

## MAPPING OF ISLAM IN THE SOUTH OF CHAD: Spaces and Intercommunity Relationship

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### **Abstract**

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*Islam is the religion is one of the religions with high rate of growth. It is the most popular in the world after the Christianity. In 2010, the number of followers is estimated at 1.6 billion, or 23.2% of the world's population and represents 15.5% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa (LaRochelle et al.2015, P. 15). In Chad, 53.9% of the populations are Muslims. As a result, it is the first religion after before Christianity and animism (INSEED, 1993, P. 21). The penetration and expansion of Islam is not recent in Chad. However, the modes of penetration and expansion differ from one area to another. In the North of the country, the penetration and expansion have been flexible because of the economic, social and historical links of this part of the population with the peoples of neighboring Arab countries. In the Centre, there were instances of clashes upon entry and expansion was slow. In the South, on the other hand, the spread was violent because of the animist and Christian roots of the population. The psychosis of this violent penetration has led to a less peaceful cohabitation in this part of the country, based on open or hidden claims of territorial or religious affiliation. This article, based on surveys assisted by cartography, aims to understand the history, to identify the space and to analyze intercommunity and interfaith relations in southern Chad through cases of three bordering regions, namely the two Logones (Oriental and Occidental) and the Tandjilé.*

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**Keywords:** Islam-Expansion-Geography-Relations-Chad-Community

### **Introduction**

The Muslim population is spreading in time and space across the globe. There are an estimated 1.6 billion believers, or 23% of the world's population. The majority of these followers are in Asia, where about 62% live. They are concentrated in the South and South-East of this continent (Patrick Ribau, 2015, P.122). In Africa, the proportions of followers of the religion of Allah differ from one region to another. In North Africa or Maghreb Africa, the three countries where three quarters of the population is Muslim are, in order of importance, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt. Muslims are represented there by 99.8%, 97.9% and 95% respectively according to the Atlasocio.com (2021) ranking. Sub-Saharan Africa has only 15.5%, with Nigeria in the lead. The exponential growth in the number of Muslims can only be observed in the 20th century. The number of Muslims has increased from 11 million in 1900 to 234 million in 2010, according to the same source.

In Chad, the number of Muslims is far greater than that of other religions such as Christianity and Animism. Islam comes first with 53.9%, followed by Christianity with 40.6%. The other so-called traditional religions represent only 4.1% (INSEED, 1993, P. 21). This high rate, at the national level, is disproportionate within the country in relation to historical and political facts. The North of the country is almost entirely Muslim. The Centre is predominantly Muslim. And the South is predominantly Christian and animist. The proportion of Muslims is increasing. According to the Pew Research Center (2022), the number of Muslims in Chad has risen from 6,210,000 in 2010 to 8,090,000 in 2020.

The expansion of Islam was gradual in time and space in Chad due to many factors. The proximity of the northern part of Chad to the Muslim peoples of neighboring countries facilitated the penetration of the religion very early on. Trading relations between these peoples also contributed greatly to the expansion of this religion. In the South, the mode of entry and expansion of Islam is different. At first its penetration was violent through the actions of the Sudanese conqueror Rabah. The subsequent gentle and insidious trading relationships continued the work of the conqueror. Also, has the seizure and maintenance of political and military power by northern leaders over the past thirty years not contributed to the expansion of Islam? And finally, the new mechanisms of attraction linked to humanitarian and the acts of charity continue, today, to amplify the expansion of religion in Chad.

If during the period of Rabah's conquest relations between Muslims and people of other religious denominations were tumultuous, the period from independence to the 1970s was relatively peaceful. Indeed, the Muslim faithful were very open to dialogue and enrolled their children in Catholic schools where parents of other faiths attended. Inter-marriage was widespread and everyone worked together in peace (Zbinden R, 2017, 14/12). But the 1979 civil war, which saw the intervention of Islamic countries, undermined this prevailing climate of peaceful living together .

