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Navigations of a globalizing Chad: Nomadic Walad Djifir grounded in connectivity

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Navigations of a globalizing Chad

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Front cover: Photo of Haamid's son, Ibaaris, pouring himself a cup of tea after a long two days spent herding the goats and sheep. (Inge Butter, 2014)

Back cover: Photo of Zaynebah and her mother, taken in Bangui (printed 5 February 1985) and kept amongst Zaynebah's possessions.

Navigations of a globalizing Chad:
Nomadic Walad Djifir grounded in connectivity

Proefschrift

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First, that concrete relations that we establish in living with others are like shadows of the more abstract questions—that is, we learn about the nature of the world in the process of such living. Second, that we cannot assign a scale to patterns of sociality independent of perspective.

— Das 2007: 4, referring to Marilyn Strathern (1995)

This ethnography is dedicated to Bachar Saad Harun, whose stubborn independence has brought about alternative perspectives for understanding this world.

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PREFACE

On one of the many hot and dry afternoons, Bachar and I returned to Marnéh's tent to find a stranger seated on a mat under one of the shady trees within the centre of the camp.¹ He had been given a *sokhaan*² to wash with and a bowl of a mixture of water, milk, and grains. This mixture is a good thirst quencher, being a little bit sour, salty, and sometimes spicy as well. I asked Marnéh who he was and what he was doing here, and she raised her shoulders and said she did not know (*ma ne'arfa*). The stranger was left alone for a while, until the men started returning from the 'eidd (watering holes) and it was time for the late afternoon prayers. Brief greetings were exchanged, and those belonging to the camp sat down on a separate mat laid out by the women. Bachar later explained that when a stranger visits the *ferikh* (nomadic camp), they are not immediately asked who they are and where they have come from.³ In Chad, someone's physical appearance is often an indicator of his or her background, and Walad Djifir will often be able to recognize which family someone belongs to within their own tribe. Physical traits are strong, and familial resemblances carry over to next generations. This man was wearing a white *djallabeya* and headscarf, which is not unusual. He had come on a horse, which was tethered to a tree just outside of the camp. His complexion was relatively fair, a characteristic of several nomadic Arab tribes. I do not remember whether he had markings on his face, a tell-tale sign for which *tribu* he belonged to. Older Walad Djifir, for example, have two small parallel scars on each cheek, which has given them the nickname 'onze onze'. Younger generations do not practise this scarring as much any more.

The visitor turned out to be a *marabout* (religious figure) who was travelling from *ferikh* to *ferikh* to raise awareness on sending children to school. This was something we discovered only much later that evening, after another set of prayers followed by dinner. Bachar explained that guests, even when strangers, are treated with honour and respect. On many more occasions, strangers to the *ferikh* were treated in this way.⁴ What interested me in these encounters was

¹ The camps are made up of tents set up in a circle with their openings facing outwards. This gives the women of each of the tents privacy. Throughout the day men gather within the interior of the camp. A visitor being placed here will thus barely get a glimpse of the women going about their household chores.

² The *sokhaan* can be found in every Chadian household. They are usually made of plastic and look like a kettle, having a handle and spout. They come in various colours, sizes, and qualities. The *sokhaan* is filled with water and used to wash one's hands before a meal, for Muslims to carry out their ablutions, and also to take with you to the 'bathroom'. When I learned the word for tea kettle (*barada*), it made me laugh. In Arabic, *sokhun* means that something is warm, while *baarid* means something is cold. The *sokhaan*, however, holds cool water, while the *barada* is used to heat water.

³ Fieldnotes, Mongo, 28 April 2012.

⁴ Bachar and I were also treated in this fashion when we visited people we both did not know, so it is not something typical of the Walad Djifir alone but more a way of receiving guests.

something I had also observed when meeting people in passing. It was a certain wariness toward people one did not know, coupled with a specific method of greeting. There is a first and extensive exchange of ‘Peace be with you,’ ‘God bless you,’ and other well-wishing, interrupted by brief practical questions, followed by more well-wishing for the person and their family. Only slowly does one come to know who the person is, where they are headed, and what they either want from you or you from them. When spending time next to people one does not know, as in a bus or while waiting for a tyre to be repaired, the conversations are minimal, with neither party liable to give anything personal away. This may not be so strange and is common the world over. Yet for some reason, the evasive answering of questions and avoidance of personal matters which could identify one were very noticeable.

In a context where suspicion of one’s neighbours is historically rife, greetings among strangers and the receiving of guests are interesting to observe. While mistrust (wariness) is clearly the basis for behaviour, the values of honour and respect hold just as much sway. There is no rudeness, even if someone is not trusted. So how do the two work together? How can both mistrust and the upkeep of certain values exist in one person? And how do the two shape and form the nature of exchange and choices made?

Despite the intrinsic wariness toward the unknown, there are methods and etiquettes for dealing with a stranger, just as there are norms and values linked to the dealing with livestock, Islamic customs, land and familial issues, or the sending of money. The logics and reasonings surrounding these moments of connectivity help structure daily life, creating frameworks (of belonging) within which individuals face moments of both insecurity and security.

This ethnography explores the Walad Djifir’s navigations in a world characterized by dispersion (mobility and connectivity) and disruption (insecurity and crisis). A focus on connections and connectivity—as an alternative way to explore networks and the social (the global wilderness)—reveals how that which the *ferikh* embodies continues to provide a form of groundedness for Walad Djifir.

Acknowledgements

In carrying out this research, I continually encountered moments of wariness and trust, on the part of others and myself. Ultimately, it is the trust certain people had in me which led to the writing of this ethnography. In thanking everyone personally, I am bound to omit someone by accident. Instead, I would like to thank several ‘circles’ to which I feel I now ‘belong’. I hope the feeling is mutual. I thank Bachar and his extended family of Walad Djifir for the warm welcome and enduring patience with my many questions and mere presence. This ethnography is dedicated to him. A special mention is due to Bachar’s wife Khadidjah, and their children Hadji Mariam, Brahim, Shaddara, Howwa, Ayesha, Nadjah, and of course our future journalist, Abdusalaam—this all could not have happened without you all making space and time for me within your home. I would like to thank the CRASH⁵ team in N’Djaména, specifically Djimet, Remadji, and Khalil, for always having the door to the office open, creating a haven for reflection and general socializing when needed.

⁵ Centre du Recherche en Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines (CRASH).

Andrea and Laguerre, you were the first to include me on arrival in N'Djaména in 2011 and I will always be grateful for that. May our paths continue to cross. Mirjam and her CTD team—Adamou, Boukary, Catherina, Inge L, Jonna, Lotte, Meike, and Souleymane—what kind of a journey would this have been without you all there, going through similar obstacles, emotions, and ‘eureka’ moments? Mirjam, you have an admirable way of making things possible, especially when everyone else says it can’t be done. Souleymane, Adama, and your wonderful children, thank you for showing me another side of Mongo and sharing your home with me. The fieldwork we carried out together in both Bangui and Mongo was enriching. In Mongo as well, I would like to thank SIL⁶ and its team of super women, ‘the Guéra Girls’—Andrea, Stephanie, Liz, Emma, and Caroline—for providing a calm and secure space from which to reflect and ‘répose’. Geeske (Ritske), you were the first foreigner I was put in contact with in Mongo but also the least ‘foreign’. Thank you for the conversations over coffee and your household’s famous salad. Your work and ‘family’ are inspiring. In Bangui, Espérance and Ahmed Hamid are to thank for making it such a pleasant experience—strange words to use these days, but I do not know how else to describe the time spent there. Rogier, Ahmed Muhammed, Ghislain, and François, thank you for helping me find my bearings research-wise! The African Studies Centre (ASC), its library, and ASC colleagues are always a pleasant space to return to, and I look forward to what the future has in store for you! A little mention needs to be made for my local library and the surrounding cafes for providing coffee and a workspace. Tracy, our wonderful child-minder—couldn’t have done this without you there for Emma and Luuk. To my parents Jaap en Suzie, my sisters Vera en Irene, and to Bouk: I look forward to presenting this ethnography to you as a way of finally sharing the stories which have lived in my head for years, and as a way of showing you what it is I have been working on *all this time!* And finally, *li-l ahl fi-l ferīkh: shukran gezīlan. Wallahi — ana ma-nansaku intu dol abadan. Wa inshallah, fi-l yawm tāni! Ogodu ‘aafé.*

⁶ Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL).

ON TRANSCRIPTION CHOICES & TRANSLATION

The Chadian Arabic spoken by the Walad Djifir is close to that spoken in the Sudans. In referencing the origins of Chadian Arabic words, I have made use of both Hans Wehr's ([1979] 1994)⁷ *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* as well as Patrice Julien de Pommerol's (1999) *Dictionnaire arabe tchadien*.

The Chadian Arabic in this ethnography uses Wehr's system of standard transliteration, with the following exceptions:

ذ : dh

ث : th

ج : dj

خ : kh

و : w and ū

Upon first use of a word, its origins are explained by giving the root of the word and the correct transliteration. Throughout the text, however, I have chosen to transcribe some frequently used words as the Walad Djifir pronounce them. For example, a footnote for first use of the word *ferīkh* reads:

farīq, pl. *furqān* (فريق ج فرقان), band, company, troop, detachment, faction, or unit. The word *ferīkh* comes from the verb, *faraqa*, to separate, part, or divide (Wehr 1994). In the text, I have chosen to transcribe the word as the Walad Djifir pronounce it: with a 'kh' (خ) at the end and a softer 'e': *ferīkh*. Julien de Pommerol's (1999) dictionary of Chadian Arabic–French makes the choice to transcribe the 'q' as 'g': *ferīg*.

Well-known words such as *sheikh*, chief, are left un-italicized and transcribed as one would pronounce the word (i.e. the ش, 'š' becoming a 'sh'). In the case of Chadian Arabic words frequently used throughout the text, the word has been italicized only upon first use. This is especially the case for the word *ferīkh*, which is used in its literal sense but also as an analytical concept.

⁷ This is the fourth edition of the dictionary, edited by J.M. Cowan.

Translations from interviews in French and Chadian Arabic are mine. In most cases, I have chosen to literally transcribe the Chadian Arabic as it is pronounced by the informant, giving an English translation alongside.

In terms of names, accents have been placed where they would otherwise not be obviously pronounced (Marnéh). Hamdaan is used instead of Hamdān, Lemoen instead of Lemūn, Saaleh instead of Sāleh. And so forth. Wahhabi instead of Waḥabi. Misseria instead of Misseriyya.

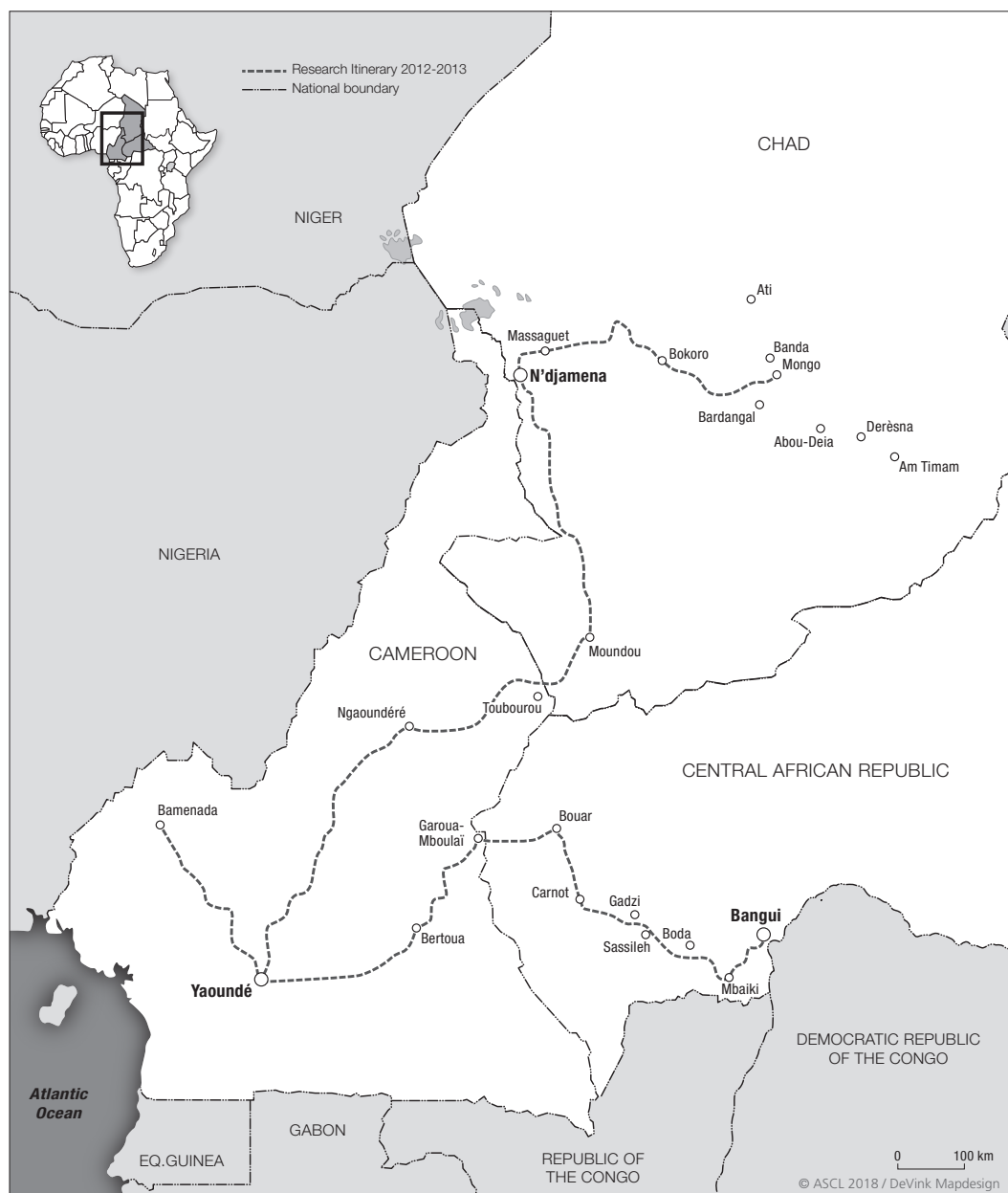
For names of nomadic sub-divisions I have stuck to the more formal transcription: Walad Sūrūr instead of Sourour, Matanīn instead of Mataneen.

MAPS



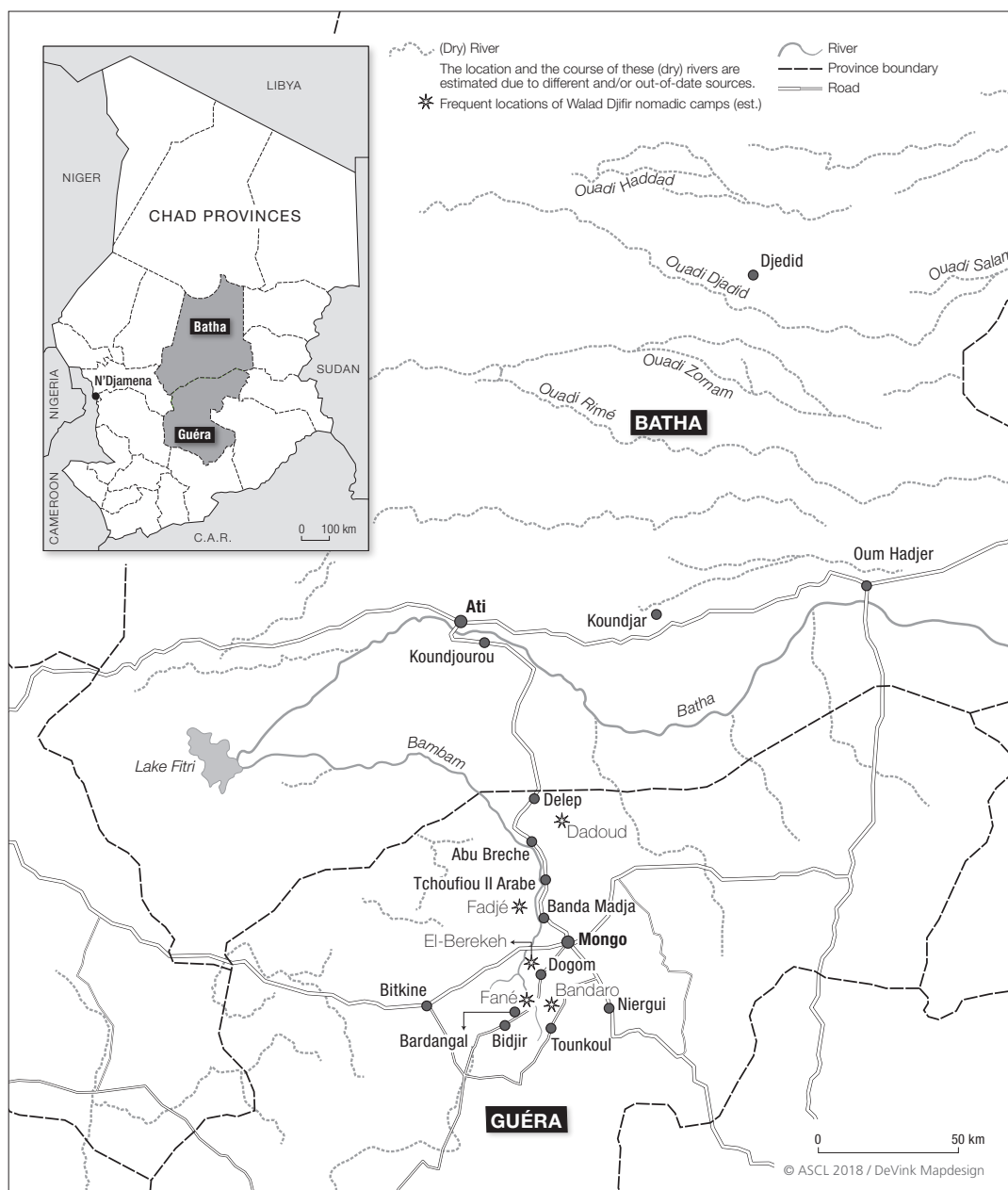
Map 1.1: Chad, Cameroon, CAR

Source: DeVink Mapdesign. Copyright: CTD/ASCL 2018.



Map 1.2: Research itinerary, October 2012 – March 2013

Source: DeVink Mapdesign. Copyright: CTD/ASCL 2018.



Map 1.3: Guéra – Batha, detail research sites & locations nomadic camps

Source: DeVink Mapdesign. Copyright: CTD/ASCL 2018

Between March 2012 and December 2012, Hadj Hamdaan's camel herd grew from a mere five or six head to at least forty.⁸ Over the next year, he would add more camels and buy plots of land in the nearby district town of Mongo in Central Chad. These investments were enabled by the slow but consistent selling off of cattle and land in the neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR) as a result of his brother's inheritance. Hadj Hamdaan was responsible for the dividing up, according to Islamic custom, of a large herd of cattle as well as of plots of land and small commercial enterprises. Ideally, the extended family wanted to move the herd of cattle north, into Chad, to be reared by their family there. Such a journey was, however, too risky and potentially very expensive—the border crossing itself would be tricky and involve bribes, let alone the travel through inland CAR, where fears of road robbers and additional 'administrative fees' are an ever-present reality.

From late 2012 onwards, this fairly sudden influx of camels had consequences for the family members living and working close to Hadj Hamdaan.⁹ The camp of those tending the camels was usually set up at a fair distance from the other camps, as camels need their space. This also meant that the allocation of daily tasks performed by women, men, and children had to be reorganized—it took longer to fetch water from the well as the camels were further away. Men and boys who had previously herded the cattle now tended to the camels, staying away from their camp for more days in a row than they had previously done.¹⁰ The continuing familial link to CAR also had an effect on the more social and emotional aspects of people's lives. During the course of 2013, CAR underwent a coup, and what followed were months of violence whereby family members anxiously searched for news of their loved ones.

By March 2013, Hadj Hamdaan had sold off about half of the herd, with a recent Express Union transfer of three million CFA (approx. €4,574)¹¹ having been made. The transfer itself had been accompanied by many phone calls between the nearest town in CAR to have an Express Union office, the capital of N'Djaména to which the money had been sent and where it was to be collected by Hadj Hamdaan's direct cousin, and family members in Mongo and the nomadic camp, the end-recipients.

