reconvert themselves to accepted trades and keep their power over the scattered groups of Guéra farmers. While the network of traders increased its influence, Guéra farmers remained scarcely involved in political life, at least until the 1950s, when Guéra became an independent region and the political life in the colony livened up (LeCornec 1963, Arditi 2005).

In 1953, Guéra was separated from the broader Batha region (Lanne 1995). Furthermore, during the 1950s, the French government facilitated the penetration of Christian missions into Chad, which represented the first form of civil society emerging in the region. The approach of the various Christian missions was quite cautious: they tried to convert some of the pagan groups, but, as the area was influenced by the Muslim elites of the neighbouring Wadai region, Christian proselytising activity was implemented on a small scale, mainly through the opening of schools and health centres (Martellozzo 2013). Social development played an important role in this framework. This strategy continued in the first years after independence. Christian elites from the south controlled the central government during this time. Therefore, central

government supported the activities of the missions in health and education sectors. However, Chad quickly fell into dictatorship, erasing political spaces for local associations. During the whole of the 1970s and part of the 1980s, violence prevented any form of state intervention, as well as local groups' autonomous initiatives.

From the 1980s onwards, the situation slowly changed. After his military victory in 1982, President Hissene Habré progressively imposed order in the region. Those years saw the start of the first initiatives that led to the promotion of local development initiatives, such as private or community schools or agricultural interventions. As other forms of local associations were previously not allowed, the Christian missions were the main actors in Guéra. The priority in Guéra was food security. The droughts in the 1980s were particularly harsh and, since political stability had been established, the population had started settling again and using resources more intensely. Moreover, under the Habré regime the main administrative and military roles were occupied by new elites made up of northern people. Those state officials supported Muslim herders in their clashes against farmers from the south, making the former more aggressive and giving them incentives to move more southward. All these changes affected the availability of resources such as water and cultivable land. Therefore, the first development interventions were focused on fostering agricultural production and protecting local farmers from famine. The array of heterogeneous local organisations that I defined as "Guéra civil society" slowly emerged from these activities.

Two main strategies initially emerged: the creation of cereal banks, to make farmers independent of traders in the hungry season; and a system of small dams on the slopes of the mountains, aimed to improve the capacity of the soil to absorb water and boost agriculture productivity. In the 1980s, the Christian missions had an important role in training local leaders, coordinating people from different groups and finding money to carry out such activities. Afterwards, especially when multilateral donors increased their financial support during the 1990s, some groups of local leaders tried to create their own channels to access development funding. As the international aid progressively increased following the stabilisation of the country, for many local leaders it became important to create their own association and compete for funding. Therefore, the initial cooperative approach started by the Christian missions was progressively overcome by open competition between different associations, usually linked to a charismatic leader and an ethnic group. Political competition for a seat in the National Assembly (elected for the first time in 1996) and the city council assembly (elected for the first time in 2012) further contributed to those divisions, as the

ability of a leader to find money and projects for his voters became crucial. Nowadays, in Mongo department there are five local associations whose head office is in the Guéra department: ALSADER, ACDAR, APSE, AMTINE and MOUSTAGBAL.

	Founder	Main geographic area of intervention	Type of intervention
ALSADER	Jaime (Migami Christian), Ibrahim (Dadjo Muslim), Mahmat (Dadjo Muslim)	All departments of Guéra region	Cereal bank
APSE	Ibrahim (Dadjo Muslim)	Dadjo, Yalnas, Bidio – Melfi department	Small dams, water reservoir, environment protection
ACDAR	Mahmat (Dadjo Muslim)	Mongo area	Training for blacksmiths and carpenters
AMTINE	Jaime (Migami Christian)	Migami and Dangaleat cantons (in Bitkine department)	Small dams
MOUSTAGBAL	Abou (Migami Muslim)	Migami, Bidio, Yalnas cantons – Melfi and Bitkine departments	Small dams, water reservoir, farming activities

Table 5: List of the main Guéra local associations

ALSADER was created in 1996, with the purpose of regrouping into the same associations the various people who had cooperated in the first development initiatives promoted by the church. Among the founders of ALSADER, two members kept their role in it, but decided also to create their own associations: Mahmat – a member of the Dadjo canton chief's family – opened ACDAR, which initially cooperated with the Catholic mission in organising training for local technicians; Ibrahim created APSE, with the formal purpose of focusing more on environmental issues. Jaime, a Catholic man from Moro, in the Migami canton, was one of the founders of ALSADER, but he also has an important role in AMTINE, active mainly in Moro area

for projects to create small dams. In Moro, there is also the office of Moustagbal, created by Abdoul. Abdoul is a man from Moro, now in his 50s, who initially cooperated with the Christian missions on small projects, before founding Moustagbal.

Apart from these locally led associations, in Guéra there is also AURA, a branch of the Catholic CARITAS, and the Federation of the Cereal Bank of Guéra (FCBG), created in 2012 to regroup all the existing cereal banks under a single umbrella organisation. Finally, there are some international organisations working in Guéra: the Catholic organisation Foie et Joie, working mainly with schools; Oxfam, focused on agricultural development; Acord, working on support for decentralisation in partnership with Oxfam; and IRC, which focuses on health issues.

While ALSADER and the FCBG are based on the partnership between different people, with their positions being temporary and usually distributed with the purpose of representing the variety of ethnic and religious groups, the other associations are strongly related to their founders, who decide the other roles, and constrain their decision-making. AURA and AMITNE work mainly in cooperation with the Catholic mission, AMTINE on small dam projects, while AURA continues a variety of other activities started by the Catholic mission (agricultural groups, health centres and schools). During my fieldwork, Moustagbal and APSE seemed to me the organisations that cooperated more exclusively with international donors. They had both been working in partnership with the World Food Programme since the beginning of the 2010 on a range of small projects based on "food for work" agreements; Moustagbal was cooperating with Oxfam and Acord, while APSE was just starting a project funded by the World Bank and supported by the national Ministry of the Environment. Before exploring the current activities and mutual relationships of these associations, it is useful to summarise their progressive emergence since the first activities of the 1980s.

Cereal banks and small dams were the first local initiatives in which Guéra people started cooperating in association under the support of the Christian missions, before the flow of donor money fostered the creation of other new local organisations. The cereal banks emerged as a tool for food security in the whole Sahel area during the 1980s and were designed to guarantee basic cereal access for farmers during the whole year, a crucial need in the Sahel following droughts (Tubiana 1995). In Guéra, cereal banks were created when the local political situation enabled this kind of intervention. The idea came out as a strategy for dealing with periods of famine. I heard directly from the Catholic priest François about the first famine he experienced in Guéra. It was in 1984 and there were no humanitarian agencies working there, as the territory was still considered unsafe. He told me that the harvest was

very disappointing and many villages had run out of cereals in June. Through the network of Catholic churches, they started distributing cereals to the Christian communities that were in need. As they had limited resources, they decided not to give these cereals as a gift, but as a loan. The farmers receiving those cereals were required to refund it to the Catholic mission after the next harvest, a few months later. Then the Catholic mission would store them as emergency stock and eventually distribute them again during the next hungry season. Therefore, during that famine, they started – on a small scale and mainly with Catholic villages – the cereal bank system as a strategy for food security.

*"*It was initially very successful, because the people involved were all members of our Catholic communities and there were strong trust ties among us" (Francois, N'Djamena, January 2014). Moreover, the cereal bank system, which put only a low interest on the cereals, emancipated the farmers from the extortionate rates associated with local traders. François told me that traders – as I explained, the most powerful local economic and political group in Guéra since colonisation – used to buy large amount of cereals immediately after the harvest. They kept the cereal in their stores and then sold it in the hungry season, when the prices were much higher. As farmers usually had little cash during this season, the traders would give them cereals as a loan with a very high interest rate, asking the farmers to repay it through bags of cereal from the next harvest. In this way many of the farmers entered into endless cycles of debt and repayment with increasingly wealthy traders.

"These traders were often Arab people, who decided to sell their cattle to get capital and start trading. They built very big stores and then quickly expanded this cereal business, which became massive from the 1980s onwards, when the drought affected many harvests" (Francois, N'Djamena, January 2014).

The cereal bank strategy progressively became popular in the Guéra region and the other communities wanted to be involved.

That was the period when the church was moving toward more development actions. (…) *Hence, we progressively had more resources and started involving other communities, on the condition that they were really motivated and understood that the cereals were a loan and not a gift* (Francois, N'Djamena, January 2014).

During the 1990s, the priests started involving grassroots independent associations in this scheme. Following the 1996 constitution, the procedures to create associations became easier and their number increased (EU 2014). This is the moment when local leaders were involved

and some of them understood the importance of these associations in the creation of networks for supporting the people around them. Mahmat was among the first to start cereal bank projects, together with Ibrahim, in the 1990s. They were both from the same village, Borock, in the Dadjo canton and started volunteering when François wanted to enlarge the cereal bank system. They were then hired by an Italian NGO, which came to support François' project in the early 1990s. Alex – the head of the Italian NGO – and Francois told me that the first initiatives were mainly implemented in partnership with the Catholic mission. François stressed to me the importance of "making Christians and Muslims work together, so that people would not feel we were supporting a specific group" (Francois, Moro, May 2015). Alex also has clear memories about that period.

"A*t that time, there was much less bureaucracy than now. We were working both for education and agriculture: there was not such a thematic distinction. As donors were rare, it was easy to find money and we all trusted Mahmat: he was able to mobilise people quickly and had a very good friendship with François"* (Alex, Mongo, June 2015).

Mahmat and Ibrahim, nowadays important political actors and key informants for my research, also have clear memories of that period:

"People used to call Ibrahim and me the twin brothers, as we were always working together" (Mahmat, Mongo, March 2015).

"We didn't have as many resources as now. Francois gave us a motorbike and me and Mahmat were moving together on the same moto, everywhere, we were really good partners" (Ibrahim, Mongo, June 2015).

In our conversations, Ibrahim explained to me that the involvement of the Yalnas chief, Adam, was a crucial factor for the success of that project in Jujube, one of the first sites where they acted. Adam reminded him and Ibrahim about the old alliance between Jujube and their village and promised them that the community would do its best. According to Ibrahim, the choice of Jujube was also related to the situation of the village and the Yalnas canton at that time.

"I chose this area because they did not have many literate people and, while the other cantons had more people who had studied outside and could find some support outside the region, Jujube, small and isolated, was lacking this kind of people. This is why we decided to start from here" (Ibrahim, Mongo, June 2015).

The community was in charge of the construction of a warehouse, to be used only as a cereal bank, and the committee managing the school had to take care of the cereal bank. Then the repayment of the cereals should be done with low interest, and any surplus of cereals used to help pay the community school teachers. Both Mahmat and Ibrahim described this project as the starting point of a strategy they tried to reproduce in other villages.

International donors started supporting cereal banks in the 2000s (FIDA 2014). The number of cereal banks in Guéra increased from 27 in 2004 to 312 in 2014, and in the last FBCG (2015) census there were still new banks under construction. The boost of cereal banks had an impact on the future of Ibrahim and Mahmat. Their political careers continued to follow the same path for a few years: they were involved in the creation of ALSADER, whose purpose was to develop a collective strategy for cereal banks in the region and, therefore, grew quickly during the 2000s; it was also designed to draw representatives of different local groups and religions together in a single institution linked to their growing involvement in cereal bank projects. Because of their experience, Mahmat and Ibrahim initially had important roles. They each created two new local associations, at the beginning of the 2000s, focusing on other kinds of activities. After a few years, Mahmat became chief of Dadjo canton and then got elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) with a party opposing president Deby. He kept his roles in both associations, but since he started working as an MP, his involvement reduced drastically. Ibrahim also tried a political career. After failing in the parliamentary election, he was elected to the Mongo city council; therefore his political career remained focused on the local level and his involvement in his own association persisted.

Contrary to the case of the cereal bank, I could not find a clear moment when small dam construction was chosen as a tool to boost agricultural production. According to my sources, since Guéra people settled in the plains, they had occasionally done this activity, even though on a small scale and achieving only simple constructions. Nowadays, international donors support small dam' construction, together with the excavation of big water basins, locally called *afir*. According to the National Plan for Food Security (PNSA 2010), it is difficult to assess if this component of food security policy is getting the same financial support as cereal bank construction, as in the budget activities related to small dams are mixed with all the other interventions regarding water. I have noticed that often donors consider the existence of the cereal bank a pre-condition for the construction of a small dam in Guéra: as these activities are mainly implemented through the "food for work" policy, the existence of a store for cereals

facilitates this kind of intervention. This resulted from a survey I helped the FCBG to carry out[28] and was confirmed in the final meeting when the results of the survey were discussed, in February 2016.

Since the beginning this activity has required a different level of involvement of local communities, which should be mobilised intensively for the construction of the dam and, subsequently, for its maintenance. Another Catholic priest, Stefan, has followed the activities regarding small dams.

"I have heard in the past they already used to do something like this, but not regularly and not durably. After the first dam, we progressively tried to train the people. Then we created a couple of organisations in the cantons where small dams were more appreciated, which still exist" (Stefan, Mongo, May 2015).

Stefan explained to me in detail the peculiarities of Guéra soil and, therefore, the effectiveness of small dams in collecting water.

"The first dam is just outside Mongo; we made it in the early 1980s and is still there. It was done both to prevent flooding and collect water; we realised it was very good for improving the capacity of the aquifer. This kind of dam is very easy to do, so we started in other areas, even though they cannot last long, unless there is careful maintenance" (Stefan, Mongo, May 2015).

Usually these dams are built with rocks at the point in the valleys where the rain-water tends to converge; hence covering just a few metres of surface can prevent a significant amount of water flowing down and being wasted. Their presence fosters water absorption by the soil and I found all my sources in agreement on their effectiveness. The local FAO office considers them a tool to boost local farming production and has supported their construction for the last 10 years. The main issue, in Guéra, is that, as they must be built at the top of valleys, usually they are in areas where the land does not clearly belong to a specific group. Therefore, reaching agreement between different groups about labour division may be difficult. Interestingly, there are no small dams in any of the Yalnas villages: I was told by Ibrahim that this is due to the kind of land in their territory, while Jaime – the head of AMTINE, itself deeply involved in small dam construction in the Abou Telfane area – claims that, as Yalnas land tenure is controversial, local associations avoid engaging in this kind of project there.

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[28] Between May and June 2015, the Italian NGO Acra and the FCBG conducted a survey about the impact of the cereal banks. I helped with the preparation of the survey and the analysis of the results, presented in Mongo in February 2016.

The missionaries used the same strategy they used for the cereal banks: they involved youths from different villages that they already knew, giving them the task to mediate with the local communities, and progressively gave more responsibilities to those who showed more commitment. These projects saw many ups and downs until at least the first half of the 1990s. Two organisations – SILA and AMTINE – were created by these activities and are still active, even though only SILA exclusively works in the neighbouring Bitkine department. AMTINE is currently led by Jaime, a Migami Christian from Moro. He did not start a political career, kept stronger ties with the Catholic Mission and tended to work more on small projects in partnership with them, rather than compete for direct access to international donors' funding.

Among the leaders more heavily involved in the political arena, Abdoul is the only one who came into contact with the Christian missions relatively late. I have been told his studies were supported by a Dutch Protestant missionary, even though nowadays he prefers to underemphasize this initial support. He was involved the first time in a project for people affected by leprosy, in the 1990s, when he was in his twenties and was working as a social worker. He decided to create his own NGO – Moustagbal – and was helped by François to write the NGO constitution. He proudly told me that he started directly to apply to international projects, as he wanted to create an organisation working to western donors' standards and hiring some local people as NGO staff. Moustagbal is still cooperating with the missionaries, but quickly enlarged its field of activities, moving to the support of the vulnerable and then, following international donors 'call for proposals', to small dams, *afir* and cereal banks[29]. Compared to APSE, which is composed only of Ibrahim, Issa, a secretary and four or five temporary social workers, Abdoul created a larger organisation with many branches: he has a volunteer from the church helping him with the administration, five management employees and some more social workers, whose contracts are usually determined by the budget of a specific project. Abdoul comes from the same village as another Member of Parliament for Guéra, Daoud, with whom he has a good friendship and cooperates closely. Daoud also studied at the Catholic mission and was involved – albeit in a less relevant way than Mahmat and Ibrahim – in the development projects. After the first parliamentary election, Daoud became an MP in the ruling party – being also awarded the presidency of the National Assembly for some years – collecting most his votes in the Migami canton.