Islam was, the first if not the best weapon to take power from the southern working class who had held it since 1960. Hissein Habré was the one who used Islam to achieve his goal. Indeed, in the process of reconciling the country's belligerent sons, an agreement, called the Fundamental Charter, was signed in Khartoum, Sudan, on 25 August 1978 between the President of the Republic, Félix Malloum NGakoutou Bey-Ndi, and the rebel Hissein Habré. This agreement promoted Hissein Habré to the office of Prime Minister on 31 August 1978. With his sights set on taking supreme power, Habré made Islam his battle horse. He was the only defender of Islam in the highest instances. He appeared to be the eye of Muslims that had to be protected at the risk of letting it die. Thus, in the mosques and in the streets, preaching against other religions multiplied until the civil war broke out in April 1979.

After the conquest of power by the Muslim groups the fundamentalists gradually immigrated to Chad. This invasion was concomitant with the sowing of division through preaching that denigrated and called non-Muslims 'impure' that is to say "unclean".

Thus, the division, in the name of religion, gradually took hold throughout the country, creating a Muslim North and a Christian South. In the South it led to open and deadly conflicts between communities. Beyond the eternal farmer-herder conflicts common to all three provinces where the surveys were conducted the non-respect of customs, the desecration of cultural spaces and the problem of sharing market spaces are the main causes of conflicts that make peaceful cohabitation between the communities difficult.

This article, based on a survey carried out in three provinces of southern Chad, revisits the areas of Islamic expansion in relation to the factors involved, using mapping. It also analyses intercommunity relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in the current context where cohabitation is problematic.

## **1. Materials and methods**

The methodology used to produce this article is based on surveys, interviews and direct field observations. The work of the various authors who have dealt with the subject on the one hand and the study area on the other has been very useful for understanding and comparing the phenomena. The spatialization of these phenomena is adapted with the help of existing maps obtained free of charge.

- Field surveys. These were carried out with the help of forms, drawn up for the purpose, consisting of several headings. The first section, which is of a general nature, is made up of the elements of appreciation for identifying the religion, the ethnic groups and the territory of origin as well as the main activities of the respondent. The second section focuses on the denomination. It gathers questions related to the type of religion, taking into account the family's religion in order to understand the conversion or not of the respondent. The last section is linked to the search for an appreciation of peaceful cohabitation or not. To this end, the heading takes into account the residence and relational fabrics of the respondents.

- Direct field observations. These have enabled us to correct and complete the shortcomings that the surveys have revealed. We deliberately visited rural rather than urban areas for several reasons.

The first is linked to the cosmopolitan nature of the city, which not only masks the characteristics of the relationships by the constraint of living together in the same space. Also, it must be understood that, beyond that, occupations restrict time for certain considerations. The second is related to the level of education of city dwellers, which allows them to transcend certain considerations that rural people have.

- The cartographic figures are derived from digitization with GIS software, ArcGIS. The map showing the location of the study area and the one tracing the path of Rabah during the period of conquest are taken from the administrative division modified by Decree No. 415/PR/MAT/2002 on the creation and reorganization of departments. The map showing the location of highly Islamized ethnic groups is taken from the International Language Society (SIL) map of the languages of Chad. The field data (surveys and interviews) allowed for adaptations of the passages, devastation and resistance.

The area where this study was carried out covers an area of 76581Km<sup>2</sup> where 1918187 people live, i.e. 6% of the area and 17% of the population of Chad. It is made up of three provinces, namely Mandoul, Moyen Chari and Tandjilé (see Figure 1). A total of 600 people were interviewed, or 200 per province.

- The Mandoul Province, with an area of 17,517 km<sup>2</sup> and 637,086 inhabitants, has three departments and 15 sub-prefectures.

- Moyen Chari, the largest of the three in terms of surface area (41,460 km<sup>2</sup>), has 598,284 people. It is composed of three departments and 18 sub-prefectures;

- The province of Tandjilé, with three departments and 14 sub-prefectures, covers 17,604 km<sup>2</sup> and has 682,817 inhabitants. This makes the province the most densely populated (39habs/Km<sup>2</sup>) of the three (RGPH, 2009, P. 17).