⁸ Based on own observations and conversations with Hadj Hamdaan and those guarding his cattle (fieldnotes, 16 January 2013).

⁹ This is not to say that the activities in CAR did not have similar consequences for family members in Chad prior to 2012. Like a few others, Hadj Hamdaan had travelled and even spent years living and working with his brother in CAR, leaving his wife and their young children at home, as well as the household and livestock to be seen to by others. Nevertheless, the observed influx of camels marks another moment of change to the 'normal' day-to-day of the extended family.

¹⁰ This is an intrinsic part of people's lives as pastoral nomads, yet it does not mean that all aspects of herding and tending to livestock are equally challenging physically.

¹¹ Based on an exchange rate of 1 EUR = 655.957 CFA in February 2018.

Like many other contemporary pastoral nomads in the Sahel region, the Walad Djifir are involved in numerous economic activities not only in various locations in Chad but also transnationally.¹² In the past, the Walad Djifir, a sub-tribe of the Misseria Rouges, were known to transhumance with their livestock, locally referred to as the *murḥal*,¹³ from areas in Central Chad all the way south to the border with CAR.¹⁴ Partly due to severe losses of livestock in the 1970s and 1980s after periods of recurring droughts and cattle disease, many members have cut down on their transhumance activities, limiting the distance travelled with their livestock in the rainy and dry seasons.

For the past thirty years, Hadj Hamdaan and his extended family of Walad Djifir have taken to settling their nomadic camps—locally known as a *ferīkh*¹⁵—in five specific areas in the Guéra, only moving camp three to four times a year. Their cattle and other livestock still travel toward far-away pastures when necessary, but the majority of the family will then stay behind. Some Walad Djifir have year-round agricultural fields close to their dry- or wet-season *ferīkh*, in the Guéra or Batha respectively. Permanent villages, though only a handful, have also been established in the area.

In relation to non-specifically pastoral-oriented practices, such as those referred to above in the situation of Hadj Hamdaan and his deceased brother, members of the community are seen migrating to neighbouring countries in search of work and trade, both temporarily and more permanently. Older Walad Djifir recount stories of earning cash in Sudan, returning to the *ferīkh* with a horse of their own and some change to spare.¹⁶ Such trends have continued with several Walad Djifir working as cattle traders herding cattle to the lucrative markets of Nigeria. Others have found work guarding herds of smaller livestock and camels in the Libyan Desert. Still others make their living selling products from a stall or small shop in CAR, as was the case for Hadj Hamdaan and the brother whose inheritance he is in charge of.

The brief description of Hadj Hamdaan's inheritance and subsequent investments (1) introduces the Walad Djifir as a group of people for whom mobility is a livelihood strategy inherent to their nomadic way of life, a way of life which includes transnational wage labour and commerce; (2) suggests that this mobility involves the use of specific socio-economic networks informed by various 'connectors' and technologies of communication; which ultimately (3) connect the ways of life in the nomadic camps to larger regional dynamics, and vice versa. It is ultimately the change

¹² See Fisher & Kohl 2010 for similar dynamics among the Saharan Tuareg; Pantuliano 2010 on the Misseriyya of Sudan; the edited volume by Catley et al. 2013 on dynamics in the Horn of Africa; and Manoli et al. 2014 in Senegal.

¹³ The Arabic word *murḥal* comes from the verb *raḥala* (رحل), meaning to set out, voyage, move away. In the context of nomadic Chad, the word *murḥal* is used to specifically signify the 'corridor' of transhumance. This is a designated route which livestock and their herders are permitted to take while transhumancing, so as to avoid the devastation of agricultural fields. The verb *sāra* (سار) is used to indicate the act of transhumancing (moving with livestock). Officially, nomadic movement is said to be irregular, with the transhumance being of a more regular or fixed nature—though how regular this can really be is debatable.

¹⁴ Barraud et al. 2001; Aubague et al. 2006; Dangbet 2015a; conversations with informants in 2012–2015.

¹⁵ *farīq*, pl. *furqān* (فریق ج فرقان), band, company, troop, detachment, faction, or unit. The word *ferīkh* comes from the verb, *faraqa*, to separate, part, or divide (Wehr 1994). In the text, I have chosen to transcribe the word as Walad Djifir pronounce it, with a 'kh' (خ) at the end and a softer 'e': *ferīkh*. Julien de Pommerol's (1999) dictionary of Chadian Arabic–French makes the choice to transcribe the 'q' as 'g': *ferīg*.

¹⁶ Author interviews, Fadje, 20 March 2012.

and continuity within these ‘ways of life’, which include inter-regional movement, that this ethnography describes, through a focus on connectivity.

Ethnographic presence

Research among Hadj Hamdaan’s extended family has been an explorative endeavour. An ethnography of the Walad Djifir has not been written thus far, and knowledge in general about this specific group of Chadian Arabs is far from complete. Except for the fairly recent works of Martin Wiese (2004, 2011) and Zakinet Dangbet (2015a, 2015b)¹⁷ on the Misseria, there are older ethnographies and studies of Chadian nomadic groups¹⁸ that are written in a tradition that does not reflect today’s understanding of the Walad Djifir in a connected world. As the introductory case of Hadj Hamdaan implies, theirs is not a place-bound world, nor are they ‘merely’ nomadic pastoralists. Instead, Walad Djifir own livestock and travel and work in different places in different capacities (wage labour, commerce). The developments in transport and communication technologies are an intrinsic part of the connected world in which these nomads carve out a living. On the other hand, they also live in a world where conflict and insecurity are important vectors in life, with the region of their transhumance and other activities being part of post-colonial histories of conflict and turmoil. How then can we best come to know the Walad Djifir, and how can we best describe their lives?

This dissertation, which I call an ethnography of connectivity, is also my search for an understanding of these nomads from their own perspective in a globalizing world, a world which is insufficiently encompassed by many of the existing studies in the fields of nomads,¹⁹ insecurity,²⁰

¹⁷ The existing contemporary studies which specifically mention the Chadian Misseria Rouges of the Batha are mainly from the Ministry of Pastoralism. The studies of Dr Zakinet Dangbet are an exception in that, as a historian, he made use of existing literature and archival sources but also spent six months in a nomadic camp and transhumancing with the Salamat Arabs of the Batha in 2006. The study, published by Marty, Eberschweiler & Dangbet 2009, focuses on understanding the Chadian transhumance system at a micro-level. In later work, Dangbet (2015a, 2015b) concentrates more on the historical and contemporary patterns of alliances and conflicts among two tribes of transhumancing Batha Arabs between 1635 and 2012: the Misseria and the Salamat Sifera. These and other references (such as the collection of articles on Chadian nomads in general in Barraud et al. 2001 and in Alfaroukh et al. 2011) have been useful in contextualizing the accounts of the Walad Djifir. At the same time, there is still much information missing.

¹⁸ See Thomas 1959; Cunnison 1966, 1972; Courtecuisse et al. 1971; Zeltner 1979; Cordell 1985; Zeltner & Tourneux 1986; Brahim 1988; Hugot 1997 for fairly traditional approaches to the study of Arab nomads in Chad or as groups coming from Sudan into Chad. For other general works on the Chadian population, see Chapelle 1980; Collelo 1990.

¹⁹ For studies on, for example, changes in nomadic livelihood strategies within a context of economic, environmental, or other global changes, see De Bruijn 1995; Casciarri 1995; van Dijk 1995; Shehu & Hassan 1995; Braukämper 1996; Hodgson 1999; Holtzman 2009; Elliot 2010; Unusa 2012; Mahmoud 2013; Manoli et al. 2014; Gertel & Le Heron 2016; Köhler 2016a.

²⁰ For a variety of existing studies on insecurity, see Mbembe & Roitman 1995, Vigh 2008 (crisis, chronic crisis); Arditi 2003 (history of violence in Chad); Richards 2005 (ethnographic approach to war); Ankogui-Mpoko et al. 2009 (insecurity, mobility & nomads); Käihkö & Utas 2014, Lombard 2016 (the CAR crisis); Cooper & Pratten 2015 (uncertainty).

and mobility.²¹ While these studies go a long way in providing insights and analytical lenses, this ethnography has borrowed ways of thinking from different sources, thus not situating itself within one specific approach. An example: Gaibazzi (2015: 3) offers an alternative approach to studying mobility and migration which

[...] suggests ways in which we can conceive of and investigate sedentary livelihoods as an integral element of migration. It disturbs the received views of immobility as a static, natural or residual category and instead shows how movement and stillness combine to animate social life.

In shedding light on ‘stillness amidst movement’, Gaibazzi’s work comes close to what I will later introduce as a certain Walad Djifir ‘groundedness’ amidst possible crisis and disruption, partly due to mobility. Previous nomadic studies have often approached sedentarism as a logical development and mobility as something happening out of need,²² a trend we also see in refugee and migrant studies. This current study approaches both mobility and stasis as two parts of a whole and as a means to understand the nature of connectivity and belonging among Walad Djifir. To get to grips with this nature of connectivity, I first of all had to define *where* to carry out research among the Walad Djifir, not only geographically but also conceptually.

As Gupta and Ferguson argued in 1997, “‘The field’ of anthropology and ‘the field’ of ‘fieldwork’ are politically and epistemologically intertwined; to think critically about one requires a readiness to question the other’ (p. 3). Ultimately, the ‘field’ in which the Walad Djifir’s daily lives play out has informed the ‘field’ of research. Through my own stories as well as those of members of the community, I sketch the setting in which this research took place—ultimately setting the scene and providing accounts of conceptual (this Introduction) and methodological (Chapter 1) choices made. In this sense, this ethnography should be seen as an explorative, empirical, and descriptive piece of work based on qualitative research methods and one which adopts a phenomenological approach to the understanding of a nomadic people’s life and ways in a turbulent and globalized world of ‘insecurity’, ‘flexibility’, and ‘connections’. Such an environment can easily disrupt cohesion or feelings of belonging.²³ To my surprise, this is not how the life of the Walad Djifir appeared (to me) in my interactions with them.

²¹ The historical and contemporary importance of movement became a focus of study from the 1990s onwards, also known as ‘the mobilities turn’. While various forms of mobilities definitely play a role in the past and present lives of Walad Djifir, it seems that an emphasis on this movement alone is not sufficient to understand contemporary dynamics. For studies situated within the mobilities turn of the 1990s, see Malkki 1992 (displacement and sedentarism); Appadurai 1996, Castells 1996, 1997, Urry 2010 (localities, networks and flows); Clifford 1997 (travelling cultures); Urry 2000, Sheller & Urry 2006 (sociology of mobilities). More recent works have developed debates on mobility and spatiality further with such themes as: Flexibility, cultures of travel/migration, social navigation, vital conjunctures: see De Bruijn, van Dijk & van Dijk 2001; Johnson-Hanks 2002; Vigh 2006, 2009; Hahn & Klute 2007; Urry 2007; Salazar 2010; Wilson Janssens 2018. Nomadism and mobility: Boesen, Marfaing & De Bruijn 2014; Retailé 2014; Köhler 2016a. Mobility and migration: Boesen & Marfaing 2007; Schapendonk 2011; Gaibazzi 2015.

²² A related debate is that of ‘the end of pastoralism’; see Markakis 1993 (in relation to conflict and political marginalization); van Dijk 1994; De Bruijn & van Dijk 2003 (social security, changing risk positions); Azarya et al. 1999; van Dijk 1999; Turner 1999 (ecological and economic insecurity/resilience); Little et al. 2001; Galvin 2009; Næs 2013 (fragmentation, climate change/variability, and risk management/resilience).

²³ For ethnographies of disruption in relation to globalization: Tsing 2000. On making sense of violence and everyday life: Scheper-Hughes 1993, 2008; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2003; Das 2007. Youth navigating war/post-conflict: Berckmoes 2014; Both 2017.

Thus began the search for how best to describe and analyse my empirical observations: what theories or ideas would ‘fit’ that which ‘the field’ revealed? Here I adopted a rather intersubjective attitude to the theories and frames that could be useful for the understanding of my observations. I did not depart from a prefabricated theoretical framework; rather, I began to explore various fields of study to see where they could fit the intersubjective realities I had encountered with the Walad Djafir. The next section presents the process of discovering a frame/theory with which to describe and analyse the situation I encountered in the field.

Choices of narration vis-à-vis the empirical

The book *Writing Women’s Worlds* by Lila Abu-Lughod has been particularly inspirational to my approach. I had started writing chapters in a very narrative style. Then, after having shared one such chapter with a colleague and voicing my doubts about whether I could justify this way of writing at all—whether it made sense or was ‘academic’ enough—she pointed me toward this book of Bedouin stories. It was an eye-opener and resonated with what I had, subconsciously, been trying to do. I had been struggling with ‘daring’ to fit the stories of the people I have come to know between 2011 and 2014 into some kind of theoretical framework, linking them to currently popular anthropological concepts. After repeated advice from my supervisor to ‘just start writing’ from my data, 1,000 words per day—this is what I did. The result was one piece just shy of 8,000 words—a piece consisting of such intricate stories that it has been a puzzle to find ways to tease them apart before piecing them together again in a somewhat coherent-for-the-reader fashion (see Chapter 5).

The textual narrative

Narratively, this has meant that there is a certain intersubjectivity to the stories presented here—they are retellings of conversations, discussions, and observations with specific members of a specific group of people, interpreted by me.²⁴ During my time in the field I often had a set of questions in my head, guidelines to help structure conversations. At the same time, so much of the fieldwork was participant observation; and by letting conversations flow as they would have naturally, I often came to know what issues were most pertinent to my interlocutors, as opposed to those I imagined relevant. So instead of ending up with a thick ethnographic description of a group of semi-sedentary pastoral nomads in Central Chad, this ethnography covers and attempts to contextualize (theoretically) those issues people themselves were dealing with throughout the fieldwork periods: fathers, husbands, and sons were either returning from or leaving on market trucks toward Libya; sons herding cattle for merchants in Nigeria were worried when the latter had not been in touch and news of Boko Haram attacks were becoming more frequent; arguments developed over issues of land ownership and use, over leadership rights and choices; remittances were sent and passed on. In the piecing together, I have chosen not to overly use the jargon and

²⁴ See Desjarlais & Throop (2011) on phenomenological approaches in anthropology; Jackson (2013: 234) on the phenomenological turn in migration studies. Strathern (1991) emphasizes how knowledge is fragmented and highly dependent on who has done the observing and writing, as well as who or what has been observed and written about.

focus of pastoral-nomadic studies, borrowing instead from different domains of anthropology and ultimately aiming to allow the voices and experiences of the Walad Djifir to speak for themselves.²⁵

In a way, the style of writing reflects the methodological and conceptual choices made, both being very much based on and even guided by empirical data. Each chapter is thus an empirical one, interspersed with aspects of theory and methodology relevant to it.²⁶ To avoid interrupting the narratives too much, I provide footnotes with much of the contextual information and references to other works. This research has thus been built on various pieces of a puzzle provided by informants themselves and interpreted by me. As Abu-Lughod herself says so well:

[...] attending to the particulars of individual's lives need not imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based; the effects of extralocal or long-term processes are always manifested locally and specifically. (2008: 8)

As we became more familiar with one another, I with the terrain and the terrain with me, it became clear that the Walad Djifir are part of several fields of reference. These inform the 'places' and 'spaces' where this research has been carried out, as well as its ethnography's form of narrative—one which combines the written and the visual.

The visual narrative

Next to the written narrative, the visual narrative has been just as important. Ultimately, our observations in the field are a mix of sensations: sounds, smells, feelings, emotions, words, and sights.²⁷ Throughout the various fieldwork visits, photography and film have been essential in capturing the lives of contemporary Walad Djifir like Hadj Hamdaan. The visual can call up a different yet complementary emotion and narrative from the textual or verbal, through its potential linkages with other senses and discourses (Pink 2012a, 2012b). This ethnography approaches visuals in two ways: (1) in their realist function as portraying a visible image for something described in words, like a nomadic camp or watering hole; and (2) as a way of 'telling' a complementary story. In the case of the latter, however, it is actually the narrative text that becomes complementary to the visible (in photographic form), in that it provides a way of interpreting, intersubjectively, that which may not be 'visible' but is still present and thus a part of a reality (Pink 2012b: 23-24). This process of interpreting both the visible and non-visible is also a means through which to approach the understanding and positioning of Walad Djifir daily life, within the existing dominant visual imagery emerging from Chad and the wider region. In their realist function, each

²⁵ Reading Jackson's *The Wherewithal of Life* while making some of the final revisions to this ethnography, his words resonate with my own intentions, though they were less deliberate from the onset. Jackson distances himself 'from the jargon of migration studies so that their [informants'] voices would be heard and their observations and recollections would determine the course of my own deliberations' (p. 4-5).

²⁶ You will therefore not find the traditional categories titled 'Methodological Approach' or 'Theoretical Framework'. Instead, the methodology and methods used, heavily linked to the conceptual choices made, are laid out in the first two chapters and developed further in each consecutive chapter. Nader's (2011: 211) words are echoed in this approach: '[...] the ethnography itself as well as its explanatory use is a theoretical endeavor'.

²⁷ For more on sensory ethnography and an anthropology of the senses in general, see Goody 2002, Pink 2009, Stoller 2011.

chapter thus holds visuals relevant to it. Where possible, photographs have been included which tell a complementary story.

Concepts & analytical lenses

Narrative choices are closely linked to choices made in approaching the theoretical field, and these latter choices are simultaneously related to the data that comes out of the field. The data revealed specific dynamics which required situating a variety of nomadic groups and conceptual themes within the existing literature on Chad. Throughout this process, several pre-existing and self-constructed themes have helped me analyse the field/data—namely, the everyday/extraordinaire, insecurity, connectivity, and the *ferīkh* as concept. In formulating answers to the questions the analyses raise, the idea of a globalizing wilderness and that of the *ferīkh* as groundedness have been inspiring. The following paragraphs will describe the coming into being of these concepts and analytical lenses.

The ‘everyday’ and the ‘extraordinaire’

The experiences encountered throughout five fieldwork periods, totalling almost 12 months between late 2011 and early 2014, were mostly situated in people’s everyday lives—that is, in everyday conversations and activity/goings-on. My ethnographic data are fairly descriptive in this sense, showing how men, women, and children go through their day living in a nomadic camp, a town, or a city: gathering wood, cooking, collecting water, gathering together for meals, and so on. At the same time, the data describe the conversations and family gatherings held when more special or less ordinary situations come up: a child gone missing, a sickness, birth or death, a marriage, conversations that brought up previous lives lived in other (foreign) places and future plans to return. And then there were the moments or days in which sudden, external, often political events impact life—a coup with violent consequences in CAR, for example, the loss of family and friends, uncertainty and a flight ‘back’ to the roots. This led me to question the role of the more ‘mundane’ daily happenings—choices, decisions, moments—in relation to experiences of insecurity or disruption.

Within the context of the ‘writing against culture’ discourse, Holtzman

[...] highlights how mundane, everyday activities may provide lenses for understanding change in ways that neither rely on convenient Euro-American categories, such as modernity or “the global,” nor reinforce essentializing views of a primitive Other. (2009: 11)

Abu-Lughod and others would agree with such an approach. At the same time, we need to remain open to the ‘less mundane’ moments within daily life and question how the one relates to the other.²⁸

Veena Das (2007), for example, describes a situation in which the everyday became eventful, with events simultaneously being attached to the everyday. The events Das describes are the riots and violence against Sikhs that took place in the resettlement colonies in Delhi shortly after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, while keeping in mind the silences around the aftermath of the Partition of India in 1947. In short, she argues that the event became what it was through its effects on the ordinary:

[...] life was recovered not through some grand gesture in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary. [...] There was, I argue, a mutual absorption of the violent and the ordinary so that I end up thinking of the event as always attached to the ordinary as if there were tentacles that reach out from the everyday and anchor the event to it in specific ways. (ibid. 7)

If we take the case of the Walad Djifir, what ‘tentacles’ can we discern as anchoring extraordinary life events to the more mundane? Grabska (2014), in her studies among Nuer communities in Western Upper Nile, examines the transformative power of war and displacement on gender relations in terms of their empowering and emancipating impacts. While the context of her research is of course different from that of the Walad Djifir—the agro-pastoral Nuer in Grabska’s case studies have been forcibly displaced to refugee camps and then return ‘home’, a process she describes and uses to analyse gender asymmetries and ultimately social change—nevertheless, it raises a few interesting questions which are useful for this reflection. It is the impact of existing, yet fluid, social relations—and specifically gender and age-based hierarchies (arguably the more ‘mundane’ frameworks)—on people’s daily life choices within the discussions around insecurities and crisis, which I would like to build on. The question that remains, however, is how we can disentangle a researcher’s ideas about such abstract concepts as crisis and disruption, from the perceptions of experiencing them by those being researched.