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[29] I have had various conversations with Abdoul, when he told me a lot about his past. However, he did not find the time to give me a proper interview like Mahmat and Ibrahim. While I was in Mongo, he was hosting a French master student of Anthropology and probably was feeling tired of receiving questions.

A general impression from this short summary about Guéra civil society is that the main local heads of associations (Ibrahim, Mahmat, Abdoul, Jaime) started their activities in Mongo around a nucleus of a few missionaries and some important families in the 1980s. With the growing importance of international donors, they created their own associations and took different pathways while competing for the funding. While some of these organisations decided to focus on a specific activity – like AMTINE with the construction of small dams and ALSADER with the cereal banks – others, like APSE and Moustagbal, are active in different fields and aim to get funding directly from the international donors. These two associations were progressively more closely associated with their founders (Ibrahim and Abdoul) and their ethnic groups, Migami and Dadjo. This evolution contributed to outlining a political landscape where ethnicity plays a major role and, therefore, the narratives presented by the different ethnic groups to claim rights and access resources acquired importance.

During the 1980s and 1990s, development projects were using a reduced amount of funding and were implemented mainly through the mobilisation of communities. The resources were distributed according to local needs and the focus was on keeping many different ethnic groups in the organising committees, and involving those communities that showed more commitment. There were no formal local organisations and the funding was unlocked through informal negotiation, rather than standardised procedures. Moreover, the development initiatives in the 1980s were based on the involvement of different local leaders. Francois and Stefan told me that the involvement of different ethnic and religious groups was their main criterion when arranging projects. "I was happy to see Mahmat and Ibrahim – Muslim Dadjo – sharing their motorbike with Jaime – a Migami Christian – and we were always paying attention to these balances when we were arranging working teams" (Francois, Moro, May 2015) explained Francois, who considered inter-community conflicts a potentially very dangerous issue. The cooperation between different groups was the original purpose of ALSADER. This NGO was created as a secular organisation where all the various groups of Guéra would cooperate for the common good.

In the last fifteen years, the state budget has increased a lot thanks to oil revenues, and so has financial support from International donors[30]. Therefore, the amount of funding available for

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[30] Both the national budget and international aid had different peaks and regressions, following the national political situation. However, compared with their value in the early 1990s, in the 2010s the financial value of both GDP and international aid was around three times more, even though international aid achieved its peak in 2009 and then decreased. Similarly, the national GDP record was in

local civil society has received a boost. However, the procedures have become more complex, and there is increased competition to access those resources. This change was clearly described to me by Alex, who had long experience with NGOs in Chad.

In the 1990s there were not many NGOs working in Chad. I remember the donors were running after us and we did not need to provide too much documentation. Now we are always struggling a lot to get a project and must produce many complex dossiers. The interventions are not as flexible as they used to be (Alex, Mongo, June 2015)

The Guéra region has never been at the centre of big humanitarian emergencies. However, the small network of locally rooted organisations makes it easier for donors to implement projects. Moreover, increasing the agricultural production of the central part of the country is one of the priorities in Chad's development plans (PNSA 2010). Therefore, local organisations have become involved more and more in a project funded by the World Food Programme and UNICEF, which both have offices in Mongo.

With increased resources available, cooperation between different ethnic groups became one of the main problems. Even though people from different origins often cooperate in the same organisations and deal with a variety of different ethnic groups, local organisations tend to be associated with their founders and ethnic groups. Moustagbal is considered close to the Migami people and has some problems in working in Dadjo zones: I have heard that village chiefs of the canton do not like to cooperate with this NGO, as they generally have a low opinion of Migami workers. For Ibrahim, conversely, it is difficult to develop activities in Migami area, as people here often do not trust Dadjo, as already mentioned in Chapter Four. For the last five years, both Ibrahim and Abdoul have been partners of the WFP and every year build small dams and *afir*, but they always work in different areas. The activities of all these associations are coordinated through monthly meetings, divided according to the different areas of interventions. I once attended one on food security and heard about many other meetings. There have never been public criticisms of local organisations, nor embarrassing questions. In fact, as a neutral observer, I would not have noticed all these disputes and competitions behind the (strongly emphasised) polite behaviour of Ibrahim, Abou and all the other workers of the various local NGOs.

2011, followed by a steady decline related to the oil price fall. I found these data on data.worldbank.org/country/chad, visited on November 2017

During my fieldwork, I saw how the initial purpose of civil society organisations - to foster cooperative relationships between different groups - had not totally disappeared. My housemate in Mongo, Erminia, had very strong ties to some girls in Jujube, thanks to his work with the NGO Foie et Joie at Jujube school. Nora, a young sister of the canton chief who assisted me while in Jujube, occasionally worked with both Ibrahim's and Abdul's associations, and developed friendly relationships with the closest assistants of the two leaders, Issa and Ahmat. Finally, Annour developed a very strong network of friendships thanks to activities supporting local schools. However, despite these achievements at an individual level, in recent years the civil society world has become a cause more of division than cohesion in the region. In the next section, I explore these conflicts in more detail, focusing on two examples involving the people of Jujube.

3. Community brigade, cereal banks and other Guéra conflicts

The competition between APSE and Moustagbal was the most evident political confrontation in the field of development in Guéra. Jujube did not have a central role in the competition between them, even though development initiatives regarding Yalnas have been problematic. Yalnas' involvement in these controversies is quite revealing about the status of this group in Guéra. I explained at the beginning of the chapter how Ibrahim – a Dadjo from Borock – is a key ally of Jujube, and the old alliance between Dadjo of Borock and Yalnas was used by the old chief Adam to guarantee the Yalnas canton's involvement in local development initiatives. After the first project, the cereal bank, Ibrahim remained very close to Jujube people, while Mahmat progressively distanced himself. The interviews and conversations I had with both gave me important information about the status of Yalnas people. Mahmat was the first person to tell me about the popular jokes about Yalnas, in March 2015, when describing the cereal bank project in Jujube. According to him, at the beginning, the people in Jujube were very motivated, whereas in the following years the management of the cereal bank became quite poor. François and Mahmat were aware of this, so they agreed with the common saying, to "never trust the people who abandoned their mother tongue, they are more likely to lie" (Mahmat, Mongo, March 2015). According to them, despite their initial enthusiasm for the cereal bank, local people soon just remained involved hoping to get more support, and did not really handle the cereals according to the procedure of the bank. This led them to conclude that Yalnas are not trustworthy, using discourses similar to those I presented in Chapter Five about the unreliability of land claims made by Arabic speakers. In many villages, especially in the more recently created banks, the cereals have been managed very poorly; however, I

heard various times in Mongo this sentence about the untrustworthiness of those who "abandoned their mother tongue", as if it was something specific about the people called Yalnas.

Unlike Mahmat, Ibrahim remained very close to the Jujube people. He claims his choice was related to the weakness of this canton, small and with a generally bad reputation in the region, but connected to his people by an old alliance. Despite presenting this attitude as a sort of choice to help a disadvantaged ally, Ibrahim also got some advantage from this situation: the Yalnas canton chief was always present in local meetings and thus more likely to support and cooperate with APSE than other organisations; moreover, the Yalnas canton is in an area where APSE is struggling to find space, as it is very close to the Migami canton, where villagers are more likely to work with Moustagbal. I explained, in the previous chapter, how Yalnas are a collective actor among others, fighting to defend their status as a social group – sometimes challenged by their neighbours – and to enjoy the political advantage of such status; but, at the same time, more likely to be attacked because of their unclear origin. I focused on a couple of conflicts dividing them from their neighbours, to analyse how their status matters in this domain, and the strategy deployed by the group to defend their position.

3.1 The community brigade of Jujube

The events related to the community brigade project were very useful for me to understand those conflicts from the inside, as I was directly involved in it. In fact, at the beginning of April 2015, I was called to the police office in Mongo. Someone had told the *sous-préfet* of Nevio that a development project focused on environmental protection in the *Abou Telfane* mountain chain – the biggest mountain chain of the department, separating the cantons Migami, Yalnas and Bidio – had been awarded to Jujube people through bribes. It was said that Ibrahim and I had been corrupted by Jujube people. According to these accounts, Ibrahim got money, while I was rewarded with a plot of land.

I had known about this project since the beginning of my fieldwork. I was told that the effective enforcement of a protected area covering the whole *Abou-Telfane* was about to start. Formally, the whole mountain chain area is part of the broader "*Réserve de Faune de l'Abou Telfane*" (*Abou Telfane* Natural Reserve), a protected area created by the colonial government in 1955, but never implemented. Jujube is on the southern slope of this area, as is the Bidio canton, while the Migami canton occupies the northern part of it. I was aware that the *Abou Telfane* was a non-implemented nature reserve, but I had no idea about any projects to realise

this until October 2014, when Ibrahim came to visit Jujube. The purpose of his travel was to explain to local people about a project funded by the World Bank (2012) and involving the *Abou Telfane* area. The project aimed to foster agricultural production and improve the use of natural resources in the whole country. In the Guéra region, the project instigates various activities, such as the distribution of 'improved' seeds, the support of vegetable gardens and the protection of natural resources in the official nature reserve.

This last component is the one directly involving the people of Jujube. Ibrahim's strategy was to create a "community brigade" with the people of Jujube. The role of this brigade remained ambiguous: I was told by Ibrahim that it would educate local people about the importance of protecting plants and animals. In fact, as the government aims to implement the nature reserve, in future nobody would be allowed to cut trees or hunt wild animals. However, as the definition of "brigade" may suggest, the people involved would not only have been in charge of educating local people, but would also have had the task of checking if anyone was hunting or cutting trees, and reporting this to the local military brigade. The day after this meeting, Jujube inhabitants seemed to me more worried by the possible limiting of their activities than excited about being involved in the project. Moreover, it was not clear to them if they would have been responsible solely for checking the area and, in the case of non-authorised activities, calling the military, or if they would have had to directly stop such observed activities.

Even though the protected area might cover three cantons, Ibrahim decided to work only with Jujube, ignoring the two other cantons in the area. He told me that this was a "pilot project": if it worked well, he would extend it to other areas. He decided to work with Jujube people because of the old alliance his group had with them. He explained that in Jujube locals suffered in the past, because of the bad reputation related to their ambiguous label, *Yalnas*.

"Nowadays there are no discriminations, but they are a small canton of people with a bad reputation. I know there is an alliance between our groups [the Dadjo of Borock]*: the old chief told me the first time I came there, and our elders confirmed it. Therefore, I felt I had to work with them, to improve their condition and make them prouder"* (Ibrahim, Mongo, February 2015)

I have already mentioned the personal commitment Ibrahim had to Jujube. During my fieldwork, he came various times to visit, sometimes because of the project, sometimes just to chat with the canton chief. He was invited when Ibeth, one of the chief's brothers, organised a

celebration for his wedding, in March 2015. At the same time, his NGO was keeping track of various projects in other areas of Guéra, with different donors. In general, I have noted Ibrahim had strong ties with Jujube, but as he was a quite important local leader involved in many activities, I thought it was normal for him to have these kinds of links with the various locally significant families. I did not notice anything in his activities or relationships with Jujube people until the police called me in April 2015.

That day, some friends in Mongo told me that the police had been looking for me while I was travelling with Annour, my research assistant. Even before fully understanding what was happening, I found the reactions of the people close to me interesting: although the problem was still very unclear, most of my friends already had a strong opinion about this story. This gave me the impression that this kind of problem was not something new and they already had made their assumptions about the motivation of the main actors involved in it. First, Annour told me that some Bidio were causing the problem. Then, the following day, Issa – a colleague of Ibrahim – came to visit me. He told me that the police had called Ibrahim too. According to Issa, Ibrahim was very angry and blamed his rival Abdoul for organising this political attack. The situation was not yet clear for anyone, but both Ibrahim and Annour had already identified possible political enemies behind something they were defining as "an attack".

The following day I went to the local police station. The head of the police station asked me if I had a plot of land in Jujube, and whether I knew the people of the state agency in charge of that project. I told him no and then I asked if I could know why I was asked this. He explained that someone had told the Nevio *sous-préfet* that the community brigade project had been awarded to Jujube illegally. They said that Ibrahim was their friend, and therefore helped them rather than involving everyone. They also said that a white man who spent a lot of time in Jujube had helped them too, and they had given him a plot of land as a reward. This specific point of the land made those who complained in Nevio particularly angry, as in their opinion Yalnas do not have the right to sell that land. The police officer told me he was quite sure that the story was not true, as he already knew me, but now it was important to clarify everything with the Mongo local authorities[31]. After this conversation, I spent the whole morning in the police station; they checked all my documents and authorisations.

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[31] A short summary of the conversation I had with the Mongo police commissioner in Mongo, April 2015

In the afternoon, I started asking questions and all my sources – Yalnas and non-Yalnas – seemed to have their ideas about what was happening further strengthened. "When there is something for us, they are jealous and try to block us. They are jealous because they don't have many projects in their canton, so they try to ruin ours too, but it won't work: we know how to deal with it", Annour told me. He also added that, though they did not sell me a plot of land, this was no business of the Bidio, as the land is for the people of Jujube and "we can do whatever we want with it. They should not say that we cannot sell it – it is none of their business" (Annour, Mongo, April 2015). A few days later I met with David – an elder from Jujube working at Mongo city council – and he had the same point of view. Moreover, he connected this event with the past tensions regarding the antenna in Kuju, described in Chapter Four.

"Sometimes people eat with you, and then, after a problem, they just refuse you. The Bidio did not accept that it was us that got the money for the Kuju antenna, and since then they say we are different, and should be treated differently" (David, Mongo, April 2015)

I was asked about this story also by people that were not directly involved, such as François. He heard about the story from his Migami friends. He told me not to worry too much and gave me his interpretation of this issue.

"Ibrahim went too far from his canton's border and the Migami people did not like it: they felt he was invading their territory. This is not the first case like this. Abdoul is currently on trial because of a project he ran in Dadjo canton, so maybe he just wants to have revenge, and that is why they created this case" (Francois, Mongo, April 2015)

Interestingly, while in Jujube everyone was blaming the Bidio, in Mongo both François and Ibrahim told me that those responsible were people from the Migami canton. When I met Ibrahim, a couple of days later, he was furious. He told me that it was all organised by Abdoul, the only one with the social knowledge to lead local authorities to open a file and the Migami MP Daoud, a good friend of Abdoul, probably supported him.

"We all met with the Prefect and he asked me also to involve the other group in the project, but I cannot, it is a small project, and I wanted to do it as a pilot project only in that area. I showed them all the maps with government approval, so they must let me work. I am a friend of the younger sister of the president, and I have already informed the president about this. They will not achieve their goal" (Ibrahim, Mongo, April 2015)

I could not understand who had made this complaint. Ibrahim and Francois pointed to someone close to Abdoul or Daoud, hence to the Migami canton. In the conversations I had on this topic, it was difficult for me to steer my informants towards some points that would be interesting for me. They were all emotionally involved and more focused on understanding who had launched a "political attack" against them, rather than understanding what the reasons for the accusation could have been. Annour, David, Ibrahim and even the Catholic priest Francois described the situation as a sort of political battle, started by leaders of the cantons that were not involved, with the purpose of blocking this project. Moreover, Annour and David were very irritated by the assumption in the allegation, that Jujube people were not entitled to sell the land. The opposing views about land ownership of Bidio and Yalnas also emerged in this struggle. I felt it would have been interesting to have Abdoul's point of view on this story. Through my housemate in Mongo, I knew he also had to go to the police, but it was not clear when and how. However, he did not want to tell me very much. "Ibrahim created confusion in his project, but everyone knows you are not involved at all, so don't worry: they won't bother you any more" (Abdoul, Mongo, April 2015), he told me, without adding any other information.