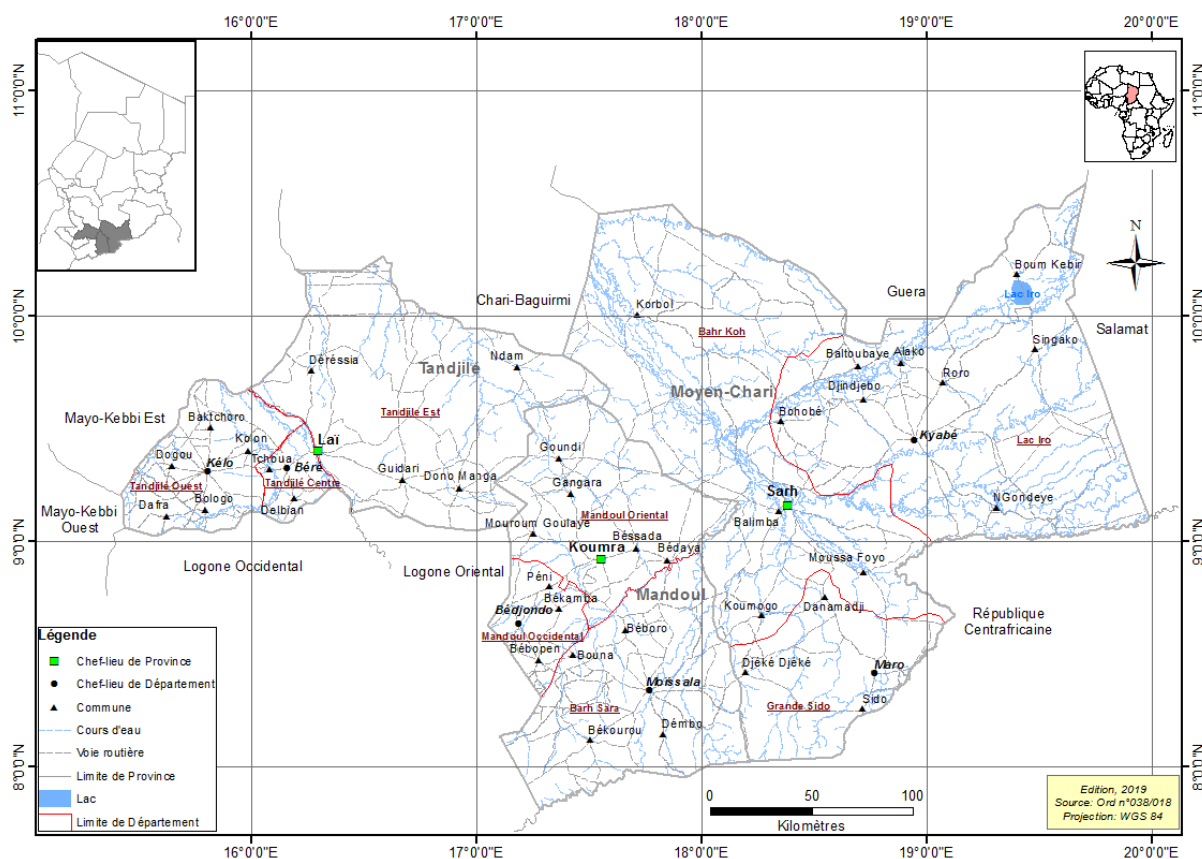


Figure 1: Location map of the study area

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Factors in the expansion of Islam in Southern Chad

With 53.9% of followers, Chad is a predominantly Muslim country in Africa. The mapping of religions practiced in Chad confers the large northern part of the country to Islam. In the centre, the majority of the population belongs to Islam because of the resistance of some ethnic groups to this confessional denomination to its penetration and expansion until today. The South, on the other hand, which represents 10% of the territory but is the most populated, presents a mixed situation with a dominance of Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) and animism (Dumont, G.F., 2007, p. 268). What then are the factors that contributed to the expansion of Islam in this part of the territory?