The following paragraphs explore how best to understand the contextual/environmental realities in which the more mundane aspects of Hadj Hamdaan’s life, for example, are embedded, in relation to existing theories. This was not a straightforward process, as the way I had encountered the field did not seem to match up with the ways in which Chad and its dynamics are normally depicted. Again, an exploration of topics set against the field’s lived realities provided me with the frames with which to analyse my data—namely, insecurity and connectivity. Insecurity and connectivity

²⁸ ‘As she [Malkki] points out, such an emphasis tends to direct attention away from those things that the [Hutu] refugees she worked with cared about most—the extraordinary and exceptional events that had made refugees of them, and the atypical and transitory circumstances of their lives in a refugee camp. She observes that a division of labor between anthropology and journalism has made all big, extraordinary happenings into “stories” to be covered by journalists, while the durable, ordinary, everyday occurrences are to be found in “sites” suitable for long-term anthropological fieldwork. What would it mean, she asks, to direct an anthropological gaze on singular, exceptional, and extraordinary events? What sorts of fieldwork would be appropriate to studying the “communities of memory” formed in the aftermath of such events? A different sort of engagement than that of the usual “anthropological investigation” of a geographical “field site” might, she suggests, be warranted.’ — (Malkki in Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 134)

led me to the idea of a wilderness of global networks and social relations, in which people are very much grounded through their ability to link up to various layers of connectivity.

Insecurity

It seems as though many phenomena perceived in Chad are described within a context of post-conflict and insecurity.²⁹ At times, however, I have struggled with a mixture of feelings and perceptions: with a way to fit into the common discourses of insecurity, disorder, crisis as context, and chronic crisis in particular.³⁰ The reality I first encountered among the Walad Djifir did not match up with the settings sketched in existing studies and through the conversations I had with colleagues who had spent time in Chad. In the end, ironically enough, that which came out of the field itself led me back to the insecurity approach.

Methodologically, like Stasik (2010), I did not go in search of moments in which conflict and politics entered people's lives. Instead, it seemed to be an almost automatic part of their lives—of course, for some more than for others. In his master's thesis on popular music audiences in Freetown, Michael Stasik describes how a group's musical tastes and practices are formed by certain societal structures such as class, while at the same time these same musical tastes can also provide a means of transcending these societal categories. Not only did Stasik choose to 'look beyond the scars and memories of the war'; what he 'found was that—despite the still perceptible scars and memories of the past's dreads—a somewhat “ordinarily” turbulent but thriving urban life recaptured all spheres of the city and its people' (ibid. p. 3). What is relevant here is the choice one can make in focus and emphasis. Elements which make up insecurities can limit or reinforce existing societal structures in a negative way, but they can also—just as musical taste—hold a certain potential for redefining these structures, sometimes by emphasizing aspects of society 'that work'. I thus want to emphasize focusing on what *does* work and not on *what went wrong*. In doing so, one obviously does touch on what is going wrong—yet the emphasis is rather different.³¹

While staying with this group of semi-sedentary nomads, an intuitive feeling inside me said: 'This is not what insecurity looks like, at least not in the dramatic, no-way-out, constant-state-of-

²⁹ I refer here mainly to the political scientists who have written on Chad, such as Buijtenhuijs 1977, 1978, 1987; Decalo 1980a, 1980b; Lemarchand 1980, 1981, 1985, 1986; Joffe 1982; Nolutshungu 1996; Azevedo 2004; Marchal 2006, 2008; Tubiana 2011; and others. For recent exceptions in other domains in Chad see Arditi 1999; De Bruijn, van Dijk & Djindil 2004; Behrends, Heiß & Reyna 2007; Debos 2008, 2016; Behrends 2011; Seli 2012; De Bruijn 2014; Souleymane 2017; De Bruijn & Both 2018.

³⁰ See the special edition in *Ethnos* of 2008 featuring Vigh, Scheper-Hughes, and Reynolds Whyte; Hammar 2014. Some exceptions need to be noted—namely, those researchers that have managed to create a more nuanced understanding of insecurity and post-conflict situations. For example, Both's 2017 use of memory in order to understand the practices of Yumbe youths within the Ugandan context of historical and contemporary conflict offers an interesting alternative approach to conflict legacies, allowing for the understanding of 'the pasts in the present'. Stasik 2010 approaches Sierra Leonean society by looking beyond its war scars and encountered fairly ordinary hopes and dreams, for which music provides a 'place'.

³¹ While attending a conference at the London Centre for Social Studies (LCSS) in 2013, one of the keynote speakers, Prof. Kenneth Benoit, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), presented an interesting piece of (counter-)logic which has helped me develop my own positionality vis-à-vis such conflict ethnography. He explained how during WWI, a mathematician was asked by the British to help in ensuring more planes survived the bombings over Europe. They were looking for a solution to the many planes that failed to return. The mathematician decided to look at the planes that did come back and at what was left intact. He then told the engineers to reinforce those parts as they seemed to be the most important in keeping the plane in the air.

fear-and-tension kind of way.’ No, it was a far more subtle insecurity: an insecurity which is partly inherent to a way of life and the ecology of the country the Walad Djifir find themselves in, insecurity such as droughts, famine, cattle disease, and general issues of health and education. The daily need to collect water, walking long distances in the heat, complaints of headaches or general *rheum* (flu), as well as pregnancy-related health issues on the part of the women—all these were issues that surfaced regularly. Yet, these are also ‘normal’ daily occurrences, and there are many studies which speak about pastoral-nomadic resilience and inherent mobility as coping strategies.³² I thus consider these issues as continuous insecurities, as well as issues related to land ownership, access to watering points and grazing land, cattle theft, and strategic allegiances (i.e. within a sub-tribe, between sub-tribes, and with sedentary populations of other ethnic groups).

In mentioning strategic alliances and land, one must mention pastoral–sedentary conflict. During my various fieldwork visits we heard of the occasional conflict over cattle or camels entering into someone’s field and eating or destroying their crops. Walad Djifir were not involved in these instances, but neighbouring tribes or sedentary villagers were. These are real issues, which have caused much tension, debate, and a search for solutions at local and policy level.³³ It is interesting that there were other conflicts or issues which took precedence among the Walad Djifir while I was there.³⁴ Whether this says something about their agreements and allegiance with the sedentary villagers, or more about their control of their herds while in the vicinity of an agricultural field, is difficult to say.

These continuous insecurities seem almost to be *expected* insecurities—can we even speak of expected moments of crisis—although nonetheless dramatic and disruptive. Apart from these continuous³⁵ insecurities, one can also detect changing insecurities. This distinction does not necessarily imply new insecurities but rather perhaps an intensification or variation in the nature of older pre-existing (continuous?) insecurities. For example, family members have, for generations, travelled far and wide, whether in search of pasture or cash. The dangers of travel continue, although perhaps in different forms (e.g. due to regional dynamics and infrastructural developments). Through such technologies as the mobile phone, the experience of someone being away, and the tension and stress this may involve for those at home or away, may be altered. Family members expect periodic phone calls. They expect money to be sent home, something which is now very much possible through a mixture of formal and informal networks. Conflicts can be

³² See Monod 1975; Azarya 1996b; Chatty 2006; see van Dijk 1995 on how indigenous coping strategies can also be threatened or undermined by a combination of drought and political developments.

³³ See Arditi 1999 on conflicts among the Sara and pastoralists in southern Chad; for the Misseria Rouges (Dangbet 2015a, 2015b) and Guéra & Batha specifically (Aubague et al. 2006).

³⁴ Certainly these conflicts occurred often in the past, and stories were told—by those remembering their childhood transhumance—of tensions running high and being chased. Problems often occur during the transhumance, which is why the corridors were agreed upon. As Walad Djifir are now settled within the region, it is in their best interest to keep a healthy and friendly allegiance with their direct neighbours. Nevertheless, conflicts have and do still arise between communities sharing access to agricultural and pastoral land, and to deep-water wells. Conflicts within a community itself are also common, as this dissertation will go on to show.

³⁵ What distinguishes an expected moment of crisis from Vigh’s (2008) ‘chronic crisis’ is that the latter has a more prolonged or enduring connotation. These ‘expected’ insecurities, on the other hand, can come and go and are continuous in that sense, i.e. continually coming and going versus continuously present with no relief.

simultaneously more intense, quickly rallying family from all over through a phone call, and short-lived—a similar phone call to the *sous-prefet* or military can put a quick stop to anything brewing.

In *Fiscal Disobedience*, Janet Roitman (2005) argues that we need to look closely at when or how a ‘crisis’ is defined as such. A house burning down is not immediately a crisis, given a specific context or perspective. The fleeing of Zaynebah and family from CAR after the 2013 coup (see Chapter 5) in and of itself could be labelled as a crisis situation. It was traumatic and stressful and involved much uncertainty for all parties involved. At the same time, the result (now) is that Zaynebah, her children, and husband have been reunited with her father’s family in Chad. They currently live in the town of Mongo in Central Chad, close to the nomadic camps of their families. The children go to Qur’ānic school; her husband runs a shop. How can the interplay of crisis as context and moments of crisis then be interpreted? Or do the results of Zaynebah’s sudden move require a more nuanced concept to describe them? The cause was a crisis situation; the process was also one of relative insecurity. But the outcome? And the chronicity of the contextual crisis? I would like to leave this line of thinking open for now. Chad and its people have lived through many atrocities and much violence and oppression, which has taken place under various actors at different times and which, in a way, is still ongoing and *cannot* be downplayed (see Chapter 1).³⁶ Discussing specific political events is not the purpose here. I would merely like to ask whether a certain order—existence and emergence of power relations and socio-economic hierarchies—can be discerned in what, at first sight, may appear chaotic. This does not imply that this order is fixed or in any way not ‘paratactic, contradictory, opportunistic, and improvisatory’ (Jackson 2013: 7). Events like the coup in CAR, the death of Hadj Hamdaan’s brother (Zaynebah’s father), and also other political events initiated by government leaders or rebels forces *have* framed the environment in which people, institutions, and infrastructures have come to take shape. There is also a certain reciprocity, however, in the way political events, infrastructural developments, and civilian actions, for example, are influenced by one another.³⁷

What struck me was the constant negotiation that family members were involved in, a negotiation between security and insecurity, the self and the group, the group and the state, order and disorder, the known (predictable) and the unknown (unpredictable = crisis?),³⁸ the drive to escape while nurturing the safety of familiar ways. Another aspect which I found intriguing was that of the simultaneous confrontation, struggle, adaptation, and empowerment of flexibility in relation

³⁶ The conviction of Hissein Habré in May 2016 has offered some consolation but also leaves many avenues of justice unresolved—what about the role of the French and Americans in providing him financial and material support? And what about those that carried out his orders and went on to take up other posts under the president that followed?

³⁷ See Souleymane 2017 on the relationship between communication and violence in colonial and post-colonial Chad. Djama (2010: 100) reminds us of the historical role of trade circulation and Islam in shaping political structures.

³⁸ In his short book *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Bauman (2007: 95) says the following: ‘We are all familiar with unpleasant and uncomfortable occasions when things or people cause us worries we would not expect them, and certainly not wish them, to cause. What makes such adversities (“blows of fate”, as we sometimes call them) particularly irksome is that they fall unannounced—we do not expect them to come, and quite often will not believe that they might be near. They hit us, as we say, “like bolts out of the blue”—we can’t take precautions and avert the catastrophe, since no one expects a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky....’

to (in)security.³⁹ This flexibility was mostly reflected in the (in)voluntary choices people made and their explanatory narrative of why they had done so. Again, Zaynebah's case is most illustrative here—is her 'flexibility' to move between Chad and CAR part of a continuous process of action–reaction already in place? What power relations and gender hierarchies, for example, have played a role in her initial move to Chad, upon the death of her father, and the later 'choice' to settle in Chad after CAR's violence? To what extent are such pre-existing social frameworks, within which Zaynebah's actions and reactions can be placed, being transformed by disruptive socio-political events and technological developments? In other words, what is the nature of connectivity for Walad Djifir like Zaynebah and Hadj Hamdaan, in a regionally insecure context—socio-economically and politically, but also ecologically—and how better to understand it?

Connectivity

Cooper (2001) argues that the idea of everything being connected is not a new one. In his critique of globalization as a useful analytical concept, he posits that historical depth is often lacking, especially when it comes to understanding interconnections with a focus on what the structures and limits of the connecting mechanisms are.⁴⁰ This ethnography does not pretend to be historical; it does acknowledge, however, the continuity of mobility, networks, and connections within the region and the Walad Djifir's way of life.

Pastoral-nomadic studies have often taken a geographic and economic approach to the subjects of mobility and globalization.⁴¹ Here, an alternative approach is offered, one based on an ethnography of connectivity as a means of studying various facets of pastoral-nomadic life. I find this important because nomadic life has always been about more than livestock rearing, socio-political organization, ecological conditions, and the need to find pastureland (Salzman 1995). Interdisciplinary studies have been carried out—for example, by Martin Wiese (2004, 2011), a geographer in an interdisciplinary health project who carried out 14 months of fieldwork on camelback with nomadic Arabs in Chad; by Zakinet Dangbet (Dangbet 2015a, 2015b; Marty et al. 2009), an historian who carried out ethnographic fieldwork transhumancing. Here, however, I am concerned not necessarily with the interdisciplinarity itself, but more with answering to the data which came out of the field, data on a group of nomadic people who engage with livestock and all

³⁹ Flexibility is a well-used concept in nomadic studies. I use it here in line with De Bruijn & van Dijk (1995: 504): 'At the level of the community and the herding families it [flexibility] expresses itself not only in a geographical mobility in order to deal with ecological fluctuations, but also in the ways people relate to each other, redistribute natural resources over society, and mediate access to social resources which may provide some protection in bad times.' They go on to emphasize that with this flexibility comes an aspect of political and cultural control, to avoid chaos. See also Chapter 3 for more on flexibility.

⁴⁰ Cooper argues for concepts which are '[...] more precise, which emphasise both the nature of spatial linkages and their limits [...]' (2001: 192). Throughout this ethnography, I will link this line of thinking to the choice for 'connectors' and the conceptualization of the *ferikh* as embodying various networks and thus as a way of 'cutting the network' (Strathern 1996): defining the nature and limits of linkages.

⁴¹ For some alternatives to this, see Fischer & Kohl 2010 on anthropological nomadology; Azarya 1996a, 1996b; De Bruijn & van Dijk 1995, on Malian Fulbe, introduce an interplay between historical and ecological dimensions in their analysis of political, social, and ecological insecurities; Holtzman 2009, on Samburu cattle herders in northern Kenya, uses food to contextualize changes occurring in their social and material life; Köhler 2016a examines identification processes in a context of mobility and migration, and the roles of place and space (placemaking and local attachment).

that this involves, but who also have family living a non-nomadic life, and who are influenced by technological and political developments as much as the sedentary population next to them.

Why does Hadj Hamdaan, for example, have family in CAR? What made his brother move there and what was he doing? How were relations maintained over the years with family in the *ferīkh*? How was the inheritance money transferred from remote CAR to remote Chad? In a day and age where technologies are developing rapidly and more and more people, including the Walad Djifir, have access to these and other infrastructural improvements, it is interesting to understand what the nature of connectivity is and has been. By focusing on specific ‘Walad Djifir’ dynamics in relation to mobility and insecurity, we gain insights into general processes of social change—processes which, indeed, are seen to involve changes but ultimately also reveal considerable continuity. But how can these dynamics be approached and analysed?

Giuffrida argues that mobility should be analysed as a system of which pastoralists are a part and which is made up of different categories of mobility and stasis.

Interrelations between categories of mobility and stasis, beyond the opposition of nomadism and sedentarization, make possible mapping networks and people as well as observing the flows of goods, knowledge and resources in local and global contexts. (Giuffrida, in Fischer & Kohl 2010: 23)

She goes on to argue:

This points to the salience of considering economic relations between pastoralism and different categories of mobility and stasis as being parts of the same social and translocal system linking pastoralists in the bush with migrants in other regions of Mali and abroad. (ibid. 27)

The movements of Hadj Hamdaan’s brother and their impact on the lives of family in and out of the *ferīkh* setting can be understood from a similar angle and through a connectivity lens. Despite his brother living a sedentary life for many years, the reasons he moved to CAR, the choices he made in investing his capital, and the way his death was dealt with are still connected to his family in the nomadic camps. The same goes for those Walad Djifir who have chosen a sedentary life in N’Djaména or Mongo: there is a continual flow (connection) between the nomadic lives of their family and those of their own more urban lives.

Connectors as analytical tool

Connections, however, are more than merely moments of interaction; they entail the transfer or communication, of information, ideas, and habits. In other words, they hold potentially transformative powers.⁴² People and goods are connectors that create a link between *ferīkh* life and life ‘outside’ of the *ferīkh*. The daily activities of the *ferīkh* link up to various socio-economic and

⁴² For studies building on the ‘social life’ of material and living connections, see Appadurai 1986 (social life of things); van Binsbergen & Geschiere 2005 (commodification); Elliot 2010 (nomadic commodification and social ties); De Bruijn & van Dijk 2012 (connectivity); van Dijk 2013 (social media).

political networks, whereby mobility and communication are key.⁴³ Instead of looking at these networks in general, we will focus on the ‘common variables’ within these networks, the points of connection—the connectors, if you will.

In the case of the Walad Djifir and within the framework of this ethnography, the connectors focussed on are Livestock (Chapter 2), Leaders (Chapter 3), Money in the form of Remittances (Chapter 4), and Family (Chapter 5). Through each of these connectors, people have interactions within and outside of the *ferikh* setting. Certain values and behaviours are embodied in these connectors at the same time that they are shaped by other factors—for example, market changes, politics, technological changes. Connectors may then be fixed entities whose values change over time and in certain contexts, thus also changing the connectivity they embody.⁴⁴

In my thinking about connectors, Strathern’s work on ‘Cutting the network’ has been inspirational. By borrowing from actor–network theory and anthropological kinship studies, she argues:

The concept of network summons the tracery of heterogenous elements that constitute such an object or event, or string of circumstances, held together by social interactions: it is, in short, a hybrid imagined in a socially extended state. The concept of network gives analytical purchase on those interactions. (1996: 521)

Strathern thus concludes that the network is a socially expanded hybrid⁴⁵ and that the hybrid can be seen as a condensed network. Both are potentially endless, so how can we ‘limit’ or ‘cut’ the network(s) we research? Harvey’s words situate the connectors as embodying various ‘realms’ but as being played out in ‘daily life’.

The strength of the Lefebvrian construction [...] is precisely that it refused to see materiality, representation and imagination as separate worlds and that it denies the particular privileging of any one realm over the other, while simultaneously insisting that it is only in the social practices of daily life that the ultimate significance of all forms of activity is registered. (1993: 23)

⁴³ Here, communication is approached in a similar fashion as mobility. It is seen as a given, a context so intrinsic to the way of life of the Walad Djifir, and piece and parcel of all their daily interactions. Communication is engrained into the idea of connectors, with each connector having different ways in which it has embodied or interacts with methods and means of communication.