I came back to Mongo in February 2016 and the project was still going on, even though the friends from Jujube I met were quite demoralised, as the only benefits they had gained were some bicycles. However, I noticed that the events surrounding the community brigade had left some divisions. In that period, AMTINE was planning to submit a project regarding small dam construction in the same area, in a broader EU project focused on climate change challenges. In the light of the recent tensions, there were careful negotiations about who was to be involved and how this would be managed. Alex, the chief of the Italian NGO, was working on this new project and had some meetings with local partners. I attended one of these meetings and a Migami social worker suggested excluding Jujube. Later, I asked him the reason for this and he told me, "They are a small group, and we know where they come from. I prefer we do not involve them: I don't trust them. But even if we do, they won't do anything against us, they know we are a much bigger group" (Jonas, Mongo, February 2016). I asked him to explain further. He told me that he knew they were officially a canton, so they owned some plots of land, but still he thought they had fewer rights to land than old and big groups like Migami and Bidio. I remember having a similar conversation with Jaime, the head of AMTINE, who criticised the fact that the Yalnas won the case against the Bidio about the Kuju antenna. "They are not a real lineage. They are allowed stay there just because the Bidio accepted them, but

they are a very small group and the Bidio can easily get rid of them, if they want" (Jaime, Mongo, June 2015).

Thanks to this issue, I could talk directly with my contacts about those kinds of community tensions and denigratory discourses I often heard in local disputes. For me, it was particularly interesting to understand if, in these disputes, there was some peculiar element that emerges when Yalnas are involved. I have already mentioned, in the introduction, that these kinds of disputes seem to be increasing. Similar tensions are also arising among the cereal banks, whose number drastically increased in the last decade, creating some issues. The Catholic mission is trying to regroup the various banks through the creation of the FCBG, but there is some resistance, as some local organisations want to keep control of them and are resisting the creation of this federation. Many cereal banks were opened in villages inhabited by mixed ethnic communities. In those villages, it has often been difficult to create a bank for the whole village, as the different groups refused to work together. I heard about some difficulties in the village of Tamar and, after having heard these explanations about the Community Brigade, I tried to explore in more depth whether similar discourses also emerged in these disputes.

3.2 The cereal bank and water well of Tamar

The village of Tamar is inhabited by both Yalnas and Bidio communities. I heard about the issues in its cereal bank in a FBCG meeting. Through a FIDA (2014) funded project, Oxfam supported the construction of a cereal bank there. As for many development projects, Tamar people were required to offer their labour during the construction. The Yalnas chief of Tamar dealt with this and recruited workers from his own group. The construction was completed in November 2014 and the cereal bank was then entrusted to the Yalnas chief of Tamar. The Bidio families in the village were told that they would not be allowed to use that cereal bank, as it was for the Yalnas. The Bidio chief then asked the social worker of the FCBG to build another bank for them. This request was reported by the social worker in March 2015 and discussed a few weeks later. At the central office of the FCBG, they knew a new cereal bank had just been built in Tamar and it seemed useless to have two cereal banks in the same village. The social worker in charge of that area blamed Oxfam, as their staff did not involve both groups before starting the project. Later, in a conversation with me, he said that even if the Yalnas had allowed the Bidio to use the cereal bank, the latter would not have trusted them, as food is something you keep in the family. Both Bidio and Yalnas would not consider a bank managed by "foreigners" as a safe place (Zakarya, Mongo, May 2015). The FIDA project was already finished; hence, there was no money to build a new bank. Moreover, as the

various projects in the last five years had drastically increased the number of banks, the priority for the FCBG management was to involve banks already organised, rather than creating or involving new ones. When I finished my fieldwork, the situation remained unresolved, with part of Tamar village excluded from the cereal bank.

These stories are quite frequent and were described them to me as normal. Yussuf, a social worker of the Catholic NGO Foie et Joie, told me that "If there are cereals, or other basic stuffs involved, you cannot trust someone that is not from your family"(Yussuf, Bitkine, April 2015). Kin, therefore, seems to play an important role not only in land issues, but also in distribution of basic resources such as cereals. There are many villages where cereal banks are creating these kinds of divisions. However, in the case of Jujube and the neighbouring villages, the issue is not related only to the cereal banks. In Jujube people are struggling to get their own health centre, even though there is already a centre in Nevio. Abdel, in one of the first interviews, told me that "It is difficult for us to use that centre: we and the Bidio don't understand each other very well," (Abdel, Jujube, October 2014) even though he could not clearly explain to me what the problem was, apart from a general bad feeling about being dependent on them.

Similarly to the cereal banks, water well management is based on local committees that oversee the collection of fees. While the purpose of the fees is to build up a reserve to be used in case repairs are needed, often local committees apply different fees depending on the origin of the customer. I realised this when the main water well in Jujube became broken and I went with Ashta, one of the sisters of the chief, to fetch some water from another water well, between Jujube and Tamar. When I went there, there were some families waiting for the water. I asked if, as the Jujube water well was broken, we could take the water freely.

"We can use either this water well or the one in Jujube there is no difference, as the water well is for our brothers in Tamar [the Yalnas inhabiting Tamar]. But the Bidio of Tamar or the Arabs must pay, as this is for us and not for them" (Ashta, Jujube, October 2014).

In August 2016, I went to Chad for the last time. I heard that the community brigade project had finally been blocked, though it was not clear whether the local authorities had found some irregularities in the paperwork or the pressures of Bidio and Migami had persuaded them to cancel it. In the meantime, Abdoul was negotiating with the Jujube canton chief to write the Canton Development Plan together, a document whose preparation is funded by the EU and plans future development intervention in the area. I know that he was involving some people from Jujube in another small project about improved seeds and he had already told me that he

had very good relationships with the Jujube chief and he would like to work with him in the future. Apparently, after a long political battle, those opposing the community brigade project won and Ibrahim had to stop the project. Anyway, a few months later, Ibrahim was elected deputy mayor of Mongo, an important boost for his political career, while the Jujube chief was negotiating the involvement of his village in another development project with the other big local NGO in the area. Both Abdoul and Ibrahim are still building their personal careers and developing local development initiatives in the area, while the issues created by their procedures remain unresolved and the various local chiefs keep competing, using opposing narratives as a tool, to enjoy the benefits of these initiatives.

4. Civil society, conflicts and memories in contemporary Guéra

The examples presented in the previous section confirm the widespread assumption that, in the last two decades, development projects have fostered more division than cooperation in Guéra. The Yalnas represent a particular case in this framework. Despite a generally hostile context, their rights are recognised by the state. Moreover, they have a local class of educated people fighting for enforcement of those rights and ready to respond to any attack. They also have local alliances preventing them from being politically marginalised, as happened in the case of Djogo about land or Ibrahim about development. Hence, even though their involvement in the political arena may be more problematic than that of other groups, they are not completely excluded. On the contrary, in the cases of the water well and the cereal bank in Tamar they were the ones controlling the Bidio population's access to local resources.

Nonetheless, their participation in development projects is likely to generate controversies and, just as in the land tenure issue, stereotypes emerged as a tool to marginalise them. The arguments used against them in local projects were similar to those described on Chapter Five and based on their presumed unreliability, as they are not a "real" local group like the others. In the case of the community brigade, I heard that Yalnas are not a real local group, hence cannot be involved like the others in local activities. Moreover, those who protested at the *sous préfet* in Nevio were angry as the Yalnas "sold the land", while they were "not entitled to sell land" (Mongo police commissioner, Mongo, April 2015). During the meetings for the preparation of the small dams project, I was told that it is better to avoid involving them, as they were are a small group not grounded in the territory and would create issues; hence, it would have been better to avoid their involvement. The presumed unreliability of Yalnas people is the basis of the joke against those "who lost their mother tongue" that Mahmat told me. That was not the only joke I heard against Yalnas: on other occasions, in Mongo, I heard

that Yalnas people are the "sheep owners who are more qualified to organise cow markets", suggesting that they have a general habit of stealing cattle.

In Chapter Five, I stated that many land issues and the related ethnic clashes are legacies of decisions taken in colonial times. The administrative division of Guéra was built on misunderstandings and contradictions that have never been resolved. Moreover, state authority has been almost non-existent for two decades, so those contradictory conceptions of borders and rights remained unresolved. An interesting point that I found in the story of Guéra civil society was the effort, promoted by the Christian missions since the 1980s, to develop a network of grassroots organisations able to involve the various rural communities and to encourage cooperation among them. There were conditions that facilitated these actions: big qur'anic school have been built only recently in Guéra and since the late 1970s until the end of the rebellions the only schools regularly working were those managed by the church; hence the elites of different cantons attended the same class and developed good relations with each other. Moreover, as both Habré and Deby governments repressed the Hadjiray, there was not a local group that was more powerful in national politics. Hence, at the elite level, there was a period of cooperation, when the main local leaders got in contact with each other and reinforced the social ties that the insecurity had made more difficult to achieve. The emergence of the alliance between Jujube and Borock was an achievement of this period and facilitated the inclusion of Jujube in development projects' activities.

This point of view still exists on many levels. In all the interviews I did with Yalnas, they claimed to have their own story, but they also defined themselves as Hadjiray. Nora – the young sister of the canton chief – told me she was shocked when she heard about the clashes between Zola and Kuju for land. A young man like Ahmat, born in Mongo, but coming from a Bidio family, told me he considers Nora a sister because he has a cousin who married a girl from Jujube, and could not explain the reasons why there are so many issues between the two cantons. In fact, in urban contexts, local struggles are often described as a legacy of the past, generated by "some elders who decided to create problems" (Jaime, Mongo, June 2015) for reasons that no longer have any value nowadays, while in the villages I often heard that the divisions were "created by the politicians" (Annour, Jujube, November 2014) to increase their own power.

Anyway, the stories related to the community brigade show how divisive discourses can easily spread. In Chapter Five, I claimed that the progressive reduction of land and other resources made divisive alternative narratives more effective. In the disputes around the Jujube area, the main point is that Yalnas cannot be the real owners, and hence there are situations where they

must step down and let the actual owners – the Bidio – decide. Looking at the quarrels created by the community brigade, as well as the management of local goods such as cereal banks and water wells, it emerges that what matters is not just the land but, in a broader sense, the legitimacy of the control a canton chief can have over resources. Since the 1990s, the different leaders gradually strengthened their own social networks and fostered their own careers. Moreover, as the procedure for accessing money became more complex and based on competition, the struggles became harsher. More money arrived from International donors to fund local development projects through competitive procedures; and, following the 1996 constitution, new institutions have been appointed by the central government with the aim of handling these projects locally. While the purpose of these policies was to foster social and economic development and involve more local communities in political deliberations, the main outcome was the exacerbation of rivalries among local groups, which were often built on pre-existing divisions.

An important ability of canton and village chiefs should be also to act as brokers of development (Bierschenk et al. 2000) and to manage the various narratives legitimising a group and guaranteeing its coexistence with its neighbours (Lentz 2013). These recent social changes are leading to an emergence of that narrative of "autochthony" that various authors (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009) relate to the reforms of decentralisation and democratisation. The case of Jujube partially fits for this narrative: the main point is not to prove a real autochthony, but a legitimate connection with the land and the other local groups, entitling one to participate development projects.

Chief Adam understood the importance of being involved in this network and strengthened his ties with Ibrahim and Mahmat, who were also building a base to support their own careers. The activities were set up as a partnership between the people of Jujube and those of Borock, hence excluding the Bidio inhabitants of the area. Since development initiatives increased in number, both groups tried to be involved through their own social channels, developing arguments against each other about the right to manage land and resources of the area. Since the number of projects increased, these occurrences became more frequent. Moreover, at the beginning, resources were limited; therefore, before any interventions were made, much attention was given to local social realities. More recently, some projects just built as many facilities as expected in the project plan, without analysing the social reality of the area. The Tamar cereal bank is a result of this approach: the Oxfam project quickly funded its construction and today the FCBG created to manage it is struggling to resolve the conflicts

between local Bidio and Yalnas. Despite the intentions behind the creation of the first local associations and the networks of friendship and marriages that exist in Guéra, the current development interventions based on communities' involvement is likely to increase local conflicts. In such a context, the opposing narratives of the past deployed by Bidio and Yalnas are more likely to emerge and exacerbate disputes.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored different aspects of civil society activities in Guéra, aiming to understand whether the people of Jujube were involved in its activities like the other groups. I started by describing the formation of civil society organisations in Guéra. Cereal banks and the building of small dams played a crucial role in this process. From these institutions, a network of associations slowly emerged, especially when the civil war calmed down during the 1980s. I have shown how the changes in the political arena progressively transformed the relationships between these actors from cooperation to competition; and how memories and ethnicities became tools in this competition. I have explored these aspects through the tension related to the project of a community brigade in Jujube; the planning of a new project regarding small dams in the Jujube area; and the issues related to a new cereal bank in Tamar. In all these cases I showed how access to resources and development projects are related to ethnicity and, therefore, when there are tensions, divergent memories of the past and stereotypes are likely to be used as political tools.

In the conclusion of Chapter five, I emphasised the connection between local narratives about the past and conflicts; and how the narratives of the past – especially those involving slavery – are tools in the political struggle between the Yalnas and the Bidio. I speculated that the tensions might have been not only related to ownership of land, but also, in a broader sense, to recognition as a legitimate group grounded in a certain territory. I also speculated that the reforms intended to facilitate civil society actions may have intensified this need for recognition. I have focused on civil society assuming it would enable me to explore in more depth the disputes I described in Chapter Five. While most of the assumptions have been confirmed, I also found some more interesting topics to deal with. I noticed how conflicts and cooperation coexist in the Guéra political context. Ibrahim and Abdoul both have friendly ties with many local leaders of the department. They are both warmly welcomed when they come to Jujube. The same is true for their staff members: Issa, who works with Ibrahim, has a relative in Jujube and works with Nora in Mongo. While I was staying in Mongo, Erminia, my neighbour, kept me updated about news from Jujube.

The social network created by civil society organisations facilitates communication and cooperation. However, those ties are built on contradictions that might easily lead to disputes. Abdoul is a friend of the Jujube chief and told me he learnt the Jujube story from the former chief, but he would claim that a group without a *margay* cannot own land. He has no problem working with Jujube, but at the same time agrees with the Bidio about many issues and would be more cautious than Ibrahim about involving them in sensitive projects, such as the community brigade.

When describing the emergence of local civil society groups, I have noted how the aim of the first initiatives was to boost cooperation; and that many of the contemporary local leaders cooperated effectively with each other. Local elite members have strong connections; and, apart from the caste group of the blacksmiths, there is no particular ethnic group that suffers severe marginalisation in Guéra. Cooperation and competition may arise, depending on the situation, and the networks created by elite members as well as common villagers are tools for both cooperating with people from other groups and reacting to external attacks.