In the southern part of Chad, in general, certain ethnic groups are recognized as predominantly Muslim. These are the Bboa, the Niellim, the Tounia and the Sara Kaba in the present-day province of Moyen Chari. The Gouley, the Ndam and the Toumak in the Mandoul province. In the province of Tandjilé, the Gabri come in first position followed by the Gouley. The Ngambay, Gor and Mongo peoples in the provinces of Logone Occidental and Logone Oriental have long resisted conversion to Islam (see Figure 2).

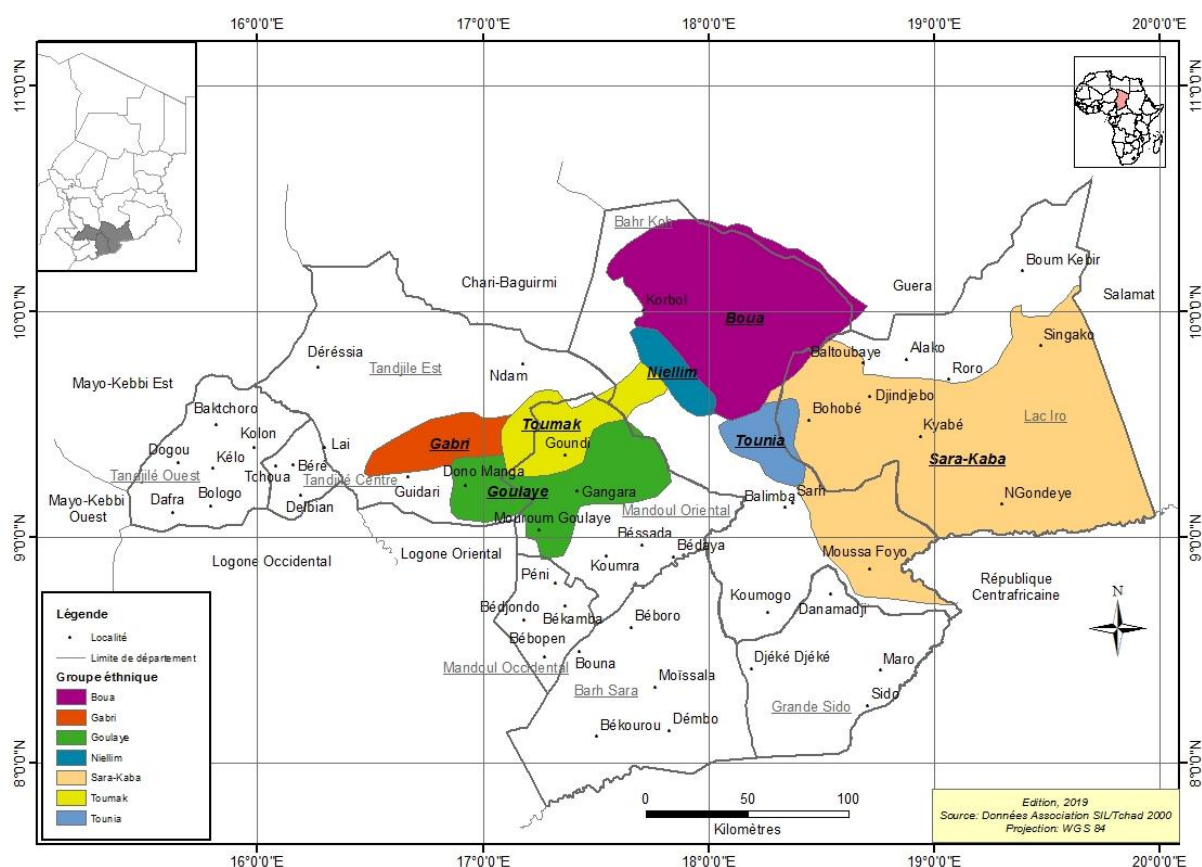


Figure 2: Location map of highly converted ethnic groups

Many factors contributed to the conversion of the above-mentioned peoples to Islam and its expansion.