⁴⁴ There are parallels to be drawn between the way Stasik (2010: 1) approaches music and people, and the conceptualization of the various connectors: ‘The connections and disconnections music creates between people do not necessarily follow the connections and disconnections that people create and draw between lines of spatial, social, economic, political, generational, gender, religious, ethnic or “racial” divides. Music can both *transcend* lines of spatial, social, economic, etc. divides and *reinforce* them. As people listen to different sorts and sounds of music and attend different sorts of music events, they continuously connect with and disconnect from each other, thereby both crossing and reinforcing lines drawn along spatial, social, economic, etc. divides.’ Though perhaps less fluid than music, cattle, leaders, money, and family have the potential to transcend, reinforce, and also sometimes defy existing societal divides. Interestingly, it remains to be seen whether, in the case of the Walad Djifir, there is indeed such variety in the way lines are crossed (transcended/defied), or whether they ultimately seem to be reinforced.

⁴⁵ Things with both human/social and non-human/technological properties.

Here ‘connectors’, as phenomenologically approached,⁴⁶ may provide an outcome. The way each appears in the lived experiences of Walad Djifir reveals how they relate to and/or are influenced by different socio-political and economic aspects, and vice-versa.⁴⁷

By looking at connectivity and connectors specifically, we have a way to integrate the economic and socio-political aspects—realms, if you will—of daily life. As De Bruijn and van Dijk argue, understanding the nature of connectivity provides insight into a society’s grammar or workings:

The idea of networking is central to our notion of the importance of connections, yet in our search of processes of social transformation from a connections perspective, we move explicitly to the significance of linking [as opposed to understanding the people involved in networks]. In processes of linking and making new connections and decisions, we can see new social constellations coming into being and social transformations taking place. The connection has a bearing on the people concerned, which means that by moving away from network theory—in which agency is placed fully in the people who are being connected—it is the connection itself that plays a role. [...] it is the nature of the connection and the way people come to embrace connections that may help us understand social transformations. (De Bruijn & van Dijk 2012: 4)

Returning to the case of Hadj Hamdaan, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, there are various connectors through which the empirical data can be analysed, each shining light on a different aspect. Daily life, as a result of the inheritance, had been affected by an increase in camels to tend to. If we were to choose camels as ‘connector’, this would allow for a look at their role in a purely nomad–livestock sense: Why the choice for camels? What work and possible adaptation and reorganization do they require from those tending them? What is the camel market in Chad like compared with the cattle market? What is the relation between nomad and camel? Each of these angles embodies different ‘natures’ of connectivity. They, in the words of Castells (1996) and Appadurai (1990, 1996), entail specific ‘flows’ or ‘forms of circulation’/‘circulation of forms’.⁴⁸ Flows of information influence interactions surrounding connectors, as well as people’s valuation for and behaviour in relation to them. The camel embodies information on how to tend them, where and when to sell them, and so on—and this information in turn is based on past processes in which change and continuity are important elements. Walad Djifir interactions with camels reveal tendencies embedded in power relations, access, and wealth.⁴⁹ By analysing the shifting systems of logic surrounding each of the connectors, I look at how they are related to decision-making processes.

⁴⁶ ‘Phenomenology: the study of phenomena as they appear to the consciousnesses of an individual or a group of people; the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences’ (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 88).

⁴⁷ Chapter 2, for example, looks at how perceptions of cattle are related to the choices Walad Djifir make in terms of labour migration and wage labour—but also how experiences of the latter influence perceptions of cattle’s future value.

⁴⁸ ‘Forms’ refer to the various forms of mobility in which both audiences and messages circulate simultaneously, hinting at the de-territorialization of both.

⁴⁹ See De Bruijn & van Dijk 2012 on connections as a resource, (re)creating forms of compartmentalization in society. As such, connections and connectors are embedded in power relations, access, and wealth; and vice versa. This builds, in part, on the idea of connectors as ‘condensed networks’, and networks as socially expanded connectors. We will work towards substituting the ‘networks’ for the *ferīkh*, ultimately seeing the *ferīkh* as a socially expanded connector and the connectors as condensed *ferīkhs*.

This ‘shifting’, when linked to the thinking on flows, scapes, networks, and communication technologies, is often associated with globalization, identity, and de-territorialization.⁵⁰ Does globalization indeed have destabilizing effects? Or is there sense in Morley’s ideas on re-territorialization, which he posits occurs simultaneously and which fixes in place people’s senses of identity by ‘patterns of residence and modes of media consumption work[ing] together’ (2001: 427).⁵¹ In his article on ‘belongings’, Morley searches for ways to understand transformations of the idea of ‘home’ in relation to changing patterns of communication and physical mobility. A variation on this theme is brought to us by Massey (1994) and Lecocq (2010). Both argue that the identity of a place is constructed from social interrelations or networks. Massey explains:

More generally, the identity of a place is formed out of social interrelations, and a proportion of those interrelations—larger or smaller, depending on the time and on the place—will stretch beyond the ‘place’ itself. In that sense, if social space is conceived of as constructed out of the vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global, then ‘a place’ is best thought of as a particular part of, a particular moment in, the global network of those social relations and understandings. (1994: 115)

If we keep our ‘Strathern lens’ on, can we say that ‘place’ is in fact a condensation of social interrelations and networks within a specific moment? If so, a focus on connectivity—on these linkages or ‘connectors’ specifically—can tell us something about the nature of the ‘place’ and ultimately of those linked to it. But what is this ‘something’?

On finding answers: Grounded in connectivity

In the case of Hadj Hamdaan and his extended family, this ‘something’ seems to be defined by the *ferīkh* and that which it embodies—the extended family—but also by socio-economic ties/networks and norms and values (i.e. a frame of reference); there seems to be a coupling of belonging and connectivity, and of space and place.⁵² In relation to the diaspora, Sigona et al. (2015: xix) describe how, ‘[t]he notion of belonging evokes an emotional attachment to a homeland, a place of origin, whether real or imagined.’ Just as the chapters in their edited volume go on to show, for the Walad Djifir this ‘home’ is not necessarily ‘conceptualised as a specific location’ (ibid.) but has more to do with the social relations and obligations embodied in specific connectors—whether they be people,

⁵⁰ For a selection of those researchers touching upon the themes of globalization, identity, and de/re-territorialization, see Harvey 1987; Appadurai 1990, 1996; Giddens 1991; Robertson 1995; Castells 1996; Cerulo 1997; Urry 2000, 2004; Smith 2001; Beck 2002.

⁵¹ See also Gupta & Ferguson’s (1992: 9) introductory ‘Beyond “culture”: Space, identity and the politics of difference’, in which they state that in the context of postmodernity, ‘space has not been irrelevant: it has been *reterritorialized* in a way that does not conform to the experience of space that characterized the era of high modernity. It is this that forces us to reconceptualize fundamentally the politics of community, solidarity, identity, and cultural difference.’

⁵² The discourses of belonging have been closely linked to those surrounding globalization, particularly when it comes to ideas of ‘the local’ and how best to understand it in relation to global processes. See, among many others, Amit & Rapport 2002 (community and contextuality/temporariness of belonging); Bouman 2003 (insecurity and identity (re)construction); Geschiere 2009 (autochthony, citizenship, and exclusion).

cattle, or money. Each connector symbolizes and introduces a ‘layer of connectivity’. Henrietta Nyamnjoh (2014) emphasizes the idea of belonging in/to family circles. For the Walad Djifir, this belonging to the family is not only an emotional factor but also a ‘mentality’ linked to certain norms and values—providing a safety network in time of need. Observed negotiations among family members, as well as with non-Walad Djifir, reveal the dynamics associated with belonging to be non-neutral and to include moments of friction and constraint.

Take Hadj Hamdaan’s niece Zaynebah, for example, born and raised in Bangui. How do her actions and feelings toward her family in the *ferīkh* relate and contribute to feelings of ‘belonging’ in relation to a physical territory or a more immaterial ‘space’? How does the *ferīkh*, as an entity governed by both internal and external forces, affect the decisions made in Zaynebah’s life, decisions surrounding her assets, children, and where she settles? And how do events in her life impact on ‘*ferīkh* life’? Analysis of such daily life encounters, through a focus on ‘connectors’, sheds light on the dynamics within different layers of connectivity and emotions of belonging, in a (dis)connected and networked society. These are dynamics which previous contemporary studies on Arab nomads of Central Chad have not yet described,⁵³ and ones which allow for the inclusion of non-nomadic family members living within and outside of Chad, such as Zaynebah.

The next section builds on the discussions (analytical concepts) introduced above, introducing the domains in which answers were found—namely, the idea of a globalizing wilderness (incorporating connectivity, insecurity, mobility), and the *ferīkh* as a place and space of groundedness (through its layers of connectivity and related emotions of belonging).

The globalizing wilderness

There are different ways in which ‘connectivity’ can be and has been analysed. As mentioned earlier, (post-)globalization studies offer one such analytical departure in the way it problematizes the idea of time and space in relation to society and cultural phenomena.⁵⁴ Earlier work on globalization has posited a concern for the increased integration of various social and cultural systems and networks—the ‘becoming identical’ when space no longer acts as a buffer between cultures, between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’. How then do cultural phenomena or even people not become disembedded from either space or place? How does the local remain grounded while being a part of the global? Work from the late 1990s adopted the concept of ‘glocalisation’ (Robertson 1995: 30) as a way of tackling what the influence of globalization does to social life. In these studies, the emphasis is almost always on how the local incorporates, adapts, or (re)appropriates aspect of the ‘global’, ultimately contributing to the (re)construction of identities.⁵⁵ In this ethnography, however, instead of looking at how aspects of what some consider ‘the global’ can be found in local daily life, we will also look at where the local—namely that which the *ferīkh* stands

⁵³ E.g. Brahim 1988; Barraud et al. 2001; Wiese 2004; Aubague et al. 2006; Dangbet 2015a, 2015b.

⁵⁴ We could, for example, examine the introduction of and increased use of mobile phones among the Walad Djifir, and their impact on communication flows within the context of globalization as seen by Harvey, ‘as a process of speeding up and a manifestation of a changing experience in time and space’ (Harvey 1989, in Fischer & Kohl 2010: 2).

⁵⁵ See Smith 2001, Beck 2002, Urry 2002—who highlight how the global and local are bound together and inextricably linked.

for—can be found in the global, with a focus on change and continuity. One example is how the Walad Djifir make use of monetary transfer systems. Available global technologies are appropriated, yet at the same time one can recognize (local) ‘ferīkh-ways’ in these processes, especially when it comes to choices about what social networks to use for the transfer of money.

Here it is worth considering the words of Retaillé and Walther when they build their argument for a mobile space model: ‘[...] mobility as an organising force can be conceived of not merely in relation to transportation and flows of people and goods, but as a mobility of the places themselves’ (2011: 86). The mobile space model considers the mobility of places themselves; a ‘place’ can move within a given spatial structure and yet keep its intrinsic properties (ibid. 89). Within the context of the pastoral-nomadic Walad Djifir, their ‘place’ is ever-moving but, nevertheless, does somehow exist. Perhaps this touches upon the idea of *asuf*—solitude, loneliness, homesickness—which lives among the Tuareg.⁵⁶ From early on, the Tuareg are taught how to cope and survive with the *tenere*⁵⁷ or wilderness which is the Sahara. The following quotation goes a long way to summing up what the ideas of *asuf* and *tenere* entail:

The Tuareg are compelled by the necessities of their life to move often, to leave continuously people whom they know and love. There is a kind of ambivalence in the Tuareg’s relation with the hostile desert environment whereby awareness of being the only human (part of the essence of *asuf*,⁵⁸ which is felt as soon as one is away from the sights, sounds, and smells of camp) is simultaneously ego diminishing and ego enhancing. Just as a seaman belongs less to the harbor where his boat is anchored than to the sea, so *tenere* [wilderness/desert] rather than his tent is the true home of the Tuareg man. (Yousouf, Grimshaw & Bird 1976: 800)

I believe the Walad Djifir relate to the ambivalence described above, in relation to their environment. Although currently based in a relatively populated area in Chad’s Sahelian Guéra region, in contrast to the Tuareg’s western Sahara setting, the above quotation defines this ambivalence along the lines of the physical, ecological space in which the Tuareg live and the feelings it creates of both endless possibilities and loneliness. The words of Jackson (2013: 12), based on fieldwork among young African migrants, resonates with this idea:

⁵⁶ Nomadic pastoralists of the western and central Sahara.

⁵⁷ To the Tuareg, the desert is known as *tenere* for ‘...its infiniteness and eternalness and in its loneliness and desolation characterised by *asuf*, a Tamashaq word which can be glossed as “homesickness”...’ (Yousouf et al. 1976: 800).

⁵⁸ For a description of *esuf* or *asuf*, see Lecocq in Fischer & Kohl 2010: 50. ‘It stands for the unknown, the wilderness and solitude. Solitude can be caused by being alone in an unknown place or by the absence of loved ones through death or separation. *Esuf* also means space still to be conquered from nature and made inhabitable and social. Conquering this space implies a confrontation with the unknown. At the other end of the spectrum of its meaning is the emotional experience of solitude, of being alone in the unknown, cut off from the social world and cultural realm. Each new pasture that has not been exploited before is situated in *esuf*; to reconnoitre this pasture one has to experience *esuf* because one has left socialised space. [Children] ...are trained at a relatively young age to endure emotional solitude by being sent into the bush, into (to them) unknown areas, to look for stray animals or to herd animals in smaller groups than in the surrounding of the camp.’ Lecoq goes on to explain that herding seems to not be included in the experience of *esuf*. ‘*Amadal*, the pasture, is part of the social work and not of the wilderness [*tenere*]. It is, very literally, domesticated space. Although the herdsman can of course experience *esuf* in its other meaning, namely an emotion stemming from the experienced absence of loved ones, especially the departed. Nevertheless, the experience of herding is also part of the same range of nomad pastoral culture that sets them apart from the sedentary global mover’ (p. 51).

[...] I have seen how the wider world has become [...] a symbolic bush—a place at once of peril and of transformative possibilities, lying beyond the moral and legal space of the ‘town’ and signifying a space of ethical questioning and bargaining [...].

While wilderness perhaps has a somewhat negative connotation, as chaotic and perhaps even frightening, I see it more in line with nature in general as being wild or unkempt yet very much having a purpose and certain structure to it. In pastoral-nomadic studies, pastoral borderlands are often associated with being beyond the reach of the state and thus also of the development industry, (in)directly implying a level of disorder. Catley et al. (2013: 12), however, referencing Peter Little on Somalia, describe a certain order created among supposed disorder through segmentary lineage systems, linked to complex clan-based hierarchies: ‘[...] even when a central state is effectively absent, daily life, relationships and particularly markets are still governed’. The one does not exclude the other: wild and unstructured, order and chaos. As Marielle Debos (2016: 174) writes when describing the trajectories of Chadian civilians:

Power relations and socio-economic hierarchies do not develop *despite* disorder—instead, they emerge and develop *from* that disorder. Social differentiation is strong. Savvy young men seldom experience social mobility with weapons in hand. However, their trajectories make sense if one considers that civilian life is often a daily combat.

In the case of the Walad Djifir, the Sahel and beyond are their *tenere* or wilderness, their space of daily ‘combat’—an infinite globalizing space. The Sahel is not, if it ever was, made up of its acacia trees, wadis, and thorny shrubs alone.⁵⁹ The Sahel has held, and still holds, paths and roads; it holds nomadic camps and sedentary villages; its landscape encompasses agricultural fields and wells, with roaming livestock and wildlife. The Sahel’s villages hold markets, whose products are brought in from near and far and whose prices for these products are also determined by events near and far. People are seen moving through, out of, and into the Sahel—for work, healthcare, schooling, family visits, or trade. In a sense then, the Sahel’s environment could be interpreted as a multi-dimensional jig-saw puzzle—Retaillé and Walther’s (2011) given spatial structure—constructed by an historical process of interactions and made up of different yet integrated pieces: ecology, infrastructure, people, but also news and ideas. Can the feeling of ambivalence described above be seen as being shaped by a combination of these (local) pieces, creating an elaborate and complex globalizing context—one within which the individual can feel both strong and small at the same time?

The *ferīkh* in a globalizing wilderness

Part of the answers to these two questions above can be sought in a return to the ‘local’—namely, to the entity known as the ‘*ferīkh*’. Here the *ferīkh* is introduced in terms of its physical and socio-political characteristics, as well as in its role as an analytical concept.

*The *ferīkh**

⁵⁹ Inspired by Lydon’s (2009) descriptions of the historical connections across the Sahara, approaching it as a dynamic space with a deep history.

In the dry season,⁶⁰ if one were to fly over the region known as Fadǵé, which runs along the Bang-bang's dry river bed (see Map 1.3), one would see a chain of *ferīkhs* dotted along it.⁶¹ The *ferīkh* is a collective word for an ensemble of nomadic tents set up together. These tents are inhabited by family members, who often share the herding of a specific group of livestock, with every married woman owning her own tent. Within the area and at walking distance from each other, one will find several other *ferīkhs*, inhabited by close and extended family members. This brings us to a second use of the word *ferīkh*. It refers to a physical nomadic camp but also indirectly to an extended family.⁶²

A Walad Djifir is thus part of an extensive familial network, with complicated kinship patterns due to a preference for endogamous, parallel cousin marriages. Members of the same extended family can live spread out over various nomadic camps and still refer to themselves as belonging to the same *ferīkh*—that is, falling under the same *chef de ferīkh* or leader (*kabir hana ferīkh*).⁶³ In the case of the Walad Djifir, it is not so easy to distinguish where an extended family ends and a primary kin group begins.⁶⁴ There is considerable overlap; and, in general, each group of nomadic tents makes up one singular camp (*ferīkh*). The extended family occupying other camps in close proximity or further away also makes up a primary kin group, which varies in composition depending on the needs of the group.

⁶⁰ The dry season is approximately from February to June. When the first rains start, the camps are moved to the other side of the Bang-bang and road between Mongo and Ati. The terrain on that side is more grassy and does not turn into huge blocks of mud which are impossible to walk over. In relation to the transhumance, more seasons are distinguished (Wiese 2004): *kharīf* (rainy season), *darat* (transitional period from the rainy to the cold season), *shittéh* (cold season), *seyf* (hot & dry season), *rushāsh* (transitional period to the rainy season).

⁶¹ On existing maps, the Bang-bang is often referred to as the Bambam. Locally, the pronunciation seems to vary. In the text I have decided to use Bang-bang, as this is what the Walad Djifir use. On Map 1.3, the readers will see the dry river bed named as Bambam.

⁶² Similar entities in other nomadic societies can be found. The entity which is associated with the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, *biyut*, actually comes close to that of the *ferīkh*. 'What Evans-Pritchard (1949: 56; cf. Peters 1967: 262; Peters 1960: 31) calls extended family groups (*biyut*) amongst the Bedouin of Cyrenaica [eastern coastal region of Libya] are, in fact, different levels of a nomadic community. This becomes clear in his description of them: "Their members live in the same stretch of tribal territory, move during the rains to the same grazing grounds, use the same wells during the dry season and cultivate adjacent strips of arable land. The members of a *biyut* have a lively sense of solidarity... They are jointly responsible for a wrong any one of them may commit. The smaller *biyut* are often identical with camps, usually from five to ten tents, in grazing grounds, and several closely related *biyut* camp near together in the vicinity of springs and wells in the summer, their combined camps then amounting sometimes to over a hundred tents.'" (Khazanov 1994: 133). Interestingly, in Ladislav Holy's (1974: 86) study of the Berti people of Darfur, the word *farīg* is used to refer to the dry-season camp.

⁶³ In Aubague et al. (2006: 69), the authors make a distinction between *iyaal raagil* [إيال راجل] (factions), the small and large *khāshim beyt* [خاشم بيت] (sub-lineage and lineage) and *qabīla* [قبيلة] (tribe). The *chef de ferīkh*, or *kabirra ana ferīkh* [كبيرة عن الفريخ] in Chadian Arabic, mentioned here would come closest to the leader of what they refer to as *iyaal raagil*, namely people who have the same grandfather four generations back. Several *iyaal raagil*, each with their own *chef de ferīkh*, make up the *khāshim beyt* known as the Walad Djifir. Chapters 1 and 2 will deal with the different levels of organization in more detail.

⁶⁴ Khazanov (1994) attempts to decipher the distinction between extended families, communities, and other classifications of social organization. Writing about primary kin groups versus the extended family, he says the following: 'Amongst nomads a primary kin group consists of closely related families which all year round, or for part of the year, pasture together and help and support each other. Such groups are, of course, considerably less stable than an individual family and all the families of a primary kin group run their own households and keep their own livestock. The primary kin group consists of several autonomous economic cells which do not automatically have the right to make claims on each other's property and labour. Thus the primary kin group must not be confused with the extended family' (p. 128).