What is interesting for this thesis is the role of the narratives about Jujube's past and in what conditions they have a role. They have emerged both in the creation of strong ties between Jujube and Borock and in the allegation that the Yalnas are former slaves, and hence not entitled to initiate projects or manage institutions. A variety of social relationships have been built between Jujube people and their neighbours. Those relationships have made Jujube a village effectively integrated into Guéra political life. The fact that they can be involved in development activities and that their neighbours may sometimes consider them rivals for those resources show that they are as much included in local political dynamics as any other local group, and that their past is just a potential tool used in specific situations, and not a commonly accepted stigma that radically excludes them. In both clusters of examples reported in this chapter and in Chapter Five, Yalnas have been able to deal with attacks and negotiate with local authorities: in the case of the antenna in Kuju and the proposed eviction of Ibis, Yalnas elders persuaded the authorities with their reasoning. Moreover, even though they cannot be involved in small dams' projects and the authorities finally blocked the community brigade activity, when I last visited Mongo in February 2016 there were negotiations for a new project under way. These are the reasons why I stated that the Yalnas cannot be considered a marginalised group; they are, rather, an ambiguous group, whose past may be used against them in specific situations.

An important aspect of the various issues I have described is the existence of a local class of educated Yalnas who are capable of defending their cantons, such as Abdel and the other elders in the case of Kuju; the Ibis chief in the defence of his own village; and the network of friendships and marriages Jujube people created with the other Hadjiray, as shown by the case of Ibrahim in this chapter and the alliance with Djogo in the last one. This local elite enabled the recognition of the canton at the colonial time and since then has fought to protect the status of Yalnas as well as the participation of its inhabitants to local political life. The struggles they faced demonstrated that their status remains distinct from other local groups and their past continues to be important. The use of land, the entitlement to financial compensation related to land use and the award of development projects are situations when this distinct Yalnas past continues to matter in the contemporary context and narratives describing them as slave descendants emerge. These are also the same situations when the elite Yalnas' capacity to protect their fellows is demonstrated and exercised. Furthermore, during the research, I saw that this elite does not only act in a defensive way. In the next chapter I will explore a situation when Yalnas took the initiative to give a particular boost to their status: through the process of renaming their canton.

Chapter 7

Becoming citizens in Guéra. Creation of a recognised Yalnas elite and renaming of the canton

1. Introduction

"[The label] Yalnas was a strategic choice. Because of it, they suffered many attacks, as if people said they are slaves, everyone wants to try to own them. But then everyone saw they were good warriors, they knew how to fight, so they could defend their territory over time. (..) They received verbal attacks, as they could not be physically defeated, but then after the death of Adam, they found the genealogy that the father had hidden. (..) This proved they were Abbassid, so people should not mock them. Even the state and the sultan of Abeche recognised they are Abbassid, they are subjects of the sultan. (..) Not all the inhabitants of the canton are Abbassid: only the ruling family can be effectively called Abbassid; this is why some people continue to call them Yalnas. Also, the Yalnas living in the canton are nowadays fully integrated and they can marry whoever they want. The only difference is that if you ask them to show their genealogy, they cannot because they have not got it. Even if they try, at a certain point is going to be blocked" (ADES president, N'Djamena, March 2015).

This quotation comes from the president of ADES – the *Association Al-Abbassia Al-Hachimia pour le Développement et l'Entraide Sociale* – a national organisation whose purpose is to regroup all the descendants of the Abbassid family in Chad. He describes a crucial political moment for Jujube people: the recognition of their new canton name, Abbassid, in 2003. This moment represents the most visible milestone in the effort made by Jujube leaders to integrate themselves into the region as a legitimate local group, and the end of the use of the ambiguous label of Yalnas in official documents. According to the ADES president, their origin proves that they are members of the Abbassid clan and, consequently, subjects of the Wadai sultan, whose dynasty is the Abbassid. He clarifies that not all the inhabitants of the canton can be considered as "real Abbassid", but only the canton chief's family. However, as I showed in the previous chapters, the narratives of the Yalnas village elders are designed to show their inter-relationships with the family of the canton chief. With the recognition of the new name by the state, these narratives – or at least the narrative of the canton chief's family – acquire an official legitimisation.

A common thread in the history of integration and competition that the Yalnas have had with other groups in Guéra is the effort of the group to claim and enjoy a fully recognised citizenship. This thesis has argued that Yalnas integration was facilitated by the lack of rooted hierarchies in a former slave-reservoir like the Guéra. The increased presence of competing actors in Guéra in the last thirty years has revived local rivalries and exacerbated some resistance to Yalnas' involvement in local management of resources. However, in the local political arena, the Yalnas, considered as a group, are an actor like the others. Inequalities among Hadjiray may emerge at other levels (for example, gender or age), but, apart from the caste of blacksmith, no ethnic group clearly discriminates against another. Therefore, it seems that the strategy of these people to unite and be formally recognised as a group under the label *Yalnas* was effective. The latest step in the Yalnas' story –their inclusion in a prestigious Muslim family, the Abbassid, leading to the formal disappearance of their first ethnonym – is also part of this strategy. Yalnas integration in Guéra has been built on a different interpretation of their past. There are bad stereotypes about Yalnas that may emerge and be used to affect their participation in political life. They are often considered untrustworthy, as they have neither a local language nor a grounded link with Guéra land; they are believed to be more likely to cheat and steal, as many non-local groups have done and keep doing in the region. These prejudices emerge among the narratives used to object to their land rights or political participation and seemed to me quite common, even though my public friendship with them may have inhibited some local actors when talking about it with me.

The limited rights of Yalnas around land ownership and political participation, even though emerging only in specific situations, are the main legacies of slavery affecting Yalnas. The political actions of the Yalnas canton chief and his close relatives since the colonial time limited the harm caused by them. In Chapter Five, I emphasised the role of customary authorities in Jujube and Kuju, who raised their voices to local authorities. In Chapter Six, I explored the network of alliances among local civil society actors and strategies developed by the Yalnas for becoming involved in local initiatives. A crucial point that emerged was the presence of a locally created elite – mainly composed of local customary authorities (canton and village chiefs) and people close to them – aware of these attacks and able to react. The chief and his assistants in the case of Kuju, Ibis leaders in this village, the Yalnas living in Mongo who were keeping in contact with Ibrahim and the regional authorities: all these actors were informed and had a role in protecting the rights of the group. These actors were aware of the changes related to the recent decentralisation policies and worked to achieve a new name for the canton. The new name, its meaning and the narratives related to it are probably the topics

that were most stressed during the fieldwork in Jujube. Therefore, it is important to understand why the name change process mattered so much for the Yalnas, even though apparently it did not bring clear practical changes to their status.

This chapter analyses the process of the Yalnas canton's change of name, exploring its meaning for the local actors involved and its capacity to adapt the Yalnas' status to the challenges of the contemporary Guéra political arena. It starts by describing the role of local elites in the recognition of the canton's new name, the general administrative context that made this need a priority, and its importance within the framework of the Guéra political context. Then it describes the process of renaming and the actors involved in it, exploring the meaning in terms of status and self-representation, and relating it to the broader governance changes that are affecting the whole Sahelian region. It finally wraps up the analysis with a broader reflection on the meaning of citizenship for a group like the Yalnas.

2. Political priorities for Jujube

In this section, I summarise the main findings of the thesis about the topic of kinship. I then relate this topic to the broader issues related to decentralisation, focusing on the peculiarities of this process in Chad, and on the impacts these policies have on the case of the Yalnas.

2.1 Elites, kin and recognition among the Yalnas

When I arrived in Mongo, I was afraid that it would be difficult to access the community of Yalnas and study the stories of the various villages united under this label. The Catholic priest François had been collecting local stories in Guéra for decades and told me it had been difficult for him to access the people of Jujube. In our first meeting, in January 2014, he warned me to be careful, as because of their controversial past, they did not like to share their story with foreigners and became anxious if someone asked them questions about it. A similar point was made to me by the Protestant priest Assane, who collected stories from local groups around the Abtouyour and Abou Telfane mountain chains. From his data, he concluded Yalnas villages were camps for slaves, so neither they nor their neighbours like to talk about the past. Therefore, when I arrived in Mongo, in September 2014, I was expecting some resistance from local communities to hosting me and exploring their past. However, I found quite the opposite: the canton chief of Jujube was enthusiastic about my presence in the village and promised me help from its elders to collect the stories of all the villages under Jujube authority. The main reason why I was warmly welcomed was that they hoped I could spread knowledge about their real family – the Abbassid – among the other Hadjiray. They facilitated my access to all the

villages of the canton and to small communities of their group in other cantons. In exchange for this help, they asked me to print a summary of the stories collected, as the elders of Jujube admitted that sometimes they could not remember when and how other villages joined their canton.

The pledge of the canton chief's family and other people close to him was a key factor in it being possible for me to collect abundant information about their past, as I explained in Chapter Three. The canton chief entrusted Annour with the task of helping me to reconstruct the "real story of Jujube people" (Assam, Jujube, October 2014), assuming that all the stories I had already heard about them were certainly wrong. He oversaw the arrangement of interviews with elders of the different villages in the canton, who were able to share their point of view about the story of the group with me. The whole family of the canton chief was very active in this area. Sheba asked me to video-record his interview, while Abdel and David came from their villages to show me printed documents they had collected during their careers in the state administration. The commitment of this small local elite in Jujube was crucial, as they had rooted local knowledge, direct access to key local informants and the linguistic competence to share their knowledge with me.

These persons were not only key informants, but also active in the political events related to the canton. When the canton had officially asked to be renamed, in 1999, they had written a letter signed by 50 elders of different villages, and I had the opportunity to meet most of them and hear their points of view. Migration has been an important phenomenon in various phases of the Guéra region's history, and therefore many of these informants were no longer in Jujube. Some of them were in other villages around Guéra, while others were in the main towns surrounding the area: Mongo, Ati (the Batha regional capital), Abeche (the Wadai regional capital) and N'Djamena. The new name of the canton, and the breakthrough about their identity related to the genealogy they found in Jujube in 1990 were among the most important topic. While in the story of Jujube it seemed to me that the most important point was to demonstrate the legitimacy of the village's claim to their territory, in the stories of these smaller Yalnas villages the focus was on their connection to the story of Jujube and its founder, Mahmoun.

As emerges from this summary, I was driven toward the topic of the genealogy by my local informants, who were mainly members of what I defined as the "local elite", close to the canton chief's family. When I refer to "local elites" I do not mean only the new brokers that emerged with the creation of civil society organisations, but in a broader sense the variety of

local leaders acting in Guéra political contexts. Most of them were initially recognised by the colonial government as customary authorities; then, in the last three decades, the opportunities to play a role in local political arena increased, as local families started getting access to positions in the state machine or local organisations, like those created by Abdoul, Ibrahim or Mahamat. Nobody from Jujube was directly involved in local civil society organisations; the elite of Yalnas is mainly composed of various village chiefs and elders, as well as the canton chief and some members of his family that gained access to state administration positions, such as Abdel and David. The role of this elite emerged in all the previous chapters: in Chapter Four, it enabled the integration of an important array of people under the label *Yalnas* into the Guéra social and political system; in Chapter Five, it protected the villages whose land tenure was challenged by the Bidio or the Dadjo; in Chapter Six, it acted to keep the group involved in local civil society activities.

I collected the information presented in those chapters through conversations and observation, thanks to my personal involvement with these people. However, since the beginning, it was clear to me that the main reason they enabled me to access their groups was their will to share and spread their narrative about the origin of their group. For the elders of Jujube, as well as for the various village chiefs I met during the fieldwork, the priority was to demonstrate that they were not Yalnas, but all belonged to a "real" kinship group, much bigger than the few villages under the authority of the Jujube chief. And, once that group had gained official recognition, through the renaming of the canton, most of the villages tried to situate their group within this recognised new kin, the Abbassid.

I explored the importance of kinship in political struggles in Chapter Four. A point that emerged was the importance for a group labelled as slave-descendants to present itself as part of a specific kin group, and the role of the label *Yalnas* in it. The description of slavery as lack of belonging was the core of both Miers and Kopytoff's (1979) and Meillassoux's theories, while Bruce Hall (2011) emphasised the importance for Muslim groups to be able to show their own genealogies. For people of ambiguous origin – like most of those labelled *Yalnas* – a political priority was to create or be assimilated into a politically recognised kin group. A framework to interpret this process in the context of colonial abolition of slavery is offered by Mamdami's *Citizen and Subjects* (1996), showing the impact of colonial state on local identities, especially where a unique central state was non-existent before. More recently, the political role of ethnicity has been associated with decentralisation reforms and the growth of what has been defined as the ideology of autochthony. Bayart et al. (2001) show how the growing competition

for resources in Africa is strengthening those ethnic identities created by the state and instrumentally used by local elites. The democratisation and decentralisation policies that have been implanted in many African states since the 1990s had the unexpected impact of triggering the reassessment and reinforcement of ethnic categories, which have proved to be powerful tools in African politics. It is, therefore, important to focus more closely on the ways in which decentralisation policies have been implemented in Chad and impacted on Guéra political life.

2.2 Decentralisation policies and their effects on Guéra

In Chapter Three, I described the peculiarities of decentralisation policies in Chad, arguing that, rather than creating locally representative institutions, they were used by the central government to appoint loyal local leaders as "customary authorities". The creation of new cantons has been the backbone of this strategy, leading to fierce competition among local families for recognition. Apart from the prestige of being recognised as a local chief and the salary guaranteed by the central state to all the canton chiefs, recognition as a customary authority facilitates access to international donors' projects. This clearly emerged in programs such as the *Programme de Développement Rural Décentralisé* (PRODALKA, funded by the EU in 2003 - 2016), when it was stated that the canton chiefs would be involved as representatives of local communities (GIZ 2006); or in the more recent *Programme d'Appui au Developpement Local* (PADL, funded by the EU in 2010 - 2015), based on the drafting of local development plans (PDL, *Plan de Developpement Local*) at the canton level and the involvement of the customary authorities of the canton in the writing of them. Moreover, arrangements between customary authorities in case of fights between different groups, as well land management, constitute the core of conflict management in the whole of Chad, and recent interventions have been based on the training of customary authorities in charge of it, further reinforcing their role (CEFOD 2006).

These changes further strengthened the political role of the canton chiefs, confirming the effectiveness of the Yalnas' strategy to be recognised as a legitimate canton by the colonial government, but also reinforcing the reasons for their rivals to object to Yalnas leaders' rights to exert these functions. The challenges that I described in the previous chapters are all attacks against the legitimacy of the group. The presence of a local class of officials able to use colonial documents as evidence to protect the group has been crucial. However, these challenges are growing and the negative connotation of the ethnonym *Yalnas* has a role in it. In this setting, the Jujube elite tried to lessen the political attacks against the group. The revitalisation of the alliance with the people of Borock and the involvement in their social network had an

important role in fostering support for the village, as shown in the previous chapter. However, decentralisation policies not only generated issues, but also opportunities. In fact, in the political framework created by the decentralisation reforms, it also became easier to revise canton boundaries, as well as rename them.

Cantons in Chad are in general a delicate issue. They were built since the 1920s on a variety of ambiguities and contradictions. These institutions are quite vague throughout the whole country: there is not a full list of the existing cantons in Chad, nor a map of their boundaries. The colonial government was exclusively interested in having a person capable of collecting taxes from a certain number of people (Duault 1938, LeCornec 1963), while the subsequent governments tried to have them on their side to avoid military turmoil in the rural areas (De Bruijn, Van Dijk 2007). The renaming processes, as well as the creation of new cantons, started under the Deby regime, especially since the 2000s. There are not many written documents about this: while the reforms involving administrative division (regions, departments and sous-prefectures) must be approved through laws, changes regarding cantons can be effected just by governmental or presidential decrees; therefore, it is harder to monitor changes in this respect (Ndjénodji Mbaïdédji 2008). My local key informants agreed on one point: before the 1990s, canton names and borders were crystallised, as the government was afraid that any changes would affect its control of the territory. Since that period, revision of canton status became a strategy of the central government to boost support and exert a diffused control over the territory.