### 2.2 Rabah's conquest of the Sara country

The conquest of the Sara by Rabah dates from the pre-colonial period. Two episodes determined the process of Islamization and the development of Islam in Southern Chad. The first corresponds to Rabah's journey during which he crossed part of the area to Sudan, and the second corresponds to his stay and raids during which he subjected part of the Sara people to Islam.

Rabah is a Sudanese conqueror. Born around 1845 in Sennar south of Khartoum, he served in the Egyptian army before joining the service of the slave trade lords in the Sudanese Barh El Gazal. After the declaration of the end of the slave trade, Rabah fled to Ubangi in the Central African Republic, which is now his base of operations.

Rabah's journey from the region of Grampel, now Kaga Bandoro in the Central African Republic, to Salamat in Chad was one of the circumstances of the Islamization of the people of the Sara country. From Chari Gribingui, Rabah crossed Chad via Maro and then Marabé and Barh Keita where he recruited soldiers and converted the people along the way. This journey gave him a taste for returning to settle and raid (see figure 3).

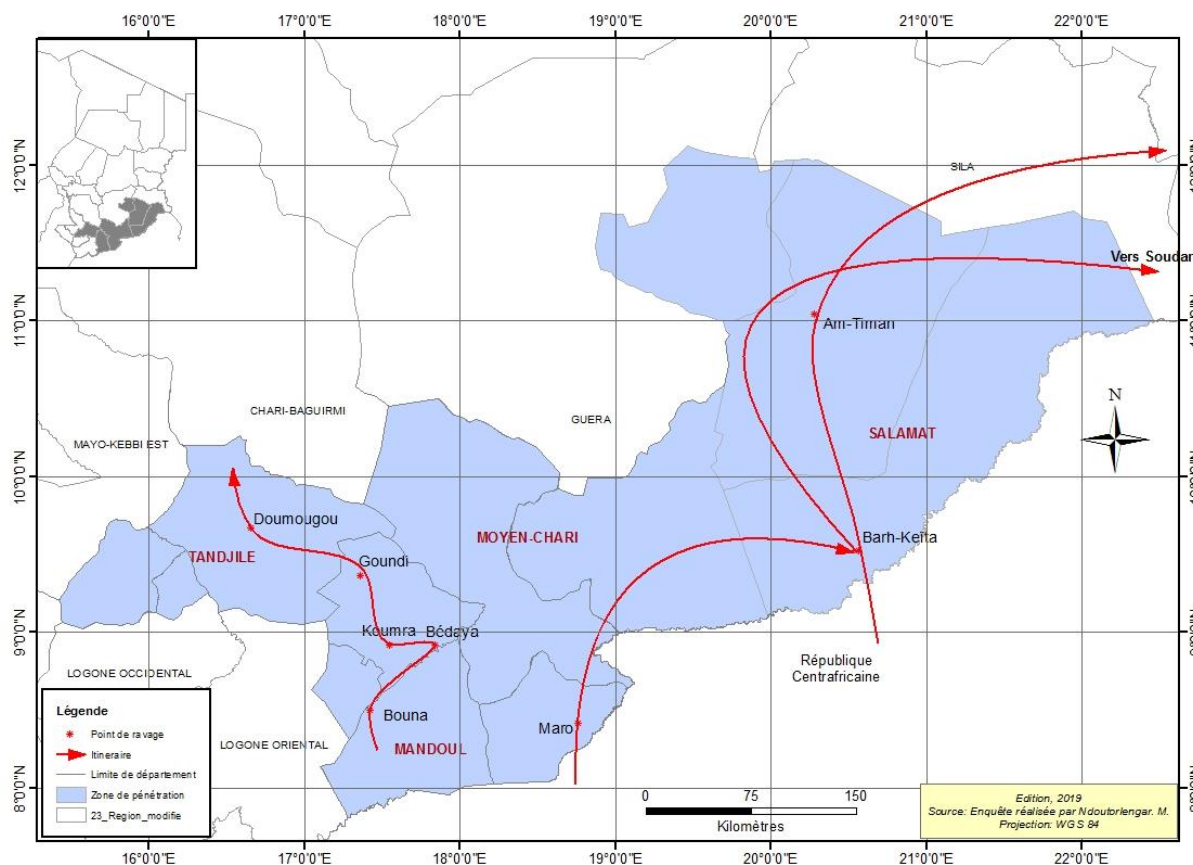


Figure 3: Wake map of Rabah during the conquest

According to J Fortier, Rabah returned in 1887 to stay in southern Chad. Rabah first stayed in Bédaya where he put the Mbang Bédaya on the run and set up his supply camp there. His raids extended at this time to Bouna in the Day country, where he first encountered resistance before conquering. In Koumra, he made a triumphant entry because the traditional chiefs had rallied without a fight. Rabah advanced his conquest to Goundi, the land of the Toumak where he subdued Chief Alifa and his people. The Ndam and Niellim were subsequently conquered. In present-day Tandjilé, his campaign in Somraya country led to its conquest a year later.

### 2.3 Conflicts of interest: the march towards civil war

Conflicts of interest began in the aftermath of independence with the reign of Chad's first president, the southern Christian Ngarta Tombalbaye. Chad was calm from 1960 to 1966. The animosities began in 1966, when Islam was used by Muslim leaders from the North to hide their thirst for power. Indeed, six years after independence, after accusing the southern regime of discriminating against the Muslim populations of the North, Centre and East, the animosities began. The first rebellion broke out on 27 October 1965 in the Guerra region, and a movement called the Chad Liberation Front (FROLINAT) was subsequently born on 22 June 1966 in Sudan to bring together Muslim seniors. It is a movement whose orientations are Islamist, even fundamentalist at the base. As such, it had the blessing and support of the Muslim countries bordering Chad, namely Sudan and Libya, and even beyond the continent (M. BRANDEY, 2008, P. 46).