Principles of social organization found in interactions in the *ferīkh* setting can be traced to other levels of interactions—for example, the ways in which the cattle market (Chapter 3), labour migration (Chapters 3 & 4), and also local politics (Chapters 2 & 5) are approached. In the edited volume *Tuareg Society within a Globalised World*, Giuffrida calls for anthropologists to revise their positions to consider the relationship between increased mobility and structural change.⁶⁵ She goes on to argue for

an integrated approach to mobility to encompass all variations and categories that together form social and spacial networks. [...] This approach can be particularly helpful in tracing aspects of continuity and change as well as understanding how economic and human resources circulate from a fixed locality [the *ferīkh* as nomadic camp] across an intricate and extended web of people in and out of Tuareg society and beyond. (Giuffrida, in Fischer & Kohl 2010: 39)

The Walad Djifir's social and spatial networks are embodied within the various connectors, accumulating in the form of the *ferīkh* functioning as a fixed locality—fixed but not stagnant, immobile, or even closed-off. The words of Massey come to mind: 'It is about constructing a sense of a locality's place in the world (its identity) which has the courage to admit that it's open' (1994: 117).

This ethnography thus approaches the *ferīkh* as a physical place, embodying different social spaces through the connections it has with life 'outside' of the *ferīkh*.⁶⁶ In this sense, the *ferīkh* is also used as an analytical concept, in the way it functions as a network (Strathern 1996) of connectivity.

The ferīkh and groundedness

Returning briefly to the Tuareg: Lecocq (2010: 43) describes the existence of a personal primary network and the capacity to adapt as useful aspects to living a global cosmopolitan life—'nomads, like all human beings, have a home, a stable position and a social network that holds a centre' (ibid. 50). The words of Massey, again, help us make the link between these social networks with a centre, a 'place', and the theoretical and methodological choice of analysing the *ferīkh*'s connections:

The argument here is that understanding the specificity of place may best be approached through an analysis, first, of the particularity of the social interactions which intersect at that location and of what people make of them in their interpretations and in their lives and, second, of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location in itself produces new effects, new social processes. (Massey 1994: 117)

⁶⁵ Increased mobility does not have to imply increased connectivity; they are not synonymous in this sense. Connectivity (including dis-connectivity), instead, is one aspect of mobility, just as it is of structural change.

⁶⁶ This does not at all imply that a distinction can be made between life in the *ferīkh* and life 'outside' it. As this ethnography hopes to show, regional and local dynamics are very much linked—also in terms of 'everyday' life.

Following the above reasoning, it is the Tuareg quotation's second insight⁶⁷ which might be questioned and developed further—the tent as less of a home than the wilderness itself. I would argue that all that which the 'tent' or *ferīkh* stands for is very much internalized/embodied by the person him/herself, allowing the wilderness to have the possible characteristics of 'home'. It is perhaps even this which informs a certain ambivalence toward the immediate environment and which will ultimately help us understand what life in the post-globalization 21st century entails, in the context of the Chadian Walad Djifir. A Walad Djifir roaming away from his camp (*ferīkh*) alone does not leave his baggage of knowledge and experience behind. In his interactions with nature, with roads, markets, and other people, the ways he was taught from childhood onward will play a role. It is these customs—which entail norms, values, and logics of doing—which connect the individual with his/her community and which directly and indirectly provide a certain groundedness. Is this the reason why people can continue to leave those they know and love?

Groundedness

In constructing what groundedness entails in relation to the Walad Djifir, the notions of 'duress' (De Bruijn & Both 2018) and a 'wherewithal of life' (Jackson 2013) have aided the analytical process. De Bruijn and Both describe processes linked to situations of enduring and accumulating hardship (duress), in which a certain normalization is discerned, coupled with a form of deeply constrained agency. Far from all situations the Walad Djifir encounter, within the context of the various connectors, are ones of duress. However, the idea of a certain continuity (normalization?) existing—throughout those extraordinary moments that *do* occur, as well as the more mundane happenings—is intriguing. In Jackson's notion of a 'wherewithal of life' this continuity could be said to take the form of an inherent, basic humanity⁶⁸ guiding people's decisions. He argues that we should not forget the spontaneous actions and minor experiences of individuals which can illuminate such things as chance, luck, contingency, resignation, and hope.

The introduction of the term groundedness thus comes from wishing to find a way to describe the practical (expectations and needs) *and* more emotional aspects (such as feelings of belonging). Amidst all the possible triggers for disruption of the personal psyche, many of the Walad Djifir I encountered seem to be 'grounded'⁶⁹ in some way or other. Their everyday lives and subsequent decisions seem to be grounded in 'the *ferīkh*' and that which it stands for. It is the connections within and represented by the *ferīkh* which ground them—hence, grounded in connectivity. This is not to negate the very real traumas lived; no, it is a way of understanding what 'frameworks' work, so to speak (or function) in ordinary and extraordinary situations. It allows one to touch upon the more practical aspects of daily life amidst disruption while, through the link with the 'emotion' of

⁶⁷ 'Just as a seaman belongs less to the harbor where his boat is anchored than to the sea, so *tenere* [wilderness/desert] rather than his tent is the true home of the Tuareg man.' Youssouf, Grimshaw & Bird 1976: 800

⁶⁸ Humanity is associated with 'being humane' or benevolent. I would like to use it more in line with 'being human' in general, thus including people's contradictory nature and a way of interpreting decisions which to another may seem unjust/illogical/non-benevolent.

⁶⁹ In the way that one speaks of someone being a grounded person but also in the way that one can have a solid theoretical or practical basis in something (e.g. to be grounded in).

belonging’ (Yuval-Davis 2006) as a characteristic of being grounded, also creating some understanding for the agency of an individual as a person ‘living life’. It is through the *ferīkh* and its connectivity (embodied networks and connectors), in the way that it provides a grounded space/basis for individuals and the group, that we can analyse the Walad Djifir’s navigations of a globalizing Chad.

On chapters and research questions

This ethnography explores the Walad Djifir’s nomadic lives in a world characterized by dispersion (mobility and connectivity) and disruption (insecurity, crisis), finding answers in the *ferīkh* as a social, cultural, and normative frame of reference, ultimately providing a form of groundedness through connectivity. Instead of departing from a logic premised around conflict and insecurity, and in an attempt to move away from an emphasis on structure in relation to nomadic society, a connectivity approach is proposed as an alternative means with which to look at networks and the social as a way of understanding aspects of connectivity and groundedness. It suggests a focus on the socio-political and socio-economic characteristics surrounding connections in a globalizing word.

Main research questions

The main question this ethnography explores is this: How do Walad Djifir navigate the globalizing world? In contrast to other nomadic studies, I focus less on ecological aspects or on how ‘the nomad’ is suffering and losing livestock. Instead, I have chosen to analyse how this navigation is grounded in connectivity. In navigating the modern globalizing world, the Walad Djifir link up to a variety of networks (e.g. commercial, transnational, refugee-related, political, nomadic) which exist outside of their nomadic camp (*ferīkh*) and are simultaneously very much embodied within the camp. These networks and related connections come with specific norms and values which help shape a Walad Djifir’s navigations.

The sub-questions that follow from this explore the nature of connectivity, in a regionally insecure context such as Chad and CAR, and how better to understand it. What are the (re)actions of the Walad Djifir to, and in, the socio-political environment of which they are a part—including developing means of communication—and how do the networks and connections to which they belong play a role? In answering these questions, I look at the internalization of the *ferīkh* both in the lives of individuals and within the spaces various connectors occupy. What place does the *ferīkh* hold in these entangled and connected regional dynamics, and what is the resulting impact on people’s lives?

The contemporary situations of several extended family members of the Walad Djifir are seen as part of a larger system of mobility (and stasis) within the region. Here, the location at which social interactions intersect is the physical nomadic camp, the *ferīkh*. Through initially focusing on daily

life ‘negotiations’⁷⁰ within the *ferīkh* setting, dynamics related to life ‘outside’ of the physical nomadic camp were revealed. I identified several ‘connectors’ which inform and mediate these connections with the ‘outside’ world (the wilderness)—namely, leaders, cattle, money/remittances, and family. This ethnography thus focuses on these connectors, through the narratives of individuals’ daily lives. In doing so, the *ferīkh* is approached as a physical setting as well as a network (of connectivity). The chapters of this ethnography follow and describe in what way the interactions with life outside of the *ferīkh* produce or reinforce social processes (informing groundedness).

The chapters and their sub-questions

The way the chapters of this ethnography have been written, they introduce the reader, chapter by chapter, to a selected set of fields of reference, essentially embedded within specific ‘connectors’. The chapters illustrate how individuals and family position themselves toward these connectors and how this in turn informs the nature of the connectivity and mobility. This is not an historical ethnography, yet every chapter does give some historical context vis-à-vis the specific connector—in order to better understand the changes surrounding each, and the continuities of connectivity.

Positionality: Intersubjectivity and circles of belonging

Intersubjectivity is the theme which binds the subjects of the first chapter—namely, those of positionality, historical and socio-political context, methodology, and reflexivity. In dealing with the position of the research field and its occupants, as well as that of the researcher, the field is approached as one built up of intersubjective memories, informing the various ways in which an historical context of the Walad Djifir can be—and has been—narrated. Instead of relying heavily on existing written sources, these are instead seen as an aid to interpreting the emic data of how the Walad Djifir came to live in the Guéra region of Central Chad, and of the *ferīkh*’s socio-political organization. The chapter then moves on to a more methodological section, describing how the contemporary itineraries of the Walad Djifir are researched. The ‘main characters’ are introduced, situating them in relation to the data and the researcher herself. In a way, intersubjectivity may be seen in light of ‘circles of belonging’. In positioning the field and its occupants, the Walad Djifir are introduced as ‘belonging’ to various constructed identities: those of nomads, Arabs, Muslims, and—as we will see in Chapter 5—Chadians. Through my interaction with Walad Djifir, certain circles of belonging were reinforced—the position of main informant Bachar as mediator for family affairs, for example; and I also had specific frames of reference to which I belonged and was seen to belong. What then are the various ‘circles of belonging’ in relation to the Walad Djifir? This chapter introduces these circles, in relation to positionality. Each consecutive chapter, through the lens of a different connector, explores what other levels/circles of belonging we can discern and what this

⁷⁰ Negotiations between family members but also people negotiating life within the frameworks of the specific connectors—e.g. choices surrounding labour migration and income-generation, negotiating the money transfer infrastructure (formal/informal means). Negotiations imply a certain agency; and the type of interaction, relationship, or context defines the ‘structures’ or frameworks within which negotiations take place.

means in terms of the role that shifting, or perhaps evolving, social and economic networks—embodied in each connector—play in maintaining a feeling of groundedness.

Leaders: Fission and fusion revisited

Chapter 2 is the first of the ‘connector’ chapters, focusing on ‘local leaders’ as connectors while introducing and contextualizing the Walad Djifir’s socio-political organization. Leadership-strife, land ownership, and the forming or strengthening of allegiances show the structure and functioning of the ferīkh as a non-isolated unit. In dealing with these issues, members of the ferīkh are faced with remnants of administrative changes under the French and with the more contemporary dynamics linked to Chad’s system of governance. Literacy and the sharing of information have led to the employment of specific tactics to fight for the land they believe is theirs. Through examples of internal (dis)agreement, normative narratives of what is good for the community surface, narratives which help us understand the workings of the ferīkh. The question we ask here is this: How does the ferīkh, in relation to socio-politics, inform or act as a frame of reference for the Walad Djifir? The case studies presented reveal the, sometimes contradictory, strategies and tactics used in light of socio-political strife—strategies and tactics which can be analysed within the traditional nomadic studies theme of ‘fission and fusion’. Contrary to the way the theme of fission and fusion is usually used in relation to a group, this chapter questions its usefulness as a way of analysing similar processes at other levels of social organization. Even though the ferīkh functions as a framework of reference toward which people justify their actions, this does not mean that disparities and ambiguities do not exist. There is, one may say, a certain fission and fusion in the way Walad Djifir as a sub-tribe, members of an extended family, and even individuals (leaders and non-leaders) relate to this framework when justifying their decisions. Is the ferīkh, then, a socially constructed space which bonds Walad Djifir together, whether through cohesion or friction?

Cattle: Flexibility and the ‘walk of life’

We cannot fully understand that which the ferīkh stands for, and the ways in which its spaces are constructed, without touching upon how engrained the nomadic way of life is to those born and raised in a nomadic camp. In the case of the Walad Djifir, this nomadic way of life is linked to their livestock, making ‘cattle’ the second connector of focus (Chapter 3). This allows us to touch upon livelihood, income, and wealth generation, as well as the normative frameworks surrounding these economic activities. The commodification of livestock and the search for alternative forms of income—labour migration into Libya, commercial endeavours in CAR, or seasonal wage labour in N’Djaména—are analysed through the perceptions and attitudes of Walad Djifir to these processes. What changes and continuities exist in the way Walad Djifir adhere to a ‘nomadic way’ of life, in light of economic developments, political and ecological insecurity, and regional mobility? The empirical data point at how economic incentives for Walad Djifir mobility and flexibility are linked

to ideas about livestock, wealth, and family.⁷¹ By using the concept of flexibility in a more personal/individual sense than previous nomadic studies may have done, we see a trend emerging, one of patterns and traces which link back to the ‘nomadic way’ of doing things—a specific ‘walk of life’—amidst contextual changes.

Remittances: Mistrust as basis for decisions

One such contextual change, which Chapter 4 focuses on, is that of developments in communication technologies, such as the sending of money. How do developing communication technologies interact with existing practices of connectivity among the Walad Djifir, within contexts of insecurity and over geographical distances? This chapter takes money, or rather remittances, as its connector. It is not about cash and remittances *per se* but more about the channels used to transfer them—the infrastructures in place, both formal and informal, as well as the role of new technologies such as the mobile phone. At the time of my fieldwork, most of the remittances received came from Libya. The case studies shine light on the existing ways in which money is sent (inter)nationally, through both traditional and digital means, and the reasons for choosing specific methods. In interpreting the choices Walad Djifir make in this process, ‘mistrust’ has provided an intriguing lens for understanding. Mistrust, coupled with mere practicality, show the continuing importance of familial networks when it comes to the digital transfer of money.

Family: Questioning expectations and emotions amidst crisis/disruption

Chapters 3 and 4 show aspects of the Walad Djifir’s socio-economic network, very much based within the ferīkh setting and branching ‘out’ from it. The final ‘connector’ chapter (Chapter 5) starts off in CAR, away from the physical setting of the ferīkh and Chad, only to take us back to it (as family unit) through the narratives of three women faced with disruption. Chapter 5 proposes ‘family’ as a connector through which to analyse the dynamics of distance, insecurity and, ultimately, belonging. The question asked is this: What role do familial relationships play in providing both security and insecurity, and possibilities for alternative futures, within a context of political and non-political disruption and mobility? Through describing the processes surrounding a sudden eruption of violence in CAR, we see how notions of citizenship / national identity and belonging become polarized. On the other hand, a much more ‘mundane’ and nuanced form of fission and fusion can be discerned when looking at non-political situations of disruption (such as a physical move away from family). Familial relationships form one of the contexts in which experiences are navigated and lived. Family can, however, simultaneously function as both safe haven and creator of disruption. A focus on family and its role in providing security reveals a more pertinent role for gender hierarchies. At the same time, these same gender hierarchies also provide a form of structure (groundedness) to the ways in which people deal with daily life, whether in the form of the ordinary or disruptive.

⁷¹ From De Bruijn et al. (2016: 650) ‘In Bonfiglioli’s (1988) seminal study of family and cattle lineages, the main conclusion was that wealth in cattle and people are intertwined. Wealth is both economic and social, and hence a core of identity dynamics.’

Grounded in a connected wilderness

The Conclusion analyses how the Walad Djifir are grounded in connectivity, by looking at the nature of connectivity itself as well as the position of the ferīkh in the everyday ‘wilderness’. In navigating this wilderness (a globalizing world with all its infrastructures of communication, ecology, and politics), Walad Djifir’s interactions with and within networks are mediated by the various connectors related to these networks. The norms and values embodied in each connector ground individuals, and the group, within the ferīkh through the way they act as a frame of reference. Each connector thus reveals a different layer of ferīkh connectivity. Interactions with these various layers produce or reinforce social processes related to 1) building wealth and maintaining it, 2) creating and keeping power, 3) transferring money, and 4) keeping the family together and strong. Within these social processes, belonging is seen as ‘the emotion of being grounded’, and certain values and norms are acknowledged. This acknowledgement does not entail an automatic acceptance, and Walad Djifir’s actions differ per connector and its context.

A brief note on methodology and narrative choices

This introduction has described the process of ‘positioning’ within previous relevant studies, as well as within the many conceptual frameworks available. The process of learning to ask the right questions and then finding the answers (theory-building) is closely linked to methodological choices made (discussed in Chapter 1). Throughout, serendipity⁷² has played a role—allowing room for the unexpected, whether from within the field or through random sources of inspiration. In a sense, the fieldwork, methods used, and theoretical orientation, as well as narrative choices are all parts of the ‘puzzle’ that, once completed, has become this ethnographic dissertation. In the presentation of this puzzle, certain choices were made. Each chapter opens with an emic excerpt, one that brings the reader back to where the data come from: the people and their ‘field’. The stories of several main informants run throughout the various chapters, with the data presented linked to the specific connector of each chapter. In this sense, a ‘layer’ of knowledge is added every time, reflecting how the field presented itself to me—though I have restructured the ‘order’ to make it more coherent.⁷³ At the end of each chapter a visual narrative has been included, complementing the written narrative through the use of photographs accompanied by a brief description relating it to the text.

⁷² See Rivoal & Salazar 2013 on serendipity and reflexivity as key characteristics of contemporary ethnography: ‘Serendipity has become a convenient notion to point out the very experience of suddenly coming to ‘see’ something that had previously been out of sight [...]’ (p. 179)

⁷³ See Mintz 1989, who reflects on choices made in the restructuring of field data into a written narrative.



I.1 Bullet-holes of 1979 fighting in N/Djaména, taken at the home of a *khalifa* of the Misseria Rouge, N'Djaména, March 2014. Perceptions of Chad are often described in a context of post-conflict and insecurity. While I did not focus on such a context from the outset, these themes and historical events of violence did come up in the 'everyday'—here in the form of a way to create some privacy and protection from the wind and sun in a household setting. Those present on this afternoon could tell me exactly which weapon had made which bullet holes.

I.2 The Bambam *wadi* (dry river bed), Fadjé area, March 2012. The Bambam reflects how the relative wilderness (or *tenere* of the Tuareg) of the Walad Djifir's roaming grounds are not necessarily unstructured and unknown. The vast regions of the Guéra and Batha hold *wadis* which act as life sources in both dry and wet seasons. They help orientate passers-by, provide grazing areas for livestock, agricultural land for those farming, and shallow ground water in the dry season. Spatial structures exist through historical processes of interactions, between people and their environment.



I.3 Close-up of a ferīkh tent and camp, with an animal enclosure (*zerriba*) in the foreground. October 2011.

I.4 Men walking towards the ferīkh once the sun had cooled, October 2011. In the distance we see a chain of nomadic camps (ferīkh). Closer to the foreground, on the right, we can see how these camps are made up of several tents (*barsh*).