Despite the lack of a clear policy about the renaming of cantons or the creation of new ones, local leaders perceive it as easier to present these kinds of requests to the government and feel that they are likely to get recognition, as the government wants to get support and loyalty from customary authorities. Local sources describe an impressive burgeoning of new cantons in the northern regions, such as the Batha or the Ennedi, where tens of new customary authorities have been approved by the President. The Chadian national press gave some emphasis to a canton, Haddad, which got a new name in 2010[32], to escape the traditional marginalisation of the Haddad. Similarly, Brachet and Scheele (2016) described the recognition of a new canton in Faya, with a name intended to hide the mostly servile origin of its members[33]. Finally, in the

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[32]   http://tchadoscopie.over-blog.com/article-tchad-pouruoi-le-canton-haddad-change-de-nom-56054274.html, visited on November 2017

[33] According to my informants, this name was recognised because the president spent part of his youth with these people during the rebellion and wanted to reward them. Apparently, these people did not have an ethnonym recognising them as a group before the canton was created. I was told by a key

Fitri lake area, a local canton has been transformed into a sultanate, under whom seven new cantons have been created (Raimond 2017). These are the most important cases for which I could find written references, but I heard during my fieldwork about many other stories, including the choice of President Deby to be recognised as a customary leader of his own canton.

Being recognised by the state is important both for finding positions as state officials and for the protection of the group. Cooperation with the government facilitated the Yalnas' acceptance in Guéra. The central state guaranteed the protection of their rights when they were threatened by other groups, as in the land issues dividing them from the Bidio. Moreover, it made successful careers possible for people like David and Abdel, who had an important role in dealing with the group's issues. In the light of these considerations, the renaming of the canton seems to be one more action in the campaign of the Jujube people to be recognised by the state and get access to the related opportunities.

The important role played by the central state seems to contradict the generally negative perception of its role in the Guéra region. The state was described by most of my informants as something alien during colonial times when it was virtually absent for almost three decades and returned only when "the Tubu" (former President Habré's ethnic group) in 1982 and then "the Zakhawa" (President Deby's ethnic group) in 1990 took control of it. The harsh repression of the MOSANAT movement – mainly made up of Hadjiray – by Habré and then Deby contributed to keeping the local perception of the state as something hostile to Hadjiray. Although they tried to get involved in it and in some cases achieved relevant roles[34], the Hadjiray generally perceived themselves to be at the margin of this power. During the period of the rebellions, local customary authorities were mainly focused on protecting their groups, rather than taking a side. Moreover, local leaders tried to take advantage of the turmoil created by rebellions for their own advantage and some chiefs were replaced by internal rivals (De Bruijn, Van Dijk 2007). When the state took back control of the territory, the Guéra customary authorities proved to be ready to cooperate with the new power, as well as to take advantage of the new opportunities created by the slow development of a local civil society.

The relationship between Hadjiray elites and the state seems quite instrumental in building these elites power. The very existence of these local elites in Guéra is due to the need of the

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informant in N'Djamena that therefore, before getting the canton, they would have been called *Yalnas*, even though I have not found confirmation of this.

[34] The first vice-president of the National Assembly is a Migami and representatives of this region have always been involved in the government as ministers, even though without crucial roles.

colonial state for brokers between them and local rural communities. The appointment and training of these elites was initially managed by the colonial states, which supported whichever group was keener to accept their rule. Since independence, the balance of power has been shaken by rebels, whose actions have been used by local groups to criticise pre-existing hierarchies and have subsequently led to changes of power relations inside some ruling families (De Bruijn, Van Dijk 2007). With the reduction of violence and instability the population quickly grew. I have already explained how since the 1980s access to resources became more complicated in Guéra and some local conflicts arose. These changes emerge in the Jujube story: they had to protect their land rights and were successful in that thanks to their initial recognition as a *Yalnas* group. As Jujube relationships with the state were mainly opportunistic and their elites already had access to key roles and protected the rights of the group, why in the 1990s did they start trying to rename their canton? Did the prestige of recognition by a state considered as something basically distant really matter to them, or there were there other motives for it?

It seems that Guéra local elites generally preferred to avoid cantons being renamed or changed. Interestingly, this wave of creating new cantons mainly affected the northern regions, the stronghold of power since the 1980s, whereas it was less evident among the other groups. However, since the 2000s, in Guéra too there have been claims related to this subject. The group of Arabs inhabiting the area around Oyo has achieved recognition as a canton, while the larger Dangaleat canton was divided into two cantons in May 2015, during the last part of my fieldwork. Moreover, in Guéra as well there are frequent discussions about the existing cantons and the creation of new ones. During fieldwork, I met with a smaller group within the Migami, the Dogangue, who claim they deserve their own canton because of their different origins. Among the Dadjo, the biggest branch of the kin group officially asked to be recognised as a sultanate, with the other existing Dadjo cantons of Guéra under the sultan's authority. I was shown the document making this request by the chief of the Haddad, whose group would also be recognized as a canton under the Dadjo sultan, following the request in that document (Haddad chief, Mongo, March 2014). However, according to Ibrahim, this request will not be granted, whereas a new Dadjo canton will be created for the people of Borock – Ibrahim's village – who want to be independent from the Dadjo of Mongo.

The renaming of Yalnas as Abbassid canton in March 2003 is one of the few changes so far in the Guéra region. It was not immediately clear why they considered this event so important. They told me that they have been a canton since colonial times, and therefore the recognition

of their new name is totally unrelated to the fight for accessing the resources available to canton chiefs in recent decades. Therefore, the reason why they fought for the new name was not mainly economic. However, from the beginning of the fieldwork, my Yalnas informants gave a lot of importance to this event, as if this recognition by the state was crucial for them. I tried to better understand what this might mean from a practical point of view, focusing on the role of the state in Guéra region.

2.3 The importance of state recognition

In the stories I have collected, the state's role had been crucial since the creation of a central power by the French, at the beginning of the 20th century. The state had an important role in providing opportunities for the members of the ruling families. The colonial administration forced the families of the canton chiefs to go to school, so that they could become a local ruling elite capable of understanding and applying the policies of the central government (Mbaiosso 1990). Schooling and the army offered the main options for local people who were looking for occupations other than farming. Jujube was recognised as a canton capital[35], and therefore the family of the chief was among the first to attend the school, opened in Mongo in 1917 (Duault 1938). Some of the key informants from Jujube, such as Abdel, David, Sheba, Annour, and the chief of Ibis, were able to develop their own personal positions thanks to the opportunities offered by the state. Despite the frequent turmoil that affected Chad's central government, being appointed a state official is nowadays considered one of the better options to achieve a stable position and a salary. I met with the elders of a couple of villages that used to be part of the Dogangue canton, which was erased by the French in the early 1930s because of the bad behaviour of their chief. Since then, the Dogangue had been under the authority of the Migami canton chief and they are still part of that community. Nowadays, in the Dogangue villages I visited, they regret this event, as they have fewer opportunities than the other Migami – who are closer to the chief's family – to be involved in state activities.

I have previously explained that Guéra has not been affected by massive administrative changes, despite the variety of sources of legitimisation for local political groups. This thesis is based on the idea that the search for political legitimacy is a crucial motive for action in a former slave-reservoir like Guéra. Being able to retrace their origin – either by proving a spiritual link with the land or belonging to a respected family – is the path to recognition as

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[35] Despite the opposite claim about the status of Jujube when the canton was renamed, which was not solved by the ambiguity of the official *arreté* [decree], the colonial reports describe Jujube as a canton capital.

locally legitimate political actors. This is the reason why my sources were so keen to orient my research in this direction; and, therefore, I have decided to close my ethnography by exploring this topic, which summarises most of the issues emerged in the previous chapters.

The issue of legitimacy is particularly important for a group like the Yalnas, as their name is easily related to slavery. Moreover, among them it may be easier to develop a commonly accepted narrative than in bigger ethnic groups. In a group like the Migami – composed of more than 60,000 people – there are different lineages that can claim recognition, as "we are a complex family, with various fathers" (Djogo village chef, Djogo, October 2014). Therefore, talking openly about genealogies may raise internal tensions. I have already talked about the Migami historian who wrote a book about Migami origins and was accused of presenting his family as the founder of the group, which was not acceptable for many other families in the canton. In an even bigger group like the Dadjo, there are documented migrations and existing cantons in other regions also[36], and therefore they "cannot base their whole story on a single myth" (Fathi, N'Djamena, September 2014).

Among the Yalnas, the main problem did not seem to be finding a coherent internal narrative between the various villages chief, but being able to impose this narrative among their neighbours. At the time of my fieldwork, the inhabitants of Jujube were mainly called Yalnas. In most cases, the new name was not even known. I previously reported bad jokes about Yalnas, based on their supposed untrustworthiness, suggesting they are people that prefer to steal, rather than work. These jokes sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, referred to the fact that Yalnas are not a real kin group, but an array of people without a common story. For most of the Hadjiray, the Abbassid are inhabitants of Wadai, and there are no Abbassid in the Guéra region. The only people who were not disoriented by the new name of the canton were those who work for state agencies or NGOs, as it is regularly used in all the official documents. Jaime, one of the leaders of the Cereal Bank Federation, knew about the new name of the canton and told me that the real meaning of Abbassid in Chadian Arabic is "the father had a master", laughing at the fact that, despite their effort, their name is still making clear "who they are" (Jaime, Mongo, October 2014). I also noticed that, in a recent book published about Guéra history, the author – a Migami – kept using the old name Yalnas, even though he is a friend of Abdel and gave him a copy of the book as a gift. "They always want to belittle us: this is why everyone keeps calling us *Yalnas*, which is not our true name," Abdel answered, adding that

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[36] Dadjo are considered the first dynasty of Wadai, before the Tounjour and the Abbassid, and there are Dadjo cantons both in the eastern region of Chad and in Sudan.

especially among Bidio this is due to their resentment, as many of their ancestors had been captured by Jujube warriors in the past.

Among the Bidio, not only is the new name – Abbassid – generally rejected, but the very recognition of the canton is presented differently than among the Yalnas and, according to Jujube people, has been questioned at various times in the past. I was told that in the 1970s the Yalnas chief was arrested because of a fake allegation coming from Nevio that he was supporting the rebels. Then in the 1980s a sous-préfet of Bidio origin arranged a local administrative reform intended to obliterate Yalnas canton, which was blocked through a legal appeal. When I asked Bidio elders about these issues, I was told that in the 1970s the Yalnas chief effectively cooperated with the rebels, and the Bidio chief was often threatened and finally killed by them because he was not cooperative enough. Therefore, what their chief said to the authorities was true. On the other hand, they deny the story of the Bidio sous-préfet in the 1980s, as all the village chiefs, elders and local authorities from Bidio canton that I met claim that Yalnas canton was not officially recognised as a canton until 2003, when they changed the name. On this point, it is very hard to understand which version is true: Yalnas is mentioned as a canton by both Duault (1938) and Fuchs (1997), even though its status is not deeply analysed. The decree recognising the new name of Yalnas canton is ambiguous, as it does not clearly state whether there was a previous Yalnas canton, nor whether it is creating a new canton, as other decrees do[37].

The procedures for canton recognition, as well as for name changing, are ambiguous, so both interpretations could fit the decree. In the following section, I want to analyse the effort made by the Jujube ruling elite, as well the elders of the other villages under its authority, to rename their canton and, consequently, legitimise their version of the story. I will explore the process of name changing, focusing on the implications that it has both in term of legitimacy and representation for the people previously defined as Yalnas.

3. How and why the canton got a new name

The Yalnas canton officially changed its name on 25th March 2003, when the new canton chief – Assam – was enthroned[38]. As I said, the new name – Abbassid – is rarely used, although among the elders of Jujube and the other villages of the canton there is a widespread will to make the new name recognised. Most of the stories I collected in my fieldwork emphasised the fact that

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[37] Arreté 586/PR/MAT/DG/DIAT/SCT/2003 of the 25 of Mars 2003.
[38] Arreté 586/PR/MAT/DG/DIAT/SCT/2003 of the 25 of Mars 2003.

all the people of the canton are "the same family" (Ibeth, Mongo, February 2015) and, therefore, the label "Abbassid" covers not just one family in Jujube, as I was told by the president of ADES in N'Djamena, but the whole group. I found a certain consistency among my informants on this aspect: despite the claim by the ADES president that only the family of the Jujube canton chief can be called Abbassid, in most of the villages – the only exception being the villages where they have an alternative story, such as Ibis – local elders emphasised their belonging to the Jujube family, and Jujube elders agreed on these stories. However, as for the reasons for and modalities of the name change, the explanations have been more contradictory. The main argument among the elders of the canton chief's family is that the old name hid their real origin and they finally decided to make this clear, even though there is no explanation of why this happened at this time.

"The other people of Guéra sometimes treat us as foreigners, because we came from somewhere else. We are not autochthones, though we have been intermarrying here for a long time. Our grandmother, Dadda, she was an autochthon, we are all descended from an autochthon grandmother. The Migami accept this, but the Bidio, they are aggressive, they don't recognise this, though we have children together. (..) To change this, we decided to change that name. At the beginning, we decided to register what we called a genealogy. We have a genealogy, coming from Saudi Arabia; this paper may track our origin. (..) Apart from our strict family, there are also other groups of Abbassid that arrived here and are now dispersed around us. The other brothers and the fellows of Mahmoun: they never came back to Wadai, they are all somewhere here" (Sheba, Jujube, October 2014)

It is important to note how in this quotation Sheba explicitly mentions the aggressive behaviour of the Bidio, consistent with the widespread perception of the Bidio having a hostile attitude to them. In another conversation, when we were alone, Sheba explained to me that "people in Guéra considered all Yalnas as slaves, but we knew it was not true," and this is the reason why they were looking for "evidences" (Sheba, Jujube, December 2014) to demonstrate their real origin. According to this argument, it seems they needed official recognition for something that was already clear to them, but refused by some local groups. Other sources contradict this approach. In a journey to Ati (Batha region) to meet some Yalnas who had settled there at the beginning of 20th century, I found a letter dated 1st April 1990 describing, full of surprise, the discovery of an old genealogy. The tone of the letter contradicts the idea that they already knew very well about their past. This letter was written in Jujube by the old chief, Adam, and some of his brothers to all the other family members living outside Jujube,

and is enthusiastically reporting the outcome of a journey they had made to Abeche, when some *faky* of the Sultan's family recognised their genealogy and stated that from now on "we are the same blood and the same milk"[39].

Though it is not clear whether their origin was progressively forgotten or strategically hidden, what emerged from all the sources was the importance of the written genealogy found by the canton chief Adam at the beginning of the 1990s. This genealogy was stored inside a small metal box whose only function was to bring good luck to the owner. It was conserved, together with the leftovers of an old handgun and metal armour, both very rusty and damaged, but considered proof that their ancestor Mahmoun was a warrior. The genealogy is a big, old paper, with four pages. Each page starts with a quotation from the Quran, followed by the representation of a journey. At the end of these four main pages, there is a smaller, handwritten part, reporting the ancestors of Wadai Sultan Abdel Karim down to the founder of his family, Al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, an uncle of the prophet Muhammad, whose descendants founded the Abbas caliphate in the 8th century. The genealogy is handwritten and mentions the journey of Abdel Karim's ancestors into the desert until their arrival in Wadai, in the 17th century.

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[39] Letter to the Yalnas elders in N'Djamena, written in April 1990, my translation from French.

Figure 4: The genealogy of Jujube people

The genealogy is kept by the canton chief in a locker inside his house. He agreed to show to me after I had been there for some days, and only for a short time, before locking it again. The genealogy has no mention of events after the arrival of Abdel Karim in Wadai, and therefore there is no mention of the story of Mahmoun or Jujube. Moreover, nobody among the Jujube elders was able to read Arabic and explain to me the meaning of the genealogy: they just knew it was a genealogy with some Quran quotations. The presence of this genealogy in Jujube and the fact that Jujube elders can relate their ancestors to the Wadai royal family was considered enough for them to demand official recognition of their status. Remarkably, when I asked about the existence of other Yalnas cantons that had not changed their names, I was told that their lack of written evidence is the reason why they have not been able to prove their alternative origin. The written genealogy is the crucial element for the recognition of their story as real.