Hissein Habré, a wing of the FROLINAT joined the central government and became Prime Minister. But a few months later, he came into conflict with this government creating a civil war with a more religious flavor in the capital Ndjamena. Thus, the Christian southerners who lost control of Ndjamena retreated to the South to escape the executions. In the South, the Force Armée Tchadienne (FAT), made up of the survivors, in reprisal, hunted down and executed the Muslims living in the southern towns, while the Force Armée du Nord (FAN) did the same job in the North and Centre.

From then on, the heirs of the FROLINAT held power in Chad. Goukouni Oueddei (1979-1982) gave way to Habré who ruled from 1982 to 1990. And, from 1990 to 2021, Idriss Déby ruled. In order to benefit from the favours or to take advantage of the confusion, many people in almost all ethnic groups converted to Islam voluntarily or were lured by the advantages offered.

## **2.4 From elite interest to community**

The civil war in Chad, which began in 1979, has been the cause of many of the ills of the country (Souleymane A. A., 2012, P.46). But in one way or another, it has contributed to the rise of Islam because of the discrimination between the Muslim North and the Christian South. This rise is linked to the search for domination for the former and for social inclusion both at the level of the governing bodies and in everyday life for the latter. The particularity of the regimes held by the northerners is the establishment of favoritism, egocentrism, ethnocentrism and impunity ((Lemarchand R., 2005, P. 123); (Gladoum M. D, 2008, 8/09)). It is under these regimes that the concept of geopolitics in the name of catching up with the South which is ahead of the North was born.

But geopolitics has been removed from its meaning in Chad with the heirs of the FROLINAT. In the context, geopolitics means favoring some people over others. This is how the notion of quotas was born in state institutions. Thus, entry into public universities, admission to entrance examinations for training institutes and schools, and recruitment public service are subject to the quota system. Whatever the result, 22% is awarded to excellence. 10% goes to women and each region is repeated by 3% and the host region of the institution gets 5%. This system marginalizes even the best for regions with high concentrations of people. Whatever the number of excellent people in the populated region, only the 3% or 5% are retained depending on whether it hosts the recruiting institution or not. In the less populated regions with little representation at events, even the least deserving are recruited. This leads many people to take the easy way out by taking Muslim names. Or simply Islamize to gain favors.