ONE POSITIONING: THE ‘FIELD’ AND ITS RESEARCHER(S)

My first meeting with the semi-sedentary nomadic Walad Djifir, a sub-tribe of the Misseria Rouges, in October 2011 was something I was pretty much ‘tricked’ into, in the best sense of the word. As a preliminary exploration of my research-field-to-be, Bachar and I were travelling east from N’Djaména toward Mongo via Ati (see Map 1.1).⁷⁴ The previous day he had already told me his *parents* (family) were from this area. This was the first time I discovered he belonged to a group of sedentary nomads, as he so accurately described them himself.⁷⁵ The following day, en route to Mongo from Ati, he asked me whether I would like to pass by and meet some of his *parents*. I said, ‘Sure; why not? I would love to, if you are sure they won’t mind.’ No sooner said than done. Toward the end of the morning and after several phone calls, with one shouting to another —‘*Weenak, where are you?! By which tree?! How much further from this village?!*’—we turned off the main road and made our way through an outstretched Savannah landscape, avoiding the thick thorny bushes. We arrived at a group of men patiently awaiting our arrival under a large tree. This was clearly not the spontaneous and unexpected visit I had thought it was going to be. After having made the proper greetings and drunk the first few glasses of sweet strong tea, Bachar asked me quietly, ‘*Now that we are here, how do you feel about spending the night?*’ I laughed. So this is what he had probably planned since our departure from N’Djaména but what he had not dared to share with me, perhaps thinking I would be scared and say no from the beginning. I agreed and he clearly relaxed.

The rest of the afternoon was spent under the shade of two large trees. There was a lot of talk, catching up, things discussed. Bachar was asked to translate a letter written in French which concerned the registering of their number of cattle. The road maps I had with me were taken out and discussed and peered over; questions were asked, such as why certain villages were not mapped; the distances of those which were mapped were challenged or acknowledged. Toward the end of the afternoon we were led to the *ferīkh*. Hadj Hamdaan insisted I walk up to the camp with him. I remember being intrigued by this man’s stance from the beginning. He had a calm presence and his

⁷⁴ We travelled in a Toyota Hilux, which my PhD supervisor Mirjam and husband Han had left behind after their time in Chad and which was being taken care of by Bachar. This is in fact the reason Bachar and I met and came to work together. I was looking for someone to introduce me to the Chad outside of N’Djaména. He had the skills (a driver and knowledgeable concerning the *brousse*) and was not a stranger. Toward the end of the fieldwork, Bachar became the owner of the car. He still uses it to transport goods and people, because he was unable to find work as a driver for a development project, which he had hoped for and done previously.

⁷⁵ Bachar is in his fifties and a father of eight, based in N’Djaména. Before we met he had worked as a driver for the veterinary department in Farscha for many years, hence explaining his familiarity with this kind of terminology. On that first trip he was a driver but also informant, introducing me to the Guéra and his family there.

hands did not show the signs of having done much of the hard physical labour involved in the tending of animals. He spoke some French as well, though he initially addressed me in *fusha* (modern standard Arabic), as opposed to the local Chadian Arabic.⁷⁶

Within the camp we were seated on large luxurious tapestries laid out over the regular straw mats. At a fair distance on the open square in between the tents were the other male members of the community. The late afternoon prayer was held and Hadj Hamdaan asked me to join them, ‘*Christian, Muslim, we all pray to God right?*’ Never having prayed before, I graciously refused. A sheep was slaughtered just outside the compound and hung from a pole before being roasted. They were very concerned with what I should eat, Bachar insisting that perhaps *macarona* would suit me best, as the *boule* was sure to be too heavy for my stomach. I could not escape sharing some of the beloved and much revered *marara* (intestines), but luckily the dark disguised the fact that there was nothing but sauce in the hand going from plate to mouth. After dinner, my bladder made me realize I had not yet gone the whole day. I asked Bachar where I could go and was directed to the women. This was my first real encounter with Zaynebah, although of course I did not realize it at the time.⁷⁷ Her first impression of me: leading me away from the camp with a torch and waiting while I went about my business. So much for first impressions It was not until the morning of the next day that I met the other women. Looking back at the photos I took at that time, I now recognize many of the women: Hassineh, Marnéh, Mansoura. The same goes for the men and children.

On the second visit to this same group, in February 2012, I was received with open arms, greeted by people I only vaguely recognized from the photos I had brought to distribute among them. At that time, I did not recognize any of the women. The idyllic first visit was slowly transformed into a more settled realistic stay. I now installed myself for the night on my fold-out bed just outside Zaynebah’s *barsh* (tent), no longer sleeping out in the open among the men. I now had my own mat to share with others during the day and was instantly introduced to their daily life patterns, including the many young children and livestock. We took walks to the ‘*eidd*’⁷⁸ where the livestock are watered. At that time, the ‘*eidd*’ was located at a five- to ten-minute walk from the dry *wadi* and a good twenty-minute walk from the camp. The groundwater level is very high here, and the wells (*birr*)⁷⁹ the men dig are only about four metres deep. It takes them about two days to dig a well; and once enforced, the wells last the whole time they are in this area during the dry season,

⁷⁶ I studied both Egyptian and Modern Standard Arabic, though I still have some way to go before being fluent! On being introduced as speaking Arabic and after having said a few words, people often did their very best to speak a ‘proper’ Arabic which they considered to be *fusha*. With time we were able to graduate into communicating in Chadian Arabic, with my own Arabic becoming an increasing mix of Egyptian and Chadian expressions.

⁷⁷ This was actually a second meeting, as we had gone to see her in the late afternoon while she was sleeping, she being ill at the time. It was only much later that I pieced the encounters together and realized the woman must have been Zaynebah during one of her ill spells.

⁷⁸ ‘*eidd* (عِدَّة) pl. ‘*udūd*, a watering point, whether water is found on the surface or by digging deep (Julien de Pommerol 1999). In MSA, the plural forms (‘*addād*, ‘*idād*) are known, although the meaning is related to counting and measuring (‘*addād*), a number/quantity (‘*idād*), or preparation/readying/drawing up (‘*i’dād*).

⁷⁹ The word *bi’r* (بئر) comes from the verb *ba’ara* (بَار), to dig a well (Wehr 1994; Julien de Pommerol 1999). In the text, it is transcribed as Walad Djifir pronounce it: *birr*.

approximately from December to June. The wells provide the *hutt*⁸⁰ with water throughout the day.⁸¹ Three *hutts* are often created around one well. They are circular in shape, slightly dug out and walled. To prevent cattle from walking right across them, a thorny bush is placed in the middle.

At first glance, this group of sedentary nomads could be considered as living an isolated existence, tending their cattle and smaller livestock, living perhaps not very differently from the way nomads lived centuries ago. But this is, of course, not the whole story. At that very first encounter in 2011, while sitting under those trees with the men, mobile phones were being charged and many would ring, often the conversations being cut off owing to the bad network. I did not yet have many questions to ask, nor did I at all know that the Zaynebah who had led me to the ‘bathroom’ and who had been feeling so ill during the day had in fact recently come from CAR. Nor was I aware that many family members were or would be travelling to Libya in search of jobs. Only two years later would I even realize that several of those family members in CAR were involved in the diamond business. Sometimes, you really do need to know the answers in order to have an inkling of the right questions to ask.

The passage above serves as an introduction to the way the ‘field’ revealed itself, the way the main ‘characters’ of this study were identified, and also how research methods developed as fieldwork phases progressed and our positions, that of Bachar and mine, became more apparent. Intersubjectivity and belonging are the themes which run through the subjects of positionality, methodology, and reflexivity described in this chapter. In dealing with the position of the research field and its occupants, as well as that of the researcher, the field is approached as one built up of intersubjective memories, informing the various ways in which the story of this group of nomads can be—and has been—narrated. Ultimately, this chapter explores what the various ‘circles of belonging and connectivity’ are, in relation to the Walad Djifir.

A field of subjective memories

⁸⁰ It is unclear where the origins of the word *hutt* lie. It most likely derives from the verb *ḥaṭṭa* (حط), to put, place down / to lower, decrease. Other words linked to this root are *maḥaṭṭ*, a place at which something is put down or deposited (Wehr 1994). In the case of the Walad Djifir, we may extend to it being a place where water from a shallow well is contained.

⁸¹ See Wiese (2004: 139) on the Arab Juhayna’s reliance on surface water compared with the Dazagada (ibid. 130), who exploit limited water resources during the dry season (the traditional wells they dig are about 15–20 m deep). The Arabs use of surface water means that they are less restricted in terms of the number of livestock that can be watered, provided the water supply is large enough and the surrounding pastures provide enough space to alternate use. During the height of the dry season, the Walad Djifir often end up grazing their cattle at some distance from the camps and wells (and thus the dry river bed). This means that the cattle, and their herders, spend much time moving to and from the pasture areas. The cattle are brought to be watered during the day, setting out for the wells in the morning and sometimes arriving only late in the morning or early afternoon, only to set off again at the end of the afternoon, thus spending the night *en brousse*. Just after the rainy seasons, however, early in the year you will more often find herds kept close to the camps overnight, as there is still sufficient grazing nearby. This means that there is a lot of dung lying around.

Already on that first visit in October 2011, I entered the field ‘carrying’ the stories I had heard or read with me. Most of these stories involved themes of suffering, stress, oppression, and general insecurity in relation to making a living and to the Chadian state. While out and about *en brousse* with Bachar, these stories did not resonate with that which I encountered⁸²—on the surface, at least. As the Introduction has described, later explorations of ‘the everyday’ ended up revealing stories linked to or defined by various forms of insecurity. The story of Adoum Judah, which is told below, provides an example of this. We had started talking about why he went to work in Sudan as a youngster. Throughout the conversation, references to a more volatile time were made—references which *did* resonate with many of the existing narratives on Chad.⁸³ In piecing together the field’s historical context, an intersubjective approach was used which allowed for the memories of Walad Djifir such as Adoum Judah to complement those dynamics described in existing sources.

Memory work

Holtzman (2009: 31) describes the relation between ‘history’ and ‘memory’ as one of

[...] history aiming to piece together a more or less accurate record and analysis of the past and memory aiming to view the past through subjective, imperfect, and conflicting lenses rooted in the experiences, understandings, and agendas of the present.

He further problematizes ‘memory’ as a concept with a variety of definitions and analytical approaches, arguing that, at times, it is in danger of becoming obsolete in the same sense that ‘culture’ or ‘modernity’ have stimulated numerous discourses. For memory to be a useful method or analytical tool, it needs to be defined with great specificity and ‘the interrelation of various memory processes’ needs to be clarified (*ibid.* 30).⁸⁴ For the purpose of this chapter, I consider the anecdotal memories of Walad Djifir in line with Fabian’s (2003) take on ‘memory work’—and thus as a way to illustrate the local dimensions of historical ‘facts’ others have written about. I did not collect

⁸² They did resonate more with situations encountered and stories heard while visiting the east of Chad on that same trip. On that occasion, I accompanied Andrea Behrends on visits to her field sites (in and around Abéché, Farshanah, and Adré) and informants (IDPs, refugees, and those ‘in between’).

⁸³ Though sociologists and anthropologists have broached other subjects as well, the context of violence, oppression, and insecurity continue to weigh heavily in the analysis. See Debos 2008, 2016 (regional dynamics of combattants/civilians and their shifting loyalties); Behrends 2011 (dynamics surrounding the oil industry); Seli 2012 (changing means of communication/ICTs and implications for identities/belonging); Souleymane 2017 (history of communication); De Bruijn & Both 2018 (duress).

⁸⁴ There are many different forms in which memory is approached and used, as analytical tool or method. On *memory as source and subject*, see Tumblety 2013. *History as memory* is seen as dependent on working consciously with unconscious memories to revise accounts of history. ‘*Memory-work* is a social constructionist and feminist research method that was developed in Germany by Frigga Haug and others explicitly to bridge the gap between theory and experience. It provides a way of exploring the process whereby individual women become part of society, and the ways in which women themselves participate in that process of socialization. It is a group method, involving always the collective analysis of individual written memories’ (Onyx & Small 2001: 773). Fabian (2003) views *memory work* more as a dialectical notion, one which allows for memory to be analysed as remembering *and* forgetting. ‘Not forgotten content but forgetting as an act should preoccupy us’ (p. 491).

sufficient anecdotes⁸⁵ to be able to construct an alternative or an addition to these historical ‘facts’, as van Dijk and De Bruijn (2007) were able to do for specific villages in the Guéra. For this reason, I call them anecdotal, as opposed to collective or even popular memories.⁸⁶ Instead, I acknowledge the incoherence of the stories Walad Djifir recounted⁸⁷ and that there are a variety of ways in which the events they recount can be described and interpreted by both informant and researcher. In fact, Holtzman (2009: 33) has an interesting point when he describes how memory may be approached through the lens of nostalgia, instead of through, for example, power dynamics or a focus on collective trauma. Such an approach allows for ‘the more mundane aspects of everyday remembering and the phenomenological experiences of reminiscence’. Putting this into practice, Both (2017) seems to have found an ethnographic approach which combines a focus on everyday practices, grievances, and remembering, allowing for an interesting analysis of the past in the present. In doing so, she adds family/personal memories to the existing political memories.⁸⁸ It is this emphasis on family/personal memories which can also help us position the way Walad Djifir narrate their own experiences of the past, in relation to existing narratives. In doing so, dynamics of belonging are revealed. The personal memories of Walad Djifir touch upon political dynamics, sometimes explicitly and sometimes in a more indirect way. Their reminiscing around an evening camp fire and their contemporary everyday practices form the basis of the contextual descriptions in this ethnography.

We thus limit ourselves, historically, to the time frame in which the Walad Djifir I spoke to lived and which came out of their own stories. In this chapter, the reader is provided with general background information necessary to contextualize the following chapters. This information also introduces some of the main informants whose stories will be elaborated on from different angles throughout the ethnography. In this sense, the nature of this chapter is an intersubjective one. It is told through the anecdotal memories and voices of Walad Djifir, and retold by me. Where possible and relevant, the stories are complemented by, and interpreted through, existing literature.

⁸⁵ Everyone I spent time with and spoke to had some kind of anecdote(s) related to the past. The depth and subject of such anecdotes varied greatly. Detailed anecdotes in relation to the civil war and other moments of political violence were rare. One topic which was recounted fairly frequently was that of the trauma or damage incurred after the cattle diseases of the 1970s and 80s.

⁸⁶ *Collective memory*, the memory of a group of people, passed from one generation to the next. Here, the way this group creates memory as something they all share is what is interesting, with the group being considered a fairly cohesive one. ‘*Popular memory* is the mirror image of official memory [how constructions of the past are used to validate the positions of those in power], the historical discourses of the downtrodden, the unheard voices of the disenfranchised and oppressed’ (Holtzman 2009: 32).

⁸⁷ On ambivalence and dissonance as fundamental characteristics of memory, see Holtzman (2009: 35). See also Argenti & Schramm 2010 on how forgetting and remembering go hand-in-hand and how memory is, to an extent, constituted by forgetting.

⁸⁸ Ultimately finding hope in ‘the idea of the predicament of [Ugandan post-conflict] history versus the abilities of “new” generations’ (p. 21).

Remembering insecurity

The Walad Djifir do not speak much about what it was like living through years of rebellions and civil war in the region, and in the country in general, post-independence.⁸⁹ When asked, men and women alike, now in their fifties or sixties, would respond that they had been too young to really know what was going on. Given that Déby came to power in 1990, after which relative peace followed,⁹⁰ this is difficult to believe. Even if they had been young during the rebellions of the 1960s, they would have been teenagers or in their early twenties during the turbulent 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, what gives us, as researchers, the right to keep probing? With time, a few stories did surface, such as that of Adoum Judah:

Now in his sixties, Adoum Judah was born in the Batha to a *ferīkh* in al-Masruub. He spent his childhood growing up with *ferīkh* life, transhumancing with the cattle and goats. Already at this time some Walad Djifir had started ploughing fields. When he was young, all he wanted was cattle (*tudura māīl*), but Chad was poor and there was little work to be found. This was the main reason he left for Sudan when he was about 16 years old: he wanted to make some extra money so that he could buy himself some cattle and preferably a horse as well.

When asked, Adoum Judah says he found Sudan more relaxed / nicer (*semeh*) than Chad at the time. Chad was a country without freedom (*istikhlal*, lit. independence). Nowadays, there is a bit more security, but back in the earlier days there were a lot of problems. 'We had two governments,' he says, 'the rebels and the government itself.' He remembers the time of the civil conflict, although he claims that they were more involved with their own livelihood and animals than with what happened outside their world. He himself was once kidnapped by rebels and set free for a high ransom.

The rebels would come to the *ferīkhs* in the evenings or early mornings, kidnapping people with a cord around their neck (gesticulating how he himself was tied up) and asking for ransom. They would take the kidnapped outside the *ferīkh* and would kill them if the ransom demand was not met. When the government would hear of the rebels having been around, they would come fully armed, punishing the people for helping them. The rebels were a mixed group of Sara, Arabs, Hadjerai—everything. When the rebels would enter the *ferīkh*, they would hit the men and force the women to make them

⁸⁹ It was difficult to get conversations going on this particular subject, in part due to my initial lack of comprehension of what had gone on in the Guéra and Batha. There is only so much one can learn from reading other people's work. My colleague and long-time Guéra resident, the historian Souleymane, was more successful when he joined me in the field for several days in March 2014. For recent work on the impact of historical processes of conflict and insecurity on inhabitants of the Guéra, see De Bruijn 2004; De Bruijn, van Dijk & Djindil 2004; De Bruijn & van Dijk 2007; Seli 2012; and Souleymane 2017.

⁹⁰ I say relative peace as, while the time under Déby cannot be compared to what it was like under Habré, there have been peaceful periods. At the same time, one should not forget that since 1991, the country has experienced forced democratization and decentralization, in addition to the continuation of people disappearing or being murdered by the regime. Elections have been held and national assemblies convened (Buijtenhuijs 1987). Such democratization processes, as well as development aid and Western meddling in national politics, may partly explain why the country has remained relatively calm. There was political and civil unrest in 2002–2003, 2005, and again in 2008. This unrest has recently been renewed, with various incidents taking place around the April 2016 elections and the changing of the constitution in April 2018. Civil protests have broken out and been suppressed and social media use restricted. The new constitution eliminates the post of prime minister and allows for a six-year presidential term instead of the current five. In practice, Déby will be able to fulfil two more terms after the next elections in 2021. On incidents surrounding the elections: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160428-disparition-militaires-tchad-ong-lumiere-amnesty-international-ltdh>, accessed 4 July 2018; <https://mirjamdebruijn.wordpress.com/2016/04/30/presidential-elections-in-chad-confusion/>, accessed 4 July 2018; <https://www.dw.com/en/growing-dissent-in-chad-as-deby-embarks-on-fifth-term/a-19450968>, accessed 4 July 2018; <http://theconversation.com/biometrie-au-tchad-nouvelles-technologies-et-vieilles-recettes-electorales-58394>, accessed 4 July 2018. On the new constitution: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chad-politics/chad-parliament-approves-new-constitution-expanding-presidents-powers-idUSKBN1111RC>, accessed 4 July 2018. On civil society in Chad: <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/category/rapportage-de-ndjamena/>, accessed 4 July 2018; <https://mirjamdebruijn.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/chad-not-yet-a-breeding-ground-for-voices/>, accessed 4 July 2018.

3eish (*boule*/food). The *ferikh* would be made to slaughter a sheep. Everything was done by force. They would take people here and there, two or three at a time, and take them *en brousse* for ransom. The rebels needed the money to buy food as they were not paid a salary. They would come with a lot of weapons. There were so many of them (*ḥumma kattirīn*). When asked what they did to protect themselves, he says, ‘We didn’t have any soldiers protecting us (*‘askari maḥḥ*). There was little we could do against them, as they would do what they wanted. We didn’t really change our ways. The government didn’t come to protect us.’ When asked whether even the women still went out in search of water, he acknowledged that, yes, they would go less often than they do now. The last time the rebels came was before Déby. ‘Hissein, Idriss.’⁹¹ ‘When Déby finally came, everything became a little better. He brought us freedom,’ someone else adds. ‘Before that, it really *ca va pas*. After Déby came, the rebels were dispersed and there are no problems like that anymore.’

— Based on an interview with Adoum Judah (fieldnotes, 20 March 2012)⁹²

The older generation often claimed to have forgotten what it had been like, and only a handful were willing to talk. The general sentiment seems to be that life had continued as usual: the priorities remained with the livestock and their needs—finding grazing land and water. Sometimes, however, anecdotes of what it had been like when rebels and state roamed the region, such as the one above, surfaced during conversations about other topics.