Apart from the letter written in 1990, I found another typed letter sent in September 1999 and addressed to the Minister of Internal Affairs. In this letter, the "original people [*ressortissants*] of Jujube" state that their ancestors – the Ouled Mahmoun, of the Abbas tribe – settled in Guéra region at the time of the wars between the main Chadian sultanates (Kanem, Wadai and

Bagirmi). They further argue that when the colonial government set up a new administrative system, this group, far away from their original land and being a minority, were classified as *Yalnas*, a word with "pejorative and offensive connotations". Therefore, they asked the government, "within the framework of the changes they are implementing, to rectify this historical anomaly"[40], changing the name from canton Yal-Nass to canton Abbassid, Ouled-Mahmoun people. In the following pages, they briefly presented the genealogy relating the contemporary canton chief to Mahmoun and his father, Saadan, to the Wadai sultan's family[41]. They collected fifty signatures, the first being those of the canton chief and the other elders from the various villages of the canton, as well as the diaspora in the main Chadian cities.

I had the conversation with the ADES president reported at the beginning of the chapter thanks to the help of a friend of mine, Salah, who works for an Italian NGO. He comes from Abeche, and I discovered in N'Djamena that he was among the founders of ADES and already knew about the story of Jujube. He had been involved in ADES since the beginning as, thanks to his long engagement with international NGOs, he knew how to write a NGO constitution to have ADES recognised by the Minister of Internal Affairs. The interview with the president was translated by him, and he also remembered the Jujube story. He told me that ADES was created in 2002 and Jujube was one of the first cases they had to deal with. The constitution of ADES states that "Abdalkarim Ben Djame", founder of the Wadai sultanate, created a "multi-ethnic kingdom", where the members of his family – Arabs – progressively melded with the indigenous groups and spread Islam in the area. Therefore, when the French arrived and defeated the sultanate, the members of the family fled all over the country and the "Abbassid identity" disappeared, mixing with other ethnic identities. The purpose of the association is to "regroup the Abbassid and their descendants" and to "strengthen their unity and well-being"[42]. The president told me that this purpose could be achieved as every "*real Abbassid*" should have recorded and kept a genealogy, which is a crucial aspect of their identity. As nowadays, through radio and the mobile network, communications are easier, the association decided to send messages inviting all the people who could prove their genealogy to contact them and, after a check of their genealogy, join the association.

I could not really understand the precise procedure of the name changing, nor the role of

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[40] Letter to the Ministery of Internal Affairs, written in September 1999, my translation from French.
[41] This is not consistent with the story they told me in Jujube, when Mahmoun's father was Sultan Saboul; at the same time, in that period the Wadai sultanate had complex internal struggles and the sources do not agree about who was sultan in the period of the presumed travel of Mahmoun to Guéra.
[42] ADES constitution, introduction and Chapter One, my translation from French.

ADES. Some Yalnas acknowledged ADES' contribution, while others minimised or even denied it. Abdel told me that all the credit for the renaming should go to the more experienced and educated elders of Jujube, like him, David and "*our brothers in N'Djamena*" (Abdel, Mitele, November 2014). Lucas, a Bidio scholar I used to meet in N'Djamena, told me that the Wadai Sultan's family had never accepted them, to the point that a Member of Parliament from the Wadai region[43] went to Jujube to complain about their new name. He also added a point often claimed by Bidio and denied in Jujube, which is that thanks to the new name Jujube people were recognised as a canton, whereas before, they were just a *groupement*, and therefore, according to the Chadian administrative system, had no authority over the land.

Ibrahim, in a conversation in Mongo, told me that, even though the official renaming took place after the death of Adam and the enthronement of Assam, his son, it was the commitment of Adam that had made it happen. However, he also thought that, before Assam, Jujube was recognised only as a *groupement*. The text of the official *arreté* recognising the renaming of the canton does not clarify this point. It states that Assam Adam is "appointed as Abbassid canton chief (previously Yalnas group), replacing his father". The fact that the *arreté* states "previously Yalnas group" may support the theory that it used not to be a canton, but at the same time, when a *groupement* is transformed into a canton, this is clearly explained in the *arreté*, whereas a simple mention in brackets does not resolve the ambiguities about the previous status of the group.

In Jujube, the interest was more in the recognition by the Sultan's family than in the bureaucratic process of renaming. I was often told by Annour and Ibeth that I needed to travel to Abeche, to find decisive confirmation of their genealogy. Even though the formal process was handled in N'Djamena, the legitimisation, in their eyes, comes from Abeche. When I travelled there with Annour, in April 2015, he arranged a meeting with a Wadai historian, Bashir, a friend of one of his cousins living in Abeche. He told me that he had no idea about the existence of Abbassid in Guéra "as there are, in Wadai documents, no references to *aqid* in Guéra. However, the genealogy of Jujube family perfectly fits with ours so I know we are relatives" (Bashir, Abeche, April 2015). Although Bashir was clearly surprised to hear about Abbassid in Guéra, Annour and his cousin were satisfied after the conversation. The fact that their genealogy is considered coherent and likely to be true gives them enough recognition. The presence of descendants of former Wadai soldiers all around Guéra was confirmed to me

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[43] He mentions M. Daoud Daba, who unfortunately was already dead at the time of my research. I found no other confirmation of this event, and neither do people in Guéra remember a visit from this MP because of this issue.

by various sources, even though all these people had melded with local people and lost all trace of their origin, probably also because many Wadai soldiers were slaves[44]. What matters for Jujube elders is to show the trajectory that led them there from Wadai as members of the sultan's family, therefore making them Abbassid. Abdel told me he wishes to host the sultan in Jujube, but for the moment "we are not yet in a condition to host him: a sultan requires a high level of comfort" (Abdel, Mitele, November 2014). They are already collecting money to achieve this target and further strengthen the legitimacy of their new identity.

Apart from the political importance of being a canton, for the inhabitants of Jujube and the villages under its authority the recognition of the genealogy and the subsequent rename of canton had a huge impact on their self-representation. In most of the villages I visited, local elders found a way to relate themselves to this genealogy through marriages or by asserting the common origin of Abbassid and groups such as the Arab or the Tounjour, whose origins are similar. The fact that Jujube genealogy received formal recognition made easier and convenient for the people of these villages to connect to it. The importance of being in a broader ethnic and, consequently, social network contributes to the importance of the new name. When I met with the management of ADES in N'Djamena, the point the president of the association stressed to me was the solidarity among the members and the aid the association could give for organising important ceremonies, to show that people are part of a big group and if necessary are capable of mobilising a lot of people.

In Chad, if you have a problem, is it important to show that there are many people around you: this gives you power and respect. So, if you are member of the association, you must attend common events with the other people […] *Therefore, the main support of the association is social, you are not alone when there are these kinds of meeting* (Ades president, N'Djamena, March 2015)

ADES aims to unite the scattered diaspora of Abbassid all around Chad for this reason. A relatively small group like the people of Jujube, whose canton has in total less than 10,000 inhabitants, can gain advantage by being considered part of a broader group. Moreover, the Abbassid family is not just big, but is also quite a prestigious group. Presenting oneself as a member of an originally aristocratic family has a different impact than being just a Yalna*s*. Among scholars in N'Djamena, I heard that there were cases of people who were denied high-

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[44] This is a point I have heard often from very different sources and is confirmed also by the research of Zeltner (1997). There are a few battles still remembered when the Wadai army was defeated and their soldiers either died or remained captive in Guéra. In these cases, they may have decided to join the Jujube people, even though nobody has any clear memory or evidence of it.

level positions in political life because it emerged that they were Yalna*s*. In these cases, *Yalnas* was used to indicate not their belonging to one of the recognised groups of Yalnas in Guéra or Salamat, but more broadly the fact that they were not real members of the community they aimed to represent[45]. Therefore, getting rid of this label is an advantage both for an individual, whose career could be affected by the stigma of this name, and for the group, as Yalnas cannot be considered real owners of land and, therefore, their political rights are to some extent reduced.

The second point I mentioned, the fact that Yalnas' rights as a group are affected by the meaning of this label, is further proved by the doubts I heard about the veracity of their new name. As with the undermining of their rights in the previous chapters, exploring the arguments used against them gives insights into the way their identity is perceived. An interesting argument against Jujube's renaming was presented to me by Ali, a Foie et Joie social worker from the Dadjo canton. I met him during an event organised by the church in the Dangaleat canton and we had a long exchange, as he used to work in Jujube school and had many friends there. Initially, he was reluctant to tell me his opinion, but then he decided to explain that the label *Yalnas* comes from the fact that "Wadai soldiers used to buy the fitter and stronger men, leaving the old and sick here". Contemporary Yalnas are "the descendants of those guys, the leftovers of the sultanate" (Ali, Dadouar, May 2015), but of course they don't like this reality, therefore they are looking for an alternative explanation. This explanation is perfectly consistent with Jaime's claim that Yalnas "are not good warriors at all, now they pretend to be aristocrats, but they are only there because the Bidio accept them, otherwise they would be evicted very quickly*"* (Jaime, Mongo, June 2015)*,* as he said when he was complaining about the outcome of the mobile phone antenna issue described in Chapter Five. Moreover, even though I did not mention to them the conversation I had had with the ADES president in March 2015, their statements totally negated his argument. The ADES president told me that the Hadjiray had tried to enslave the Yalnas, as they thought that they were former captives because of that name. However, they realised they were strong fighters, so they had to respect their authority – contrary to both Zakaria's and Jaime's opinions.

A common element of these denials of Yalnas' alternative origin is teasing about their pretended nobility and the qualities related to it. However, it is not just a case of pretending

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[45] I have heard two different stories, one regarding a Member of Parliament from the Wadai region who wanted to achieve a high position in the parliament, the other a Minister who had then to quit his place. However, these cases cannot be formally proved, as the fact that they were blamed for being Yalnas never appeared in the official discourse.

that they are not particularly strong or good in fighting. The logical implication of these criticisms is that they are there because their presence has been tolerated, and not because they won some rights in the past, as assumed by the alternative Jujube narrative. This critical view is shared by most of the Hadjiray I met. In Chapter Five, I claimed that this may be related to the fact that many Arabic-speaking groups were trying to settle during that period, and accepting a narrative entitling Yalnas' rights might have weakened the position of other Hadjiray chiefs. In this frame, the Jujube elite was trying to create a new identity to acquire a political legitimacy they did not have, as other small groups did in the wake of decentralisation. Despite some differences, all local narratives point to the need for social and political recognition by the state and at the local level to fully enjoy citizenship rights. The next section will further explore this last point.

4. A new name for full citizenship?

This chapter has so far explored the process of changing the name of the canton under Jujube authority, seeing the renaming of the canton as part of the ongoing local political struggle around the political legitimacy of the Yalnas canton. The negative meaning of the name Yalnas presented them in public conversation as a sort of non-group, whose rights are related to strategic manipulation, rather than to a natural connection with a respected genealogy or a local worship site. While discourses about slavery emerged almost exclusively in the struggle against Bidio and seem to be political tools used to delegitimise claims, the lack of kin is something inextricably related to the label *Yalnas*. Accepting this label seems to have been unproblematic at the time of colonisation. Issues arose with the creation of a new political context following the 1980s. There are various possible reasons for this: the growing competition for natural resources, the emergence at the national level of Muslim political elites, the new powers acquired by local actors or the creation of a local civil society distributing resources depending on ethnic alliances. The outcome is that the importance of belonging to a recognised and respected family has grown in Guéra. The formal recognition of the new name aims to erase this image of the group, reversing their status of former slaves – therefore deprived of real kin – to those of warriors who came to Guéra to spread Islam. This could explain why the elders I met see as so important not only formal recognition, which has already been achieved, but the general acknowledgement of their story and their relationship with the Wadai sultan's family, one of the more prestigious in the Guéra area.

The kind of social dynamics related here are not something new in the social sciences. In Chapter Four, I explored the various Guéra narratives, focusing on the importance of a group's

origin, as described by Lentz (2013), while in a broader sense the importance of belonging to a specific kin group has been already described in African societies (Miers and Kopytoff 1977, Meillassoux 1991), as well as among African Muslim groups (Zeltner 1997, Hall 2005, 2011). The absorption of Yalnas into the family of their leader – an Abbassid *aqid* – could be consistent with this model. The unification and recognition of an array of people with ambiguous origins was facilitated by the policies of the colonial regime that forced groups inhabiting areas without strong systems of power to accept a sort of local central authority. While apparently for a long time this process and the ethnonyms it generated had no central role in the Guéra region, the broader changes affecting the Sahel in the last three decades had an impact on ethnic categories, which became a crucial tool in political struggles and fostered new forms of exclusion (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009).

In this setting, identities and the narratives behind them acquired a new political importance. This is the broader context where the social legacies of slavery also started to matter more in many Sahel contexts. In Chapter Two, I explained how scholars have focused on social movements initiated by slave descendants that aimed to guarantee them the same rights that all the other citizens enjoy. I also emphasised how the trajectory of the Yalnas has diverged in many aspects from those described by these authors. The Iklan/Bella of Niger (Lecoq 2005), the Haratin of Mauritania (Leservoisier 2009), the Gando of Benin (Hahonou 2008, 2011), partially or fully embraced their identity and acknowledged their previous captivity, using this narrative as a tool to unite their groups and acquire strength in the newly created local political arenas. By contrast, among Yalnas the main aim is to totally erase this ethnonym and all the connections with slavery related to it. Despite these differences, my conclusion is that in all these cases, groups with an ambiguous past are trying to be fully recognised as citizens, in a context in which local institutions are acquiring importance and creating both new opportunities and challenges. The elites of ethnic groups that got some degree of recognition, but also many limitations to their rights, are reshaping their narratives with the purpose of fully grabbing the new opportunities. The differences in the strategies are strongly related to the particularities of the context.

In Guéra, despite an increased space for civil society organisations, decentralisation has been implemented mainly through customary authorities. This had an impact on the choices of a locally stigmatised group such as the Yalnas. In Chapter Six, I showed how the spread of local civil society is fostering interactions at the local level and creating new opportunities, as well as increasing the risks of community conflicts. Often the leaders of the civil society organisations

act more to receive financial support than to foster homogeneous development. It is important to have social connections with people who are heads of local organisations or involved in state management, and to promote the involvement of the group as a full political actor. The legitimacy and prestige of cantons and villages chiefs, therefore, matter. Being a Yalnas, an Abbassid or a Bidio matters in terms of local rights and representation. The state in Guéra enables different degrees of integration and participation according to the kin of the actors. The battle for the new name is part of those struggles I described in the previous chapters, which are not just for resource control, but in a broader sense about enjoying full citizenship. In such a context, a label related to slavery such as *Yalnas* is not an indelible stigma imposed by a powerful group on a powerless one, but is a tool reshaped over time by the various actors involved. It guaranteed some rights in the past but, nowadays, getting rid of it is a more effective strategy for empowerment.

5. Conclusion

This chapter analysed the process of name changing of the former Yalnas canton of Jujube, exploring the meaning it had in terms of both status and rights. It explained how I was steered by my local informants towards this topic and how the administrative reforms of the last two decades had affected local political life. It then described the strategies and actors that that led to its recognition in March 2003. I explained why the renaming was so important. I argued that being a legitimate local group is a crucial pathway to enjoying full citizenship rights in contemporary Guéra; and that the peculiar history and location of the region led a group with an ambiguous label like the Yalnas to unite first under this name and, subsequently, to try to impose an alternative narrative, presenting themselves as descendants of a Muslim aristocratic family. The main purpose of this strategy was to be fully recognised as citizens, a condition that the label Yalnas was no longer able to guarantee.