In the study area, there is no shortage of circumstances for converting or being converted to Islam. These may be related to the search for or retention of employment, or to concerns about social integration in the context of the stagnation of poverty and, above all, the holding of the economic reins of the country by the Muslim northerners. 13.5% of the people surveyed in the Mandoul province replied that they had decided to convert to Islam in order to have easier access to trade. 7.2% in Moyen Chari admitted that they had converted to Islam in order to keep their small jobs as sales agents in the businesses of their Muslim bosses. And in Tandjilé, 15% of the herdsmen working for Muslim herders responded that they had converted to Islam to conform to their bosses.

## **2.5 Seductions: new strategies of conquest**

The Islamization of southern Chad was not only violent. Alongside the violent methods of invasion of Islam, there are other soft, tolerant and more attractive methods. These include attractive humanitarian actions, the establishment of Islamic schools and charitable works. For more than two decades, there has been a proliferation of Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Chad, financed by rich Muslim countries. They carry out immeasurable work in the country.

The nomenclature of Islamic organizations operating in the southern provinces of Chad given in this document is perhaps not exhaustive because, on the one hand, the work does not cover all the provinces and, on the other hand, the people interviewed do not know or were not cooperative in quoting the sources of funding for the work carried out. It should also be added that we did not cover the entire study area. However, we note, among others



**Tableau 1: Répartition des ONG islamiques intervenant dans la zone d'étude**

N°	Name of the organisation	Pays d'affiliation
	Direct Aid Association	Kuwait
	Islamic Relief Organisation	Saudi Arabia
	Islamic Adawa Association	Libya
	Islamic Affairs Association	Sudan
	General Assembly for young Muslims	Arab Islamic world
	Qatari Charity Association	Qatar
	Islamic Development Bank (IDB)	Islamic Conference
	Al-matou Association	Arabic United
	Islamic Tika	Turkey

Source: Field data, January 2021

The first works of these NGOs were the construction of mosques in villages along national roads (see photograph 1). For a long time these did not attract the local population. This calls for a new strategy.

The second series of actions, the most promising in terms of their character and the interest they present to local populations, consists of the construction of works. These include

- Drinking water provided along the national road. Today, these are found in almost all the villages;
- Muslim cultural centers in urban centers, Muslim villages and the implementation of charitable actions;
- Health districts offering favors or not to denominations...



Photograph 1: Mabrouka Mosque in Moundou, Logone Occidental Province  
(Photo: Salomon Kelgué, January 2019)

An example of the mosques. View from the main road, opposite the University of Moundou

There are many Islamic villages, including the Mabrouka, which are villages equipped with at least one Koranic school and mosques. The Mabrouka of Manda in the Moyen is one of the largest. It is a village on the way to becoming a town in the Chadian context because of its size and population. Mabrouka de Manda has horn schools, mosques, markets and is electrified 24 hours a day, whereas electricity is a rare commodity in Sarh, the capital of the Moyen Chari province. The Imam is a southern convert. He fascinates the other confreres of the South by his mastery of the Holy Book and his humility to the point of attracting others. In Dono Manga in the Tandjilé, the Muslims are protected at their various sites by the canton chief Djideingar Dono, to whom the nickname 'Dono Ngar Doum', meaning 'Chief of the Muslims', is attributed.

Other forms of attraction strategies are the sharing of food during festivals and the hard times of the year. There is also the establishment of water wells in the neighbourhoods of small towns. This action consists of installing water wells along the streets in poor neighbourhoods in urban centres and villages. The contribution required from the beneficiaries is only 150,000 CFA francs, whereas the same equipment costs between 600,000 and 700,000 CFA francs to build in another context.

These different strategies have contributed in one way or another to the expansion of Islam in the context of the stagnation of poverty, especially in rural areas. But this expansion is sometimes accompanied by clashes.

## **2.6 Inter-community relations in Southern Chad**

### **2.6.1 Farmer-herder conflicts**

Since the overthrow of the southern government in 1982, southern Chad has been gradually but surely invaded by nomadic pastoralists in search of grazing land, fleeing the desert north. Some of them ended up settling down. Traders have also migrated there in search of markets. Also, the administrative and military officials in this part of the country are appointed from then on as Muslim northerners. This was done deliberately to ensure the hegemony of the North over the populations of the South (Marchand R, 2005, p.122).