Although independence from the French was achieved not that long ago (August 1960),⁹³ memories are reluctantly expressed in words (for strangers), and the more recent periods of civil war (1980s–90s and early 2000) take centre stage in conversations. The role of the Walad Djifir throughout varies per individual. Some joined the military, willingly or not, and others joined rebel forces. Even Bachar joined for a short period of time as a youngster in 1977/8. He soon left when he realized that life as a rebel basically meant being a soldier without pay. He also claims his physique was not made for carrying large, heavy weaponry.⁹⁴

Following independence, François Tombalbaye became president of Chad, heralding the ‘start’ of more complex power struggles. From independence onward, Tombalbaye’s regime set the tone, with political parties being banned in 1962. The years 1965–1990 were characterized by numerous rebellions, in which the Guéra region played an important role (De Bruijn & van Dijk 2007; Seli 2012). It is said that Tombalbaye targeted the transhumant Batha Arabs especially, after the sedentary Moubi had rebelled against him (Lemarchand 1986: 35; Dangbet 2015a: 285–6). He wanted to prevent the Arabs transhumancing through the Moubi settlements joining them. This led to the arrest of three chiefs in 1965 and to the sheikh of the Misseria Rouges, Goudjeh Walad Hamatta,⁹⁵ being placed under surveillance, even though his was known as a relatively calm

⁹¹ Referring here to Hissein Habré, who was Chad’s head of state from 1982 to 1990, and Idriss Déby Itno, who has been Chad’s president since 1990.

⁹² This anecdote comes from my fieldnotes and incorporates the words of Adoum Judah, my own, and those of other people. Where I am unsure of the correct nuance in translation, I have left the original word in parentheses. At times, the original wording also reflects the level of depth in which Adoum talked about his experiences, as well as giving certain thoughts more emphasis—such as when the French ‘*ca va pas*’ was used.

⁹³ The north of Chad remained under French administration until 1965.

⁹⁴ Fieldnotes, 17 March 2012.

⁹⁵ More about him later in this chapter and about his son in Chapter 2.

community and he himself as a chief who worked with the regime and was respected by his population.

Overall, during the period 1965–1986, while under the control of Tombalbaye (1960), Malloum (1975), Goukouni (1979), and Habré (1982), the country experienced political violence by both rebels and government forces. Under Hissein Habré (1982–1990), a spider-web network of information-gathering by his secret services (the DDS)⁹⁶ infiltrated the country, and numerous atrocities took place, with at least 40,000 people being known to have been killed and many more disappeared.⁹⁷ In December 1990, the MPS⁹⁸ came to power and with it the current Chadian president, Idriss Déby Itno. The role of such foreign powers as France, the United States, Sudan, and Libya throughout the many battles for power cannot be underestimated.⁹⁹ And, in turn, Déby himself has played his fair share in regional politics. From about 1996, when the Constitution came into force, administrative decentralization processes were implemented.

In his dissertation, Seli (2012) sketches the situation of repression by, and fear of, the state and its agents in relation to the Hadjeray of the Guéra, a sedentary population sharing the region with the Walad Djifir. He refers specifically to the repression of this group from 1986 onward when they lost Habré's support (p. 45). This repression has created an attitude of resistance against political authority and civil administration (van Dijk 2008: 130) and a feeling of mistrust toward anything unknown.¹⁰⁰

In conversations around evening camp fires, Walad Djifir would recount the ways in which they had tried to hide from the rebels, most stories involving how they ensured noises from their livestock would not divulge their location. Rebels often came at night, and getting rid of dogs and chickens helped nomadic camps stay quiet overnight. Goats and sheep were often still retained, as they do not make as much noise at night. Donkeys were treated so that they would be less likely to pass gas, which normally makes them bray so loudly. Tents would be pitched in the wadis, where the sand helped camouflage them, and animals were kept under the shade of trees. On occasion, a sheep would be slaughtered and hung from a tree as a way of asking Allah for protection. Bachar says it was difficult for nomads in the time of Tombalbaye¹⁰¹ and Habré especially. They would often stay close to the government's presence (army) in an attempt to remain safe from rebel troops. Since Déby, they are no longer troubled by rebels (*'ils sont parti loin'*), who have either been dispersed or have found jobs at different ministries. Bachar remembers that when he was 13 or 14 years old, the rebel presence was very bad; and because of their lack of firearms, the nomads could

⁹⁶ Direction de la Documentation et de la Sécurité

⁹⁷ See Collelo 1990; De Bruijn & van Dijk 2007; Seli 2012; Hicks 2018.

⁹⁸ Mouvement Patriotique du Salut

⁹⁹ See Azevedo 2004; De Bruijn & van Dijk 2007; Boggero 2009; Debos 2016; Hicks 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Seli goes on to question whether new technologies of communication and information, as new methods of communication, have been able to mitigate or reinforce this sentiment and social phenomenon of fear.

¹⁰¹ François Tombalbaye became president of Chad after its independence in 1960.

not refuse them anything.¹⁰² These anecdotes paint a somewhat different picture from that of the stereotypical Arab: supposedly cunning, sly, and a force to be reckoned with through their possession of arms and connections to those in power. I cannot explain this discrepancy, but it does call for a little more explanation, insofar as possible. Zakinet Dangbet (2015a), for example, suggests that the involvement of Batha Arabs in armed movements may have been a defensive reaction following the creation of the FROLINAT¹⁰³ in 1966. One sees a general tendency of communities becoming more militarized around that time. While the FROLINAT was a nomadic movement, it was not of Arab nomadic origin; rather, it was initiated and dominated by Tubu–Daza–Goran nomadic groups.¹⁰⁴ According to Fuchs (1996: 159), Arab nomads did not have much decisive power and were often pushed out or marginalized within the movement. They ended up establishing their own organization—the CDR¹⁰⁵—with its own leaders, becoming important allies to the FROLINAT.

Arab origins

Over the years, various perceptions of nomadic Arabs have appeared, with certain being more dominant than others—such as their relative ability to move away from authoritarian powers (Rense 2006) in ways that are more difficult for sedentary populations reliant on agricultural fields for their living. This flexibility, however, could also be interpreted as a weakness, as it means less easy access to health and education facilities.

Another aspect which figures into their constructed identity is that of religion. Islam and being a Muslim are a large part of the daily life of the Walad Djifir. The five daily prayers are adhered to fairly strictly, and many other Islamic customs are followed—for example, the naming of a child after eight days, the ceremonies held after a death or during a marriage, and the division of an inheritance (described in the Introduction). Hadj Hamdaan is also a *marabout* who teaches young boys the Qur’ān when he has the time.¹⁰⁶ These sessions are held by the early morning camp-fire and again in the evening. On a visit to Fadjé in March 2013, one of Hadj Hamdaan’s sons, Muhammed, was often found practising his Qur’ānic recitation and script. The hope was that he would be selected by a travelling *marabout* and invited to Egypt for further learning.

Like the majority of the Muslim population in Chad, the Walad Djifir are Tijaniyya Muslims. Their orientation is primarily toward West Africa, with the most popular Sheikh Niass being based in Senegal. His image can be found on posters, calendars, and stickers throughout the country. In

¹⁰² Based on fieldnotes, 17 April 2012 and 20 April 2012.

¹⁰³ Chadian National Liberation Front or *Front de Libération Nationale du Tchad* (FROLINAT), a rebel group active between 1966 and 1993. See Fuchs 1996 and Buijtenhuijs 2001 on the role of nomads in the FROLINAT and civil war, whereby it is important to mention the diverse nature of Chadian nomads in general—not all Chadian nomadic groups played a dominant role in the FROLINAT.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the Chadian Tubu and their role in state-building, see Buijtenhuijs 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Conseil Démocratique de la Révolution/Révolutionnaire (CDR) with Acyl Ahmat Akhabach as one of its most well-known and revered leaders. Acyl belonged to one of the Misseria’s sub-tribes and was greatly in favour of an alliance with Libya (Lemarchand 1986: 37).

¹⁰⁶ See De Bruijn 2014 on teaching the Qur’ān as an important element of Islamic education among Muslim Chadians and across the Sahel in general, and such teaching’s close ties to travel by pupils and teachers.

N'Djaména, at the time of the fieldwork, the imam was Hassan Hissein (fieldnotes, 20 April 2012). Many of the Qur'āns found in Chad come from Nigeria. Islam was present within the Guéra region at the time of the Ouaddaïan empire, which would send Islamic scholars and teachers to spread their ideas (Rense 2006: 56–57). In her chapter on itinerant Qur'ānic schools in Mongo, De Bruijn (2014: 67–68) provides a comprehensive overview of the general process of Islamization in and around Mongo, touching upon the role of the various surrounding Islamic empires, (Muslim) Daadjo migration into the area from Sudan in the 18th and 19th century, and the increased presence of Muslim travelling scholars (*fākih*) and traders under French pacification of the region. From the time of the civil war (1965–1990) and mostly during the 1970s and 1980s, when rebel forces dominated the area, the conversion to Islam was stimulated not least because it opened up economic and political opportunities. The informants of De Bruijn, van Dijk and Djindil (2004: 10) noticed large changes in religious practices in the Guéra in this time, with mentions of forced Islamization varying per village. Around 1986, more Salafi and Wahhabi influences began coming into the country, coinciding with people going off to work in Saudi Arabia and with certain development aid programmes arriving in the region, building mosques and supporting educational programmes (Kaag 2007, 2012; Ladiba 2011).¹⁰⁷

During my time with Walad Djifir in the *ferīkh* setting, in N'Djaména, and in CAR, I did not observe a tendency toward Wahhabi forms of Islam. The actions of Boko Haram and ISIS were criticized by members of the *ferīkh conseil* (advisory body) when we would hear about them on the radio. Having said that, I have not been there to observe any possible changes in Islamic practice over several generations (re-Islamization, as per Kaag 2007). At one point, I remember asking what the difference was, to them, between Wahhabi and Tijaniyya. One man said, 'They pray inside in mosques and we don't need one to pray. We could pray in a church if necessary; it doesn't matter. It is about the praying itself' (fieldnotes, 21 January 2013). Interestingly, from about 2012 onward, in addition to lobbying for the building of a deep well in their sedentary village, Tchoufiou II Arabe, there were voices who wanted a mosque to be built. This, of course, says nothing about dogmatic orientation. The processes involved, however, in wanting a mosque to be built or a deep well dug do bring us back to local politics in general and to the dynamics of belonging. Most of the organizations to which Walad Djifir would appeal were of Muslim origin, run by Turkish or Saudi investors.

We see a fluidity with which Walad Djifir link up to various 'circles of belonging', depending on the circumstances. In the case of a rebel-infested zone and political strife, it is difficult to say where the general loyalties of Walad Djifir lay. On an individual level, Bachar's main motivation for joining the rebels was that he wanted to try something other than herding cattle. This was a sentiment also echoed by others. His choice of the CDR, rather than other sectors of the FROLINAT, was most probably linked to the dominance of Arabs within it. But *which* Arab peoples are we talking about here? And what were *their* motivations when compared with that of Bachar? A

¹⁰⁷ Fieldnotes, 10 April 2012; conversation with two Mazaqneh tribe members, Hady Hamdaan and Bachar around al-Berekeh. In an NRC article published on 13–14 January 2018, *Franse kapmesmoorden verdelen Tsjadische moslims*, anthropologist and Arabist Dorrit van Dalen also mentions the increased trend in Wahhabism. She describes how the Chadian government acts against extremist preachings but at the same time allows the Gulf States to fund Islamic and Arabic universities in Chad, and accepts the hand-out of scholarships to Chadians wanting to study in the Gulf.

similar relate-ability with other Arabs in general is not evident, however, when speaking of Wahhabists. Here, most Walad Djifir distinctly distance themselves from the main ideologies of the Arabian Peninsula, instead affiliating themselves to the Sufi-oriented forms of Islam. At the same time, their belonging to a Muslim community, irrespective of dogma, is linked to when wanting to have a well dug or a mosque built. Belonging has many layers and motivations—with political preferences, Arab ‘roots’, and religious affiliations being just some of them. The section below will continue to explore where Walad Djifir’s Arab roots originate and how they came to establish themselves in the Batha and Guéra regions of Central Chad, before moving on to the *ferīkh*’s socio-political organization.

The Misseria Rouges

The Walad Djifir are a sub-tribe of the Misseria Rouges and claim descent from nomadic groups who moved into Chad from the Nile Delta around the 14th century, after the fall of the kingdom of Nubia (Thomas 1959: 144; Zeltner & Tourneux 1986). Originating in the wider region of the Arabian Peninsula, these groups moved to Egypt and then on to Chad via the Sudan.¹⁰⁸ When prompted, Walad Djifir themselves say their ancestors came from Yemen and that the linguistic origin of the word Misseria comes from the verb *sāra*,¹⁰⁹ to travel. What evidence of this can we find in existing literature? This section traces their origins as described in written sources and introduces their first relations with authoritarian rule in Chad under the Ouaddaï.

Descriptions of the move into Chad

The Juhaina were the first Arabs to migrate south out of Egypt and move to Dongola ‘at the great bend of the Nile’ (Thomas 1959: 144), before continuing west into Kordofan and Darfur. The Misseria descend from these Juhaina, who in turn are descendants of ‘Abdallah al-Juhani. It is said that his ancestry can be traced back to the uncle of Prophet Muhammed, al-‘Abbas (Thomas 1959; Aubague et al. 2006).¹¹⁰ It is common for nomadic tribes to claim some form of descent from the Prophet or his companions, and lineages have been observed to be fluid.

¹⁰⁸ See Dangbet (2015a: 66–67) for specifics. Le Rouvreur (1989) claims the ancestors of the Juhaina came from the Hejaz (western Saudi Arabia). Carbou (1912) specifically mentions Yemen as the ancestral homeland of the Juhaina, who then migrated onward to Egypt. Chapelle (1980) explains Arab migrations into Chad as related to the repression of Arabs, and consecutive revolts, which took place in Egypt in the 14th century.

¹⁰⁹ *sār, yisīr* (سار - يسير), to move on, set out, travel, go away (Wehr 1994).

¹¹⁰ ‘The Djoheina [Juhaina] Arabs who transhumance the Guéra are attached to the Batha region. They have Djounet as common ancestor, a descendant of Abdoullahi Ibn Ounes el Djoheini Abd el Mottaleb, respectively the grandfather of and tutor to Muhammed. According to Le Rouvreur (1989), they came from Egypt and installed themselves in Chad’s Ouaddaï region in the fifteenth century. In successive waves, other groups came to join them.’ (Aubague et al. 2006: 44–45)

The Misseria of Kordofan were initially made up of two different tribes, known as the Misseria Zurg—simply known as the Misseria—and Misseria Humr, known as the Humr. The Misseria¹¹¹ and Humr¹¹² of Kordofan thus claim they once formed a single group with those Misseria now living in Chad and with others currently in Darfur (Cunnison 1966: 4), both descending from the common ancestor, ‘Ataya.¹¹³ This ‘Ataya was from the area we now know as Yemen. Traditionally, when tribes become large or split up for any other reason, they add on contrasting names. The same might be true for the Misseria Rouges and Misseria Noirs. Some claim that the Misseria tribe was becoming too large and needed to split. Often what is meant here are the livestock numbers. Another explanation is that the sheikh had two sons, one ‘*un peu brun*’—that is, lighter skinned or *rouges* as Chadians themselves would say—and the other ‘*noire*’. Various stories such as this one circulate as to the choice of names. Looking at the linguistic origins of the word Misseria, there are two ways in which it can be transcribed/spelled: (1) as *miṣr* (مصر), the Arabic word for Egypt, *misseriyya* (مصرية) (here spelled as *misseria*) then literally meaning, ‘Egyptian’; or (2) coming from the root *sāra* (سار), to travel or transhumance, *misseriyya* (مسرية) then meaning those that transhumance. Members of the Walad Djifr refer to the latter meaning.

It is not particularly clear from the literature whether or how the current-day tribes known as Misseria Rouges and Noirs have descended from the (Misseria) Humr and Misseria (Zurg) respectively.¹¹⁴ What we know is that the Humr are said to have moved westwards into Ouaddaï around 1775.¹¹⁵ Ouaddaï is currently one of Chad’s districts and was also the location of the most eastern-lying sultanate to have reigned in Chad, with its capital established at what is still known as Abéché in 1850.¹¹⁶ The sultanate itself was established in 1635 and continued for a good two-and-a-half centuries. Many nomadic groups remained under Ouaddaïan ‘control’ for years, despite the groups’ evasive tactics.

The Ouaddaïan administration installed *aqids*, who were in charge of collecting taxes from both sedentary and nomadic populations. The *aqid* was usually not from the same tribe as the one he

¹¹¹ To avoid additional confusion, I have chosen to use the same spelling of Misseria throughout this ethnography. Others, like Cunnison (1966), would use a more elaborate spelling—namely, Messeriyya or Misseriyya.

¹¹² Numerous studies have been conducted on the Humr of Sudan, who in turn belong to the Baggara Arabs—*baqqara* (بقرة) meaning ‘cattle’ in Arabic—and who also claim descent from pre-Islamic Arabs (Cunnison 1972).

¹¹³ Julien de Pommerol (1997) includes a list of tribes with the Misseria Humr (rouge) belonging to Oum Hadjer and listed under Wulaad Atiye, which is, in turn, listed under Juhayna.

¹¹⁴ *Ahmar* (احمر) is the Arabic word for red, *humr* (حمر) belonging to the same root of the word. Zurg (زورج) in turn relates to the name for those of Nubian descent, in old Arabic texts referring to (black) Africans. This may, however, be a coincidence. It is fairly safe to assume that the words *humr* and *zurg* have been replaced by *rouge* and *noire* respectively under French influence.

¹¹⁵ According to Thomas (1959), the Humr Baggara chose to move west into Darfur and Ouaddaï, from Kordofan, establishing themselves there in the middle of the 16th century.

¹¹⁶ In an interview with the then mayor of Abéché on 20 October 2011, he related how this city came to be: ‘In 1850, Abéché was started as a town. Between 1820 and 1830 Sultan Muhammad Sherif initiated a new capital of Ouaddaï because there had been years of drought and there was no more water in the Warra. The head of the commission to find a location for the new capital was Iman al-Gazuli. He decided to follow the trajectory of the nomads, to the south of the Warra. He arrived here and found a little mountain and next to it found a herder Abu Ashee (Abéché). He found a lot of water here and decided to develop the new capital here. Al-Gazuli went back to the Sultan and together they made a plan. Turkish architects arrived and built the Palais de Sultan and made an architectural plan of the city. That is how the *ville* came to be established in 1850. The population at that time was about 12,000, made up of mixed ethnicities.’

represented but chosen from among the indigenous tribes of the region to ensure loyalty to the sultan. The *aqid* is also known as the *chef de groupe* or *chef de communauté*. Before the coming of the concept of the *chef de canton*, it was the *aqid* who acted like a *chef de guerre*. They were under the order of the Ouaddaïan *moussa*, or ruler. Under each *aqid* there were different *khashim beyt*. For example, the Misseria had an *aqid* and so did the Hamīd and the Walad Rashīd. In turn, they were divided into six *khashim beyt*: the Walad Sūrūr, Walad Matanīn, Walad Djifir, Djarafīn, Walad Tūrki, and Walad ‘Umr.¹¹⁷ Over the years, the Misseria, like other tribes, split into even more factions (Table 1.1) owing to their having migrated far away or as a result of internal discord.¹¹⁸ The factions mentioned in written sources correspond to those Walad Djifir themselves recognize and are related to questions of land rights/ownership.