Thanks to the actions of the local elites, the renaming of the canton was achieved. The disappearance from official documents of that label is another step to erase legacies of slavery on the ground and strengthen the general Guéra narrative that "slaves disappeared", as they were something alien to the region. However, these legacies are deeply embodied in various social dynamics related to the Yalnas group, and the reactions to the renaming of the canton confirm this point. For the rival groups, accepting the new name would mean recognising their political rights. Jujube people found a way to have their alternative narration of the past formally recognised, but are still struggling to get it accepted at a local level. This struggle is still ongoing, and the leaders of Jujube are planning new activities – such as a visit by a Sultan –

to make their new name and status more visible in the region.

While I was collecting the stories, I noticed how in many villages outside Jujube the elders tried to connect their genealogy with the official one of Jujube, sometimes through a brother of the founder of Jujube, sometimes claiming roots in a group close to Wadai and, therefore, considered the same family as him. There are also those who acknowledge that they met with Jujube people once in Guéra and, thanks to an alliance based on marriages, now they are the same family. In this sense, I have found some consistency around the official story of Jujube, which is an unusual element compared to other local and bigger groups who are divided within themselves and nowadays tend to disparage their common label and develop alternative stories. I have been told that this is related to the small size of the Yalnas group, which can easily be united under a common narrative. This is another element that may explain why they opted for this political strategy as a means to secure their rights.

Apart from the peculiarity of the Guéra context that may have facilitated divisions, rather than cohesion, this chapter also argued that the way decentralisation policies are implemented in Chad is impacting on local strategies to get citizenship rights. The government is fostering the creation of new customary authorities, rather than the union of bigger political groups, making it more convenient to stress particularities. In Chapter Two, I described what scholars defined as "politics of belonging", which is making the category of autochthony crucial in the management of local resources (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009). The struggles involving Yalnas can be classified as such, with the emergence of the identity of *Abbassid* as a path to legitimize their role in Guéra. However, these dynamics here cannot be understood without exploring the history of the region, the way Hadjiray identities themselves progressively emerged and how the availability of stereotypes about slavery made them easy to mobilize in situations of conflicts. Jujube people's purpose is to gain full recognition as a real local group, combining the narrative of the migration of an aristochrat Muslim family with agreements made with indigenous people, contemporarily legitimizing their status as local and increasing the prestige of their kin. This narrative is probably a reaction to the increasing local conflicts over the last thirty years, which emphasised some of the negative elements of the label *Yalnas*. As it was for the kinship relationships, land tenure management and involvement in civil society activities, the narratives are used by local actors as political tools to contemporarily deal with the legacies of Guéra history and the need of a locally grounded legitimization. The trajectory of the label *Yalnas* exemplifies this process, and the effort to erase it is another milestone in the political struggle of Jujube people to be integrated in the region as fully

recognised citizens.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

This thesis has explored the legacies left by slavery in the Guéra region, an area that was for centuries victims of slave raids from the neighbouring Wadai sultanate. I focused on the social trajectories of the Yalnas, a group whose origin is unclear and is sometimes related to their past as slaves. I described their efforts to integrate within the Guéra region and the partial acceptance of them as one of the various Hadjiray ethnic groups. The contradictions behind the integration of Yalnas into the broader group of Hadjiray emerge only in specific situations of conflict over power and resources. Since the 1980s, land has become progressively scarcer and, because of an array of decentralisation reforms implemented throughout the 1990s, control of land is nowadays a key to participation in local development initiatives. While the category *Yalnas* initially contributed to the integration of the group in the Guéra region, with the emergence of these issues it became a weakness. In the final empirical chapter, I explained the group's strategy to shake off the label and to present themselves as a more prestigious sub-group of the broader Abbassid family.

The Yalnas are the only local group whose history challenges the main narrative that, in Guéra, slaves disappeared after colonisation. I explored their story and status to understand if and how legacies of slavery matter. In an area described as a former slave reservoir, these legacies emerge through dynamics that are different from contexts where slaveholders were massively exploiting slave labour and, after abolition, slave descendants shared the same social space with their former masters. The struggle for resources between rival ethnic groups through divergent interpretations of the past does not affect only the Yalnas' status. Rather, the Yalnas appear to be actors, among the others, with the ability to re-elaborate the past from the oral reservoir of local stories used by Hadjiray groups to define their identity and social position.

In the contemporary Guéra region, I found various local disputes in which past and present overlap. What makes the case of the Yalnas relevant is that the actors involved raise the topic of slavery as the key to the conflict. This is the main element that disrupts the local narrative describing the slaves as alien to Guéra. Coming back to the quotes and the questions that opened Chapter One, I argue that it is impossible to understand if slaves "disappeared", to go somewhere far from Guéra, as claimed by most Hadjiray, or remained, classified under ambiguous ethnonyms, as stated by others. Legacies of slavery here do not emerge through a

tension between former slaves and former masters. Rather, all the various, scattered, local groups developed their own positions about the memories of slave raids, to legitimise their status.

My argument in this respect is that a post-slavery approach should not be limited to the trajectory of people labelled as slave descendants, whose presumed identity is nowadays doomed to remain ambiguous, or those of the groups trying to exert power over them. Rather, it should explore the variety of ethnogenesis processes described since colonisation, whose impact on the creation of identities has often underemphasised the importance of previous dynamics and relationships related to slave raids or trades. Exploring the stories of the slave raids, the connections and transformations of the relationships between the different local groups, as well the crystallisation of the identities that the French administration tried to impose, is the key to grasping the political arena of a place like contemporary Guéra.

Studies of post-slavery have gained impetus from the recent spread of slave descendants' movements in various contexts across Sahel. Some scholars (Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011; Pelckmans and Hardung 2015) relate these movements to the wave of decentralisation policies occurring across Western Sahel. One of the initial questions of the thesis was about the opposing effects of these policies, described both as a tool to open new political arenas for marginalised groups and the root of a politics of belonging which marginalises anyone who lacks strong grounds for belonging to a specific local arena (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2009). I explained that the Chad government implemented decentralisation policies with the aim of strengthening its power. Therefore, rather than creating room for people considered slave descendants to unite, these policies facilitated the creation of new identities, such as the creation of the *Abbassid* label. In Guéra, the lack of a strong central power capable of imposing its narrative and ideology further supported this process. However, the argument I support is that those apparently opposed strategies – the embracing of slave descent as a tool and the creation of autochthonous narratives – are both based on the same logic. In most of the countries involved in these dynamics, citizens exert their rights through the mediation of locally recognised elites. Therefore, the protection of a powerful local leadership is crucial. Political mobilisation or redrawing of identities are among the most used strategies to build such leadership. Within this framework, the re-elaboration of the past, the imposition of stigma or the creation of alternative connections are all products of the interactions between local ethnic groups. This emerges in the disputes dividing Yalnas and Bidio, where narratives and stereotypes are clearly flexible and narratives based on autochthony emerge together

with re-elaboration of those about slavery. In fact, it seems difficult to draw a clear distinction between them, as it seems difficult to clearly distinguish between slave descendants and other potential victims of slavers' raids. In the following sections, I explore these findings in more depth.

1. Legacies of slavery when the slaves disappear

In the Guéra region, slaves are described as something alien, and therefore legacies of slavery are nowadays not articulated through a former slave/master dichotomy. Even members of a group considered to be made up of slave descendants, like the Yalnas, have not suffered constraints from their former masters since the beginning of the colonial period. It is not clear if and when they had masters, apart from a few stories preserved from precolonial times, such as the testimony of Derendinger (1912). However, in both Derendinger (1912) and Duault (1938) it clearly appears that the Yalnas were free when the French arrived, and no local groups claim to have been their masters in the past.

Despite these peculiarities, legacies of slavery matter. Unpacking the meaning of Yalnas, its origin and uses, it emerged how this ethnonym was built on opposing interpretations of the past among different local groups, and that, despite a partial integration into local kinship systems, as shown in Chapter Four, the meanings of this label imply a set of rights interpreted differently by insiders and outsiders of the group. I delved into the interaction between Yalnas and Bidio, the only key to talk with people openly about slavery, as both groups interpret the hostility of the other based on a past as slaves. However, I could not find a hierarchy related to slavery between the two groups. Neither of the groups was in condition of dependence toward the other, neither capable of imposing its narrative, even though, in a context of growing importance of autochthony, the narrative of the Bidio seems the one locally more respected. The main point of their controversies is the legitimate ownership of land, explored in Chapter Five. Yalnas present a story that legitimises their ownership through a marriage with a local family at the beginning of the 19th century. However, the Bidio claim to be the owners of that land, and therefore, even if the story of the marriage is true, this does not entitle the Yalnas to that land.

In this land issue, the dynamic may be compared to other former slave/master struggles. Miers and Klein (1998) showed the importance of migration shortly after the abolition of slavery in French Western Africa, as former slaves were looking to rejoin their original kin or access land through recognition by the colonial state. This situation is well explained by Rodet's (2015)

study in northern Mali, where diasporic communities were built by "refugees" (either former captives or other individuals who had lost contact with their own groups) seeking new forms of "patronage" (pp. 368 - 376) after the reshaping of hierarchies promoted by the colonial government. Migration and resettlement were a commonly used strategy in a period when the central governments were looking to increase the exploitation of land (Klein 1998). However, in the last thirty years – when the formal control of land became more important in the Sahel – new dynamics have been emerging in this respect. While Pelckmans (2011) explores the complex link between social mobility and migration, Diop (2003) shows how when the development interventions of the 1980s – involving groups of slave descendants – increased the value of previously neglected lands in Guinea Conakry, claims of ownership among former masters were immediately aroused. Similarly, to Guéra, transformation in both demographics, climate and local governance since the 1980s triggered processes that increased the role of descent as a source of exclusive legitimacy over certain resources.

In Jujube's case, the Bidio do not claim to be former masters, but argue that a group made up of slave descendants cannot be considered the owners of land in an area that used to be protected by local groups. Furthermore, there is not only a different interpretation of land ownership, but also a broader disagreement about boundaries involving another important local group, the Migami. The variety of actors makes these issues more complicated than if it were just a matter of a binary contrast between slaves and masters.

Delving deeper into this case, I claimed that more than the ownership of the land, the problem is about citizenship rights. As local communities are more and more involved in the execution of development interventions, the recognition as the legitimate authority over a certain territory is important. The competition is not just between former slaves and masters, but involves all the groups. The administrative divisions during the colonial time were full of ambiguities, and none of the subsequent political regimes solved them. While the status of presumed former slaves did not remain a public problem, and neither was – or is – their citizenship status challenged or belittled in their daily life, there is a repertoire of stereotypes and opposed narratives that emerged at the same time as these new challenges.

A related point that Chapter Six explored is the importance of decentralisation policies and the changes they brought at a local level. The control of the land – and, therefore, the arguments against slave descendants – emerged in part because of the increasing pressure on natural resources, and in part because of the spread of local associations, usually related to ethnic groups' elites. This further contributed to creating a divisive political arena: without a clear

group of masters controlling this new set of institutions, there was more room for alliances, as well as more risk of conflict. The controversies involving Yalnas embody reference to their previous supposed enslavement. However, legacies of slavery have also emerged in other conflicts, such as the one between the Dadjo of Borock – allied with the Yalnas and claiming to be slave raiders – and the Bidio, who inhabited the area raided by them and consider them invaders and thieves.

I argued that, in an area described as a former slave reservoir, all the groups have to situate their narratives and identities in a framework where slave raids were the main element of the past. The problems affecting the Yalnas might be harder, because of their name and lack of clear attachment to the territory. This situation, together with the peculiar way the Chadian state has implemented decentralization policies, is the reason why these policies did not have the same effect as in other part of Sahel – uniting slave descendants as a group – but rather triggered the creation of a new exclusive identity. In this framework, the effort to appropriate international development resources and gain advantage from decentralised governance seems the more important political arena to explore.

2. Ethnicity, social movements and decentralisation: differences between Yalnas and other Sahelian marginal groups

The impact of decentralisation policies is a crucial aspect of Sahel political life, mainly for the importance acquired by the concept of autochthony and for its impacts on slave descendants' political role. I explored the importance of decentralisation policies mainly in Chapters Three and Six. I emphasised the peculiarity of this process in Chad, the main purpose of which was to strengthen the ability of the central government to control its peripheries. In the case of northern Benin (Hahonou 2008, 2011), decentralisation was implemented through the creation of new authorities elected at a local level. This policy enabled the Gando, a group demographically important in the local context, but marginal at the national level, to access power. Gando were empowered through the re-appropriation of their own ethnonym, initially created as a synonym for "slave descendants" and then used by local elites to unite the group and give it power and visibility. In Chad, decentralisation led to a proliferation of new cantons and departments, whose leaders are appointed by the government. Therefore, it has strengthened local leaders who are able to build contacts with representatives of the central power and argue for their own people's particularities, showing their specific group to be suitable for having a separate canton.

This policy was somehow appropriate for a group like the Yalnas. Demographically, they are among the smaller groups in the Guéra department. Therefore, it would have been difficult for them to access important roles through elections. Moreover, ever since colonisation, the leaders of the group nurtured good relationships with government authorities, as well as with potential allied groups. The colonial government recognised Yalnas because of their positive attitude towards it. The formal recognition of the new name, which was granted in 2003, is a strategy that recalls their cooperation with the colonial government in the 1920s, updated to the new framework of decentralisation. They produced a strong new narrative – that of the Abbassid – and gained the support of a national organisation in ADES, able to bring about formal acceptance of this new narrative. Even though its recognition at a local level seems to be more complicated, officially they are no longer Yalnas. In a situation where they could not muster strong local support and where access to new resources depends on government recognition, the Yalnas tried to shake off their label and look for networks of support at the national level, to enjoy new opportunities and counter a potentially growing stigmatisation.

The importance of alliances and the options explored by the Yalnas led us to the second important element, which are the decentralisation policies in Guéra. In Chapter Six, I described the formation of Guéra civil society and the struggles related to it. When new political spaces appeared, in Guéra there was not one main group gaining advantage over the others, but a variety of strategies implemented by members of customary authorities' families. The Yalnas did not have enough power to create their own association, as did other leaders – like Ibrahim and Abdoul – able to unite and mobilise their own people. However, cantons and local associations have been the main beneficiaries of aid funding since the 1990s and for the Yalnas it was important to be involved in these opportunities. The chief, Adam, opted to strengthen Jujube's alliance with Borock, cooperating as much as possible with Ibrahim and Mahmat. The facilities developed through this support, such as the water well, cereal banks and other communitarian institutions, were depicted as something belonging to the community actively engaged in them and, therefore, triggered rivalries and competition with Jujube's neighbours, mainly the Bidio.

The alliance with the Dadjo was possible because Yalnas were not totally marginalised by their rivals locally. However, they were also not fully integrated, therefore the stigma of the past could emerge as a reaction to behaviours considered inappropriate by their neighbours. Bidio have not the power alone to impose their decisions over the Yalnas, but they could instead look for alternative strategic alliances, which emerged quite clearly in the issues related to the

community brigade. In such a context, Yalnas are already able to react and counterattack, as a group with a recognised representative. The main purpose of the new name is to reduce the repertoire of arguments against them, consolidate their recognition as a canton – sometimes criticised – and eventually guarantee some new allies, thanks to the broader, prestigious label of "Abbasid". This could also reverse the Bidio argument about their past as slaves: they had many slaves, but were among the slave raiders and used to attack the Bidio, who therefore harbour jealousy.

This use of narratives and decentralisation reforms has been instrumental in most of the cases described in other contexts. Tidjani Alou's (2000) analysis of Timidria highlighted the need to organise the functioning of the association according to the policies of international donors and their focus on human rights. Hahonou (2008, 2011) in the case of the Gando describes a similar strategic use of new opportunities. The policies implemented all over Sahelian Africa following the end of cold war made these kinds of local claims a common political strategy, articulated through either political movements or NGOs. "Brokers of development" (Bierschenk et al. 2000) increased their importance, offering new spaces for both claims based on autochthony, such those described in Cameroon by Geschiere (2009) or Nimanijoh (2005), as well as for slave descendants in organisations like Timidria or through newly embraced ethnonyms like Gando.