Conflicts between users of natural resources, particularly between farmers and herders, exist everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. But the particularity of these conflicts in Chad is that they have a religious and regional background. This makes it sometimes difficult to pinpoint the exact causes of a conflict because they are superimposed and intertwined (Marty A. et al, 2010, P. 27). They are often very deadly and aggravate tensions between the North and the South and between Christians and Muslims. Inter-communal conflicts result in loss of life.

72% of respondents in Tandjilé province said that the causes of problems of peaceful cohabitation were conflicts between farmers and herders, compared to 68.5% in Mandoul and 88% in Moyen Chari. The causes of these conflicts are numerous. One of the first is demographic. The influx of herders and internal demographic growth immediately leads to a saturation of space. The pressure on space becomes strong. This leads to problems of sharing natural resources. Needs are then elastic while the available land is shrinking. Farmers who want to make their production more profitable or diversify increase the area sown. As a result, the space available for grazing is spreading out, leading to spontaneous encroachments into farmers' fields.

The administrative and military authorities in the area are sometimes herders through the intermediary of the herdsmen who graze in the bush, and sometimes relatives of the herders in terms of religion or geographical origin. This makes them both judge and party. This leads to an enjoyment of impunity on the part of the herders. This impunity means that the herders pay too little attention to the cattle to limit their intrusion into the farmers' fields. This leads to frustration on the part of farmers and a desire for self-vengeance, resulting in open conflict.

### **2.6.2 Desecration of cultural and religious spaces**

Conflicts between northerners and southerners in general and Christians and Muslims in particular in the study area also stem from the way the land is managed. Each community has its own perception and representation of land (Marty A. et al., 2010, P. 28).

Each community in southern Chad has a particular relationship with land. There is land for agricultural production and land for different rituals. Thus, there is land for women's rites and land for men's rites. The exploitation in all forms of these lands reserved for male rites by all outsiders and even women.

Immigrants to the Sara countries do not have the same perception of land as the natives. For them, the land belongs to all Chadians without any restrictions. Therefore, land that is not used for agriculture can be exploited, especially as the vegetation is green for lack of exploitation. Also, armed with firearms, the herders very often want to impose themselves.

In the Dono Manga canton in the Tandjilé province, in 2016, herders organized in groups deliberately to feed their cattle on the sacred site of Yondo, which is an initiation rite of the Sara people. The refusal of the latter to obey the farmers' requests led to an inter-community fight resulting in the loss of human life. In Koumra in the Mandoul province, in the same logic, the herders offered a sum of The farmers' fightback also resulted in the loss of human life, as they were not able to resist the offer of a sacred site in Yondo. The farmers' response also resulted in loss of life.



## Conclusion

Chad, according to the statistics, is a Muslim majority country. The factors for the expansion of Islam in this country are historical, economic and social. The historical factors are related to the conquest by the slave Rabah from Sudan on the one hand and the politico-military conflicts on the other. The economic and social factors are related to the poverty that is entrenched in the rural areas, which insidiously but surely facilitates the expansion of Islam.

Being a religion of spiritual life, of light, of love, of human brotherhood, of social justice and open to all races, Islam in itself, let alone its expansion, is a problem for Southern Chad and its people. It is rather the deviations that accompany it and its instrumentalization that pose problems. In the name of the same religion, human lives have been taken. It is also in its name that favoritism and regionalism have been popularized for decades.

In the name of national unity, every Chadian, regardless of geographical origin or religion, is called upon to show restraint. And every Chadian must feel obliged to have a role to play. In every family, the education of the offspring must not lose sight of tolerance, forgiveness and love of others and the acceptance of difference. In everyday life, every Chadian, of all religious denominations, must stop seeing another as his enemy. In religious circles, the initiative of bishops and imams to unite to advocate peace and cohesion must be reinforced and appropriated by the public authorities.

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