The move into the Guéra and Batha

Over time, and fleeing the Ouaddaï sultan’s taxes, raids, and the demands of the *aqids*, nomadic groups moved further west, into the Guéra and Batha districts of Central Chad. They could not flee too far, as other (hostile) nomadic groups were already inhabiting certain areas. The current-day Misseria, as overarching tribe, can be found primarily in the east along the border with Sudan, and in Central Chad from the Batha down through the Guéra and into the Salamat. At present, the most prominent nomadic tribes found in the Guéra are the Misseria Rouges and Noirs, the Walad Rachīd, the Djaatneh, and the Salamat Siféra. In the Batha, one will find the same tribes, as well as the Sharafa, the Zioud, the Walad Himet, and the Khozzam.¹¹⁹

In a conversation during a coffee break at SIL in Mongo, where Bachar and I would stay in one of their guesthouses in between periods in the ferīkh, it was mentioned that in the beginning the nomads would not come to the area (Guéra), as it was like a forest and with many wild animals, making it difficult to keep their herds safe. The Hadjeray lived in or close to the mountains at this time. Later, when the Hadjeray started coming down from their mountains and establishing villages in open terrain, the land also became more accessible to the nomads.¹²⁰

Traditionally, each sub-tribe has its own wet-season grazing lands. Al-Habilai is the name of the wet-season grazing land which belongs to the Walad Djifir (Hugot 1997: 162). This area of the Batha is considered their ‘homeland’ and refers to a specific terrain around a deep, constructed well, situated roughly north of the road between Oum Hadjer and Ati (Map 1.3). In order to get there, one leaves the road at the level of the mobile phone antenna and heads north toward Koundjaar. The

¹¹⁷ From an interview with a former *khalifa* and current *chef de ra’as* of the Misseria Rouge in N’Djaména, 1 March 2014. According to this same *khalifa*, the former name of the Misseria was Bin Ihlaal, and at that time their *moussa* was someone called Hassan Surhaan. The *khalifa* mentioned a book in Arabic which contained this information which I should photocopy from him. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet again and I have not yet been able to verify the source.

¹¹⁸ Special alliances exist between these factions. The Walad Djifir, for example, refer to the Walad Tūrki, who live a little further north than they do, as their ‘twin’. This means that they do not intermarry. What else this ‘twin-hood’ means is unclear. When questioned further, Bachar was unsure what the history of this alliance was, and I did not find anyone else who knew either. From a conversation with Bachar, N’Djaména, 4 April 2012.

¹¹⁹ Aubague et al. (2006: 45, 69), lists not exclusive.

¹²⁰ Fieldnotes, 11 February 2013. In his 2017 dissertation, historian Souleymane Abdoulaye Adoum describes this movement off the mountains forced by the French colonial power.

land is used not only as pasturage but also as agricultural land, which makes it highly valuable to those looking to supplement their livestock-based livelihood with that of grains and other food stuffs.

In the dry season, each sub-tribe has a different pattern of transhumance and general region in which they settle. Zakinet Dangbet's dissertation (2015a) and the book he co-authored with André Marty and Antoine Eberschweiler (2009), as well as Aubague et al. (2006), provide a detailed overview with maps of the various transhumance routes in the Batha, Salamat, and Guéra. Over several generations, those Walad Djifir who are semi-sedentary have been spending the dry-season months in the Guéra region, some settling into permanent villages and others setting up camp in

Table 1.1 The Misseria and their khashim beyt/fellati (in 1949). Based on Hugot (1997: 121).

Misseria Noirs	Misseria Rouges	
Ala'ūn	Abideye/Habideye	Mazaknéh
Hawazmeh	Bisheshat	Nadja
Walad Abou Rahama	Djūbarat	Nawass Walad Guible
Walad Khanem	Hadjadjire	Walad Djifir
Salamani/Hemat	Kalabīn	Walad Ūmar
	Khozzam	Walad Sūrūr
	Matanīn	Walad Tūrki

roughly the same locations every year. In most cases, agreements have been made between representatives of the sedentary populations who own the land and local *chef de ferīkhs*.

So why did they choose to establish villages on land which does not officially belong to them and on which cattle can survive only during the dry season, instead of settling on land they already officially had a right to? The village (Hilleh) Tchoufiou II, for example, was established some 25 years ago and can be found along the road from Mongo to Ati. As mentioned before, Walad Djifir had been coming to the region for generations. The land surrounding Tchoufiou II is more pleasant to live off during the dry season than that in the Batha (al-Habilai). Around Tchoufiou II, livestock can find grazing land, and water is close to the surface due to the nearby *wadi* (the Bang-bang). The Walad Djifir know the Hadjeray of the surrounding villages and they have got used to each other. It is for this reason that 25 years ago the Walad Djifir asked for the permission of the Hadjeray to stay and set up an official village.¹²¹ The Dadjo I *chef de canton*, Ahmed Ibeduh, agreed; and in the following years the village was also made official at the level of the national government with, in

¹²¹ Braukämper (2000: 45) describes a system known as *khuwa* (friendship in Sudanese Arabic), whereby alliances are created between groups, implying socio-political solidarity and rights to grazing land, etc. In the case of the Baqqara Arabs of the Sudan Belt, and especially among camel herders who travel far and wide, these alliances are not necessarily between neighbouring groups. A similar alliance was probably made many years ago between this sub-tribe of the Misseria Rouges and the Hadjeray and then expanded on.

the *gouverneur* of Mongo's absence, the *préfet* signing the document. On the land they have been granted over several years, they have divided themselves into five groups, who now live on the lands which are locally known as Tchoufiou (Fadjé), Garanek, Fané, Bandaro, and Dadoud (Eid Adoud) (see Map 1.3). All these places are along a tributary or main artery of the Bang-bang. Only the land of Garanek is located in the Batha and not in the Guéra. It was difficult to pinpoint their geographic locations owing to the uncertainty of where dry riverbeds (wadis) run on existing maps.

Table 1.2: Socio-political organization of the Misseria Rouges (MR) in relation to the khashim beyt of the Walad Djifir (WD) during time of main fieldwork (2011–2014). Sources: Brahim 1988; Aubague et al. 2006; Dangbet 2015a; own observations.

Leadership titles	Description	Position-holder b/w 2011–2014	Location
<i>Chef de canton</i> of the MR (aka <i>chef supérieur</i>)	Leader of a canton (a territorial sub-division). Each canton is made up of several communities, and each administrative region can hold numerous cantons.	Abdoulaye Goudjeh Hamatta (since 16 April 1985/6)	Koundjaar, Batha region
<i>Chef de canton</i> of the WD and Dadjo I	Same as above	Youssef/Hissein Eledouh (the Dadjo chef). In 2009: Ahmad Ibeduh (fieldnotes 4 April 2012)	Mongo, Guéra region
<i>Chef de tribu</i> (<i>khashim beyt</i>)	Leader of a sub-tribe, in this case of the WD; elected but often from within the same family which already held the position. Aka <i>sheikh al-khashim beyt</i> .	Kolokos Idriss Harun	Fané, Guéra region
<i>Chef de ferikh</i> (<i>iyal radjil</i>)	Leader of a sub-division of a sub-tribe, traditionally consisting of one or more lineages	Hamdaan Adoum Umar	Fadjé, Guéra region
<i>Chef de village</i>	Leader of a sedentary village	Fedellellah Uthman	Hilleh Tchoufioux II, Guéra region
<i>Ferikh conseil</i> (<i>adjaouid</i>)	Members of a sub-division of the sub-tribe who act as an advisory party to the <i>chef de ferikh</i> (and village)	Hamdaan Adoum, Fedellellah Uthman, Djibreen, Al-Hurr, Abu Ramlah (among others)	Fadjé, Guéra region

The Texas Library maps which exist date from the 1970s and are too detailed to be used accurately for the making of Map 1.3. Pastoralist researchers in Chad have made their own maps based on GPS coordinates taken in the field, yet our cartographer did not have access to their database. We

cross-referenced these maps and notes I had made in the field, when deciding on the approximate locations of the various places in which Walad Djifir have been setting up camp (i.e. their *ferīkh*).

The *ferīkh*'s socio-political organization

Traditionally, the *ferīkhs* were organized according to lineage and would transhumance together. Nowadays *ferīkhs* are sometimes made up of a mixture of lineages,¹²² and some tribes have settled in permanent villages. The leader of such a village holds approximately the same status as a *chef de ferīkh* and is known as the *chef de village*. Each *chef de ferīkh* is supported by a council (*conseil*), made up of members of his *ferīkh* and, if relevant, members of the sedentary village. It is the *chef de canton* that chooses which of the two or three nominees put forward by the *tribu* will become *chef de ferīkh*.¹²³ When issues cannot be resolved within the *ferīkh*'s *conseil* or among the Walad Djifir in general, they are brought to the *chef de canton*.

Each *chef de canton* is responsible for his specific *canton*. Several *cantons*, in turn, make up an administrative region (governed by, in this order, a *sous-prefet*, a *prefet*, and a *gouverneur*).¹²⁴ In the case of Chad, with its intricate history of numerous ethno-linguistic groups, a *canton* is not necessarily bound by geographic markers, although most do have an historic basis in specific regions. In general, *cantons* are made up of a homogenous ethno-linguistic group, with many such groups having split into several *cantons* over the years (as in the case of Mongo, where we find the sedentary Dadjo I and Dadjo II cantons functioning side by side, both made up of Hadjeray descendants). The *chef de canton* is thus usually a member of a sub-tribe. A sub-tribe is also known as a *khashim beyt* (خشم بيت), or clan. In turn, each *khashim beyt* has a leader of its own, known as the *chef de tribu*, or *sheikh* in Arabic (شيخ). To add to the complexity of social hierarchies, every *khashim beyt* can be made up of several families, each with their own leader, a *chef de ferīkh*. Traditionally, the *chef de canton* of the Misseria Rouges chooses the *chef de khashim beyt* of each separate tribe (e.g. the Walad Djifir, Mazaknéh, Walad Tūrki). Two to three candidates are put forward or nominate themselves, and the *chef de canton* chooses from among them. It is not a process of voting. Table 1.2 below provides an overview of the socio-political organization of the Walad Djifir.

¹²² 'Sometimes one family is one *ferīkh*. When it is a large family, they may encompass two to three *ferīkhs*. In this organization they used to also transhumance. Now it's a mixture within each *ferīkh*. People from one lineage have mixed into other *ferīkhs*. This used to exist in the past as well but was less frequent.' — From a conversation with Brahim Said in N'Djaména, 25 February 2014

¹²³ From a conversation with Brahim Said in N'Djaména, 25 February 2014.

¹²⁴ Chad has 18 regions, 60 departments, 202 *sous-prefectures* and numerous *cantons* within the latter. A region is governed by the governor and his general secretary. A department is governed by the *prefet* and his assistant. The *sous-prefet* governs his own *sous-prefecture*. *Cantons* follow the traditional structures of governance and are headed by chiefs belonging to the different communities.

The above has been a fairly dry, yet necessary, description. The rest of the ethnography, as described in the Introduction, has made different narrative choices, allowing for more flexibility in the way such nomadic subjects can be approached. In combination with the preceding pieces of information—on the Walad Djifir's move into the Guéra and Batha as part of the larger Misseria Rouges tribe, and their identification with certain pieces of land in these regions—this socio-political background lays the basis for an understanding of additional layers of belonging. This diversity in 'options of belonging' in relation to socio-political structures (state, tribe, canton, *ferīkh*) is analysed further in Chapter 2, when the interactions on different levels of organization are discussed in relation to issues of land strife and internal discord. In the remainder of this chapter, the idea of belonging to multiple frames of reference—not only in the socio-political sphere as we saw in the Introduction—allows us to highlight how such dynamics were researched within the scope of this ethnography.

Researching contemporary itineraries

Limiting the fieldwork to the *ferīkh* setting would have given a one-sided perspective. The cases of Hadj Hamdaan (Introduction) and Adoum Judah (this chapter) show how their lives in the *ferīkh* are not at all limited to it, geographically. In fact, the *ferīkh* itself is spread out over various geographical locations, not only in the form of its nomadic camps but also in the way its extended family members can be found far and wide—whether in the nearest town of Mongo, in the further away capital of N'Djaména, or as merchants in Bangui. It was important to follow the connections embodied in these various mobilities, leading to different people and physical locations (sites) of research/fieldwork¹²⁵ and also to different perspectives and positions. In my case, my interest was not necessarily only in the trajectory itself but just as much in the different sites and the 'trajectories' they contained.¹²⁶ Methodologically, this meant 'following' the various common variables found within these fields, which together informed networks of connections. The contemporary itineraries of Walad Djifir thus determined my own research itinerary.

Within these itineraries, the triangle of identity (as perspectives of belonging), mobility, and positionality is relevant not only to the Walad Djifir as subjects of this research, but also to those doing the research.¹²⁷ The identities of Bachar and myself, our potential to be mobile, and the

¹²⁵ On multi-sited fieldwork, see Marcus 1995, Olwig & Hastrup 1997; on travelling as a method and looking at mobility from an ethnographic perspective, see De Bruijn & Brinkman 2012, Wilson Janssens 2018.

¹²⁶ See Schapendonk 2011 on trajectory ethnography. Schapendonk refers to Hannerz (2003) on 'translocal' as the essence of multi-sited ethnography as a research strategy that deals with topics that are not to be bound within a single location (in Schapendonk 2011: 51). To me, each field 'site' (place) contained within itself clues and context (spaces) for the various connectors followed.

¹²⁷ See Mintz 1989, who reflects on his relationship as ethnographer with an informant and the informant's life history, and on his own role in constructing the situation which provided the data as well as the way of then writing it up. I agree with Mintz, however, that there is only so much self-consciousness one can write into reflections of positionality without risking the loss of the informant as focal point and, more so, of the reason for the research in the first place. The challenge is to find the correct balance.

position each of us has within the community greatly influenced the direction and results of this endeavour. On that first visit in October 2011, it was of course not a random *ferīkh* which Bachar took me to: it was the *ferīkh* of Hadj Hamdaan Adoum, the *chef de ferīkh*. Hadj Hamdaan's father and Bachar's mother were brother and sister (see Family Tree in Figure 1.1). This combination facilitated my introduction into the community and the carrying out of fieldwork over the next few years. Despite being a difficult person to interview in a more formal sense, the time spent in Hadj Hamdaan's proximity, the conversations held during different times of the day in a variety of situations (during a communal gathering or over a meal behind his tent), and the 'following' of him to CAR form a large part of my empirical data. He is an unpredictable character, with individual and communal responsibilities, a man used to making his own path. His actions were not always appreciated by the majority of his family, but it is precisely this fact that revealed the more interesting data. His handling of a brother's inheritance, for example, revealed the family's connections to CAR—and ultimately the associated themes of rupture and belonging, in a context of continuity and change.

Mobile methods & interpretations

The 'field' thus did not consist of one specific geographical location. Instead, between 2011 and 2014, 12 months of fieldwork were carried out over five separate visits in and around the nomadic camps of this extended family of Walad Djifir living within the administrative boundaries of the Guéra and Batha; in Mongo, the Guéra's main town; in the capital N'Djaména; in the capital of CAR, Bangui; and a brief but important stay in a village in south-eastern CAR. While staying with the Walad Djifir, Bachar and I frequented various *ferīkhs* in the vicinity—preferably on foot when possible—and spent time in the sedentary village, Tchoufiou II Arabe. On various occasions we stayed in *ferīkhs* further afield (around Dadoud, Al-Berekeh, Fané, Bandaro) as well as in larger towns in the area (Mongo, Ati, Koundjar, Bardangal), this time using a car (see Maps 1.2 & 1.3).

In a way, the type of fieldwork we carried out was of a nomadic nature—setting up camp in various locations, depending on our needs and/or where we had been invited next.¹²⁸ The car and the relative freedom to decide our own itinerary meant we were as flexible as nomads are. We could up and leave, belongings and all, and follow them to wherever their next camp was to be set up. Although we bought our water supplies in bulk in Mongo, we too were reliant on them insofar as they determined the length of each journey into the *brousse*. Working outside urban areas meant that we came into little contact with the authorities. On arriving in Mongo, we had of course gone to introduce ourselves at the level of the governor, showing our letters of permission provided by both the Ministry of Higher Education (a research permit) and Ministry of the Interior (a permit to travel inland) in N'Djaména. While among the nomads, though, we felt free and more secure than when in town. They gave us protection—we were among 'family'—and they quickly knew of things happening in the vicinity.

¹²⁸ While specific field 'sites' were involved, it is ultimately the connections which could be found at these sites which were researched and which are described in this ethnography. On discussions of mobile methods, multi-sited fieldwork, traveling as method, and the role of mobility and place in ethnography, See Olwig & Hastrup 1997, De Bruijn & Brinkman 2012.

In terms of the types of conversations I had while in the field, these varied: from informal gatherings over meals, while waiting for the day to cool off, or watching out for the herds to return from the fields to be watered; to more interview-like settings, where Bachar and I would seek out a person and I had a list of questions either in my head or written down.¹²⁹ When possible and appropriate, I would use a voice recorder to record both informal and formal conversations. I also took many photos; and from the middle of my second real fieldwork visit, I had the use of a videocamera with which I recorded daily life scenes as well as interviews. These have provided a visual reference with which to reflect on specific situations with Walad Djifir themselves, as well as with Connecting in Times of Duress (CTD)¹³⁰ colleagues working on other nomadic groups in Mali, Cameroon, and CAR, or on similar themes of insecurity, mobility, and connectivity in completely different rural and urban settings in CAR, Nigeria, and Congo. This reflection process highlighted how the visual reveals a separate (yet complementary) emotion and narrative from the textual or verbal. Family members now living and working in urban CAR would reflect on how things had or had not changed. When showing the pictures of Zaynebah in the *ferīkh* to her younger half-brother, born and raised like her in urban Bangui, he was shocked by the circumstances and the way she looked. Such conversations, with the aid of visuals, helped me contextualize the stories I had heard as well as my own experiences and observations of *ferīkh* life. What were the elements which distinguished life in a *ferīkh* in the 21st century from life in a neighbouring village, town, or further afield? The conceptualization of answers to this question was aided through the process of collaborating with colleagues working in their respective fields and encountering dynamics both similar and different.

As a way of interpreting the ‘data’ gathered, Bachar and I would discuss any happenings and dilemmas on our walks to another *ferīkh* or the *wadi*, where it was pleasant to spend the late afternoon. We did not always agree, of course, and I tried to understand people’s perspectives by asking numerous questions, rather than pushing through my own opinion. On subjects such as female circumcision, we had heated discussions that made me feel sad, angry, and frustrated.¹³¹ I

¹²⁹ Here I support Collin’s (1998: paragraph 4.4) line of thinking when he says: ‘I hope we can accept that interviews are shared events during which more than one life may be negotiated and in which neither participant is assumed to be more passive than the other. It is naive to think that interviews consist entirely (or even largely) of collecting data rather in the manner of shelling peas. Lives do not consist of data; they consist of stories and stories are negotiated during social interaction. And the stories (along with the selves they constitute) continue long after the writing is finished.’

¹³⁰ Between 2012 and 2017, the CTD team carried out research in Nigeria, CAR, DRC, Chad, Mali, and Cameroon. The team concentrated on understanding the dynamics in the relationship between enduring conflict, hardship, governance regimes, mobility, migration, and connectivity. My research was not funded by CTD, but I was ‘adopted’ by the team and we shared many fruitful moments, workshops, and a successful end conference in N’Djaména in October 2017. See <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl> for more information and the variety of output the research project has produced.

¹³¹ It was not something I talked about with the women, unfortunately, in the *ferīkh* setting; there never seemed to be a right moment and the subject of female circumcision never came up naturally. In a conversation on this subject in N’Djaména, the mother of four daughters said that it was the daughter of ten who had come to her to ask to have it performed. Her friends had been talking about it, and it was what made you a more virtuous woman (girl in her case). It was unclear what the mother was going to do, and I never managed to broach the subject with her elder daughters to ask whether they had undergone the procedure. Boys in the *ferīkh* are circumcised around the age of ten. On a return visit in 2012, we found two of them a bit forlorn in a specially constructed shelter, draped in decorative cloths. They were to stay in there for several days following the procedure and were not allowed out or too much interaction with the others. Peter Fuchs carried out research on various groups in Chad in the 1970s, filming aspects of their lives, including one such ceremony of female circumcision (female genital mutilation/FGM).

also had such conversations with other members of the community, especially with the women I slept alongside and had meals with. They were moments of reflection and a chance to dig deeper or come up with new questions / lines of enquiry to follow up on. In turn, Bachar—and others—would often ask what I thought or how we would do things in the Netherlands. They were curious, for example, as to what we invested our money in and found it very strange that in the Netherlands one does not just buy land to build on. I tried to explain there is little ‘free’ land left and that most people need a mortgage to even consider owning their own house. Time spent in Mongo with Walad Djifir based there and with people from different walks of life (ethnically and job-wise), provided perspective. This mutual exchange on numerous subjects thus helped provide depth to the daily observations and conversations.¹³²

Introducing the main characters