This thesis cannot achieve a fixed model of former slaves' trajectories in the wake of decentralisation. Rather, in all the examples presented, contextual specificities play a crucial role. Neither does this thesis claim to identify a common pattern across former slave reservoir areas. Klein's seminal analysis (2002) about interactions between slave raiders and decentralised societies emphasised the variety of possible configurations. Building on this, I argued that an interesting outcome of analysing legacies of slavery in an area depicted as a former slave reservoir is the positionality that all local groups have to take towards the past of slavery. These positions are not fixed, but are malleable, as are the ethnogenesis processes related to it (Lentz 2013). *Yalnas*, as a category to unite and emancipate former captives, had probably already emerged in precolonial times (Derendinger 1912, Bruel 1918), and has been further strengthened by the colonial government's policies (Duault 1938), together with the Yalnas' effort to develop friendly ties with the other groups of Hadjiray, at a moment when new political legitimacy was created. This context facilitated the emergence of new ethnonyms and the rhetoric of slaves as "aliens" to Guéra, already described by Vincent (1975) and still widespread at the time of my research.

Yalnas integration was not a definitive outcome and I have identified various ruptures in the rhetoric about slaves as "alien". I outlined how the apparent integration of Yalnas among Hadjiray in a region where slaves were said to have disappeared co-existed with a sort of "public secret" about slavery, whose importance increased in line with the competition for resources. I explored these tensions and their connections with both precolonial issues and the colonial government's controversial administrative decisions. When local associations progressively emerged and increased the importance of new local elites, both Yalnas and their local rivals had to act through different alliances to secure their rights. Moreover, as narratives and ethnonyms are "malleable" (Lentz 2013), the same ethnonym initially used for integration was abandoned for a new narrative. The very label, Yalnas, which applies "to the canton, but not the people" (Lucepa canton chief, Lucepa, December 2014), appears as a strategic invention, replaced as soon as it became a problem rather than a support. This process, described in Chapter Seven, highlights, on the one hand, the need of the scattered groups of Yalnas to have a recognised ethnic group in order to be integrated among the other Hadjiray, even though this group was to some extent fictitious and labelled through a pejorative ethnonym. On the other hand, it also highlights the relative ease of re-elaborating or re-inventing a new ethnicity and, therefore, proposing a new narrative about the group's past and rights. It is also important to remember that ethnic categories are not the simple invention of a group, or of the colonial power, but the outcome of a process of negotiation and resettling of boundaries among the various Hadjiray. The switch from Yalnas to Abbassid has been possible in part because of the general increase of Islam, and in part because of the presence of allies of Jujube that supported their change despite a context generally hostile to the new ethnonym.

Even though this may seem a different outcome to that of the Gando in northern Benin, there is a common strategy behind them. The ethnonym *Gando* was able to reunite a vast array of people at a moment when local political action created room for accessing power outside the system of customary authorities. While this name did not initially designate a distinct ethnic group, but rather a status, assuming it as an ethnonym was strategic for a new elite aiming to gain control of the new institutions. By contrast, Yalnas are a small group and power in Guéra is mainly exerted through customary authorities. In this framework, a new prestigious identity is the key to securing rights, getting rid of a denigratory label and exploiting the malleability of the local past to build a new story. Both stories are related to new models of governance being implemented in rural areas. The recent wave of slave-descendant movements described all over the Sahel have already been related to the variety of governance reforms implemented

since the 1990s. Comparing Yalnas and Gando suggests that these movements should also be associated with this reworking of identities and belonging. The specificities of the context shape the differences in the trajectory and dynamics. However, the connections between slavery, identity and the political arena are similar. The common element of these different approaches is the importance of having a narrative justifying the enjoyment of citizenship rights at a local level. Narratives consolidate a group with the support of a local elite representing them and protecting their rights within the state machine.

3. Narratives of the past and struggles for citizenship

The connection between narratives, identities and rights has been at the centre of a range of anthropological research in Africa. An important moment in the discipline was when scholars questioned the value of ethnic categories and exposed their instrumental connection with colonial and postcolonial states (Amselle and M'bokolo 1985). A more nuanced focus warned against an overrepresentation of the colonial role, emphasising the strategy of local groups, even among societies traditionally considered as decentralised (Lentz 2013). Within this framework, slavery proved to have a crucial role (Hall 2011). Shaw (2002), Rossi (2009) and Rodet (2015) emphasise the resilience of memories, sometime hidden, sometime embedded in social practices. Whilst historians deplored the lack of former slaves' and slave descendants' points of view, specific approaches, such as life story collecting, have tried to revive these memories (Mirza and Strobel 1989, McDougall 1998)).

However, neither of these approaches fits entirely with what I described in my fieldwork. In Guéra, there is not a main narrative that imposes itself over the others. The situation was closer to Lentz's (2013) research in Burkina Faso: where societies are mainly decentralised, it is difficult to find a dominant narrative, but there are a variety of malleable narratives, changing over time. Knorr and Trajano Filho (2010) noted that the same events and practices that foster social cohesion might be differently interpreted to worsen conflicts. In a former slave reservoir, despite the variety of dynamics and interactions among various actors emphasised in the literature (Klein 2001, Hawthorne 2001, David 2014), there has not traditionally been a main actor ruling over the others and imposing a specific ideology and narrative on them.

I identified a common point among the various local narratives of the past: slaves were aliens and had somehow disappeared since colonisation (Vincent 1975). This narrative is broken only occasionally and with the purpose of weakening an opposing position, without affecting the ideology of slaves as foreigners. Through collecting local stories, I found how diverse the

trajectories of Guéra groups are since precolonial times. I found an abundance of stories about slave raids, an unexplained disappearance of slaves and the ambiguous origin and presence of a group like the Yalnas. I argued that this situation is at the same time an outcome of the region's presumed past as a slave reservoir and of the specific policies that increased the importance of belonging and autochthony. In Chapters Three and Four I summarised the main historical events of Guéra, focusing on the lack of a central power ruling over the area and the variety of strategies to deal with the acute insecurity related to this. The era of raiding did not just create the isolation and desolation depicted in memory but rather generated shifting political alliances between villages that, in turn, sometimes collectively resisted the invading slave raiders and at other times also negotiated with them. The memory of those imagined dark days serves as a tool in the hands of local elites to create social order and justify the contemporary ethnic mosaic – as much a construct as the memory itself. These strategies have been the basis of the subsequent process of union between different peoples of Guéra regrouped under the label Hadjiray. Nowadays, most Hadjiray intermarry amongst themselves, sometimes even bypassing the distinction between Muslim and Christian.

In Guéra, local actors use narratives of the past to consolidate ties between groups that used to be scattered and divided. This may be an explanation for the easy access that Yalnas gave me to their stories and the emphasis on alliances built over time, in comparison with the lack of stories of isolated former or liberated slaves. The only individual story of captivity I heard – about a prisoner of the Wadai troops who fled and gave the position of the camp to the French, facilitating their victory – does not imply any marginalisation of the person involved. The stories of the groups emphasise their capacity to absorb foreigners and create bigger, but still cohesive, groups. The first initiatives of local civil society I described in Chapter Six further contributed to these unions. The reforms of the 1990s altered this process, leading to growing divisions between these associations. In such a new context, the same narratives were mobilised for opposite purposes, emphasising elements of divisions or implicit hierarchies between groups previously ignored.

I could not assess the reliability of local narratives, nor did I try to do so. What is important to understand is that whether there are slave descendants in Guéra nowadays or not is related to the organisation of the contemporary political system and how memories are reshaped or revived to guarantee the prestige and power of different groups. The variety of ways these narratives are reshaped is a peculiarity of an area described as a former slave reservoir, where there was not a dominant power able to impose its narrative on the others. In the light of

these conclusions, it may seem that a post-slavery approach does not bring much added value, if applied to a former slave reservoir. An analysis based on the exploration of the various ethnogenesis and the way they used the past to consolidate identities and exert rights can explain social dynamics, while slavery is just a discourse potentially used for political purposes. However, in enlarging the scope to broad geographic areas and the dynamics around them, I argue, rather, that the dynamics related to slavery are a key to explaining most of the contemporary social processes in the Sahel. Precolonial social relationships had a deep impact on the way the colonial state consolidated – rather than created – ethnicity in Sahelian Africa, as Hall's (2011) critique of Mamdani (2009) demonstrated.

4. What insights can a post-slavery approach provide in the case of Guéra?

In Chapter Four, I described the process of integration of the Yalnas into the newly created colonial administrative system. The origin of the ethnonym *Yalnas* has some similarities with other processes described in the literature. Bazin (1985) explains how the term *Bambara*, in French West Africa, was initially used to classify a broad range of heterogeneous people, united by the fact of not being Islamised, in a context of the growing importance of Islam. This term in a way resembles the category of *Kirdi*, used to define the pagan people of the Mandara and Adamawa mountains. The literature shows how these terms have been strategically used to get recognition and protection under the colonial system. Since the 1980s, anthropology has criticised ethnic categories in Africa (Amselle and M'bokolo 1985, Amselle 1998), seeing them as a creation of the colonial administrative machine. The colonial state reduced the variety of categories elaborated and reshaped over time by many African groups to manage a rapidly changing political landscape (Kopytoff 1987) through using fixed labels. Mamdani (1996) emphasised how these labels emerged along with a very authoritarian form of the state, creating a variety of "decentralized despotisms" through the system of native authorities. Critics of the politics of belonging in Africa build on this research (Bayart et al. 2001), highlighting the continuities between these phenomena and switching the focus on the capacity of local actors to appropriate external policies, and adapting to their agendas.

The theoretical tools developed by these authors are useful and effective, but not sufficient to explain the dynamics of a region like Guéra. The contemporary ethnic categories of the region all emerged during the colonial time and, as I emphasised while describing the decoupage, colonial administrative redrawing of boundaries had a crucial role in this. The changes in policies of central government also help to explain the contradictory dynamics between the

different groups of Hadjiray and facilitate the emersion of discourses on autochthony similar to those described by Geschiere (2005, 2009) and Niamnijoh (2005). However, I cannot fully grasp these dynamics without acknowledging the contemporary description of Guéra as a slave reservoir for the Wadai and the changes brought by the abolition of slavery in the whole area. The end of slave raids is a crucial moment in all local stories, as it radically changed Guéra's political landscape. Local legitimacy was built on totally different principles and the variety of social arrangements existing to handle Guéra's critical position at the edge of the Wadai sultanate were revisited, while the colonial government fought ruthlessly against slave raids, but, at the same time, tried to deal with former slaveholder elites.

This local framework is necessary to understand the meaning, strategies and limits of the creation of the label *Yalnas*. Similar discourses are relevant to the other ethnonyms implying slavery, such as *Gando*, *Haratin*, *Bella* or *Iklan*. The role of slavery in shaping power hierarchies in precolonial Sahel and the ambiguities in the process of abolition managed by the colonial states (Miers and Roberts 1988) led to the creation of various ethnonyms as an outcome of local political struggles. A rich literature shows the battles between descendants of captives aiming for emancipation and the efforts of slaveholder elite to keep its control over their former slaves. This thesis explored a slightly different political battle: that between people previously enslaved and other groups who somehow resisted slave raids and did not aim to capture slaves, but occasionally kept them as a currency to avoid attacks. Despite the differences emphasised throughout the thesis, there is a common point I want to emphasise: the importance of memories of slavery in the ethnogenesis that followed colonisation and the survival of those memories in local narratives as a powerful political tool.

Hall (2011) argued for the importance of the precolonial past whilst analysing contemporary social relationships in northern Mali, in contrast to Mamdani's (1996) approach to post-colonialism, especially his explanation of violence in Dar Fur (2009). Post-slavery studies support this point, as the way colonial states abolished slavery in most areas of the Sahel constitutes a crucial landmark for any analysis of these contexts. The movements of slave descendants in Sahel further emphasises the argument, showing how local actors are not just victims of colonial states' decisions, or manipulation of a small local elite, but are capable of raising their voices. The way these movements emerged, criticising these hierarchies, identifying in the precolonial past the root of unequal access to rights and asking for reforms in areas where the state has traditionally been weak, such as land tenure or political

representation, further emphasises the key role of abolition as a watershed in Sahel's political life.

The case of the Yalnas has many difference with these movements. However, in the Guéra region too, scholars cannot understand local narratives and contemporary conflicts without exploring precolonial slave practices and the processes leading to their eradication. The social relationships between Hadjiray are better interpreted as a reconfiguration of social relationships in the wake of the end of the raids, rather than a moulding of hierarchies implemented by the colonial government. Even when abandoning the name *Yalnas*, the people of Jujube needed to position themselves in terms of slavery – moving from being slave descendants as being descendant of the slave hunters - and justify their position in these crucial practices that were presented as "alien", but in fact fully ingrained in local society.

I do not have evidence to suggest an unequivocal reason for Yalnas integration or a single cause of the recent questioning of their rights. Moreover, on the basis of the evidence I collected and the strategy I deployed to enter the research arena, I mainly focused on the Yalnas as one group among other potential rival groups. Further research in Guéra or another slave reservoir could explore in more detail other factors in integration or marginalisation of ambiguous groups, such as gender, age or wealth, finding internal differences that this thesis could not demonstrate.

In this respect, it could be worthwhile to compare the relatively effective social trajectory of a group like the Yalnas to those of the caste of Haddad, which did not get the same status as the other Hadjiray, even though nobody would doubt their past as free men. Brachet and Scheele (2016) described a similar situation in the oasis of Faya where people labelled as slave descendants enjoy a better condition than the Kamaya, whose descent is less known. Exploring and comparing the peculiarities of each of these groups may shed lights on the processes of inclusions and marginalization and their connection with the past. In this sense, the category of "discrimination based on descent" presented by Quirk (2011) may be an heuristically fruitful arena for comparison, as long as descent is not considered a static and ascribed factor, but explored in its genesis and changes. Discrimination based on descent is an arena where modern slavery and post-slavery approaches may meet, but I fully agree with Rossi (2009) and O'Connell Davidson (2015) on the need to recognize the differences between the two phenomena. Rather than relating modern and classical slavery, I would suggest to explore those social categories at the edge of practices of enslavement and other hierarchies in Sahel precolonial society, such as the cases of Kamadya or the Haddad, or even the same Yalnas,

whose status cannot be fully defined as of slave descendants. Post-slavery literature showed how ethnonyms and status are ambiguous and rarely fit to fully represent the groups indicated by it. Focusing more on the mechanisim of creations and the very social effects of these labels in a comparative perspective could enlarge to scope of post slavery studies in Sahelian Africa, without losing the basic peculiarities of this approach, at the intersection between history and social science.

Moving back from my initial interest, I conclude that this thesis could not develop conclusive arguments about legacies of slavery in a former slave reservoir. This topic probably deserves more study and the conclusion I have achieved can be compared to other cases and highlight some common trends, but should not be used to generalize a model of legacies of slavery in a former slave reservoir. More historical studies about regions like Guéra, where there is not a commonly accepted narrative of the past, may better clarify some of the dynamics of ethnogenesis I could only outline, aiming to further contribute to understanding the peculiarities of an area described as a former slave reservoir. However, the aim of this thesis was to test a post-slavery approach in a different context, and try to highlight some general dynamics, hoping to facilitate exchanges and comparisons with similar contexts across the Sahel. It showed how a post-slavery approach could grasp interesting insights to describe local dynamics. At the same time, post-slavery might enlarge its focus from the former masters/slaves dialectic to the impacts the uneven colonial abolition of slavery had on the variety of actors involved at different levels in slaving activities across the Sahel.

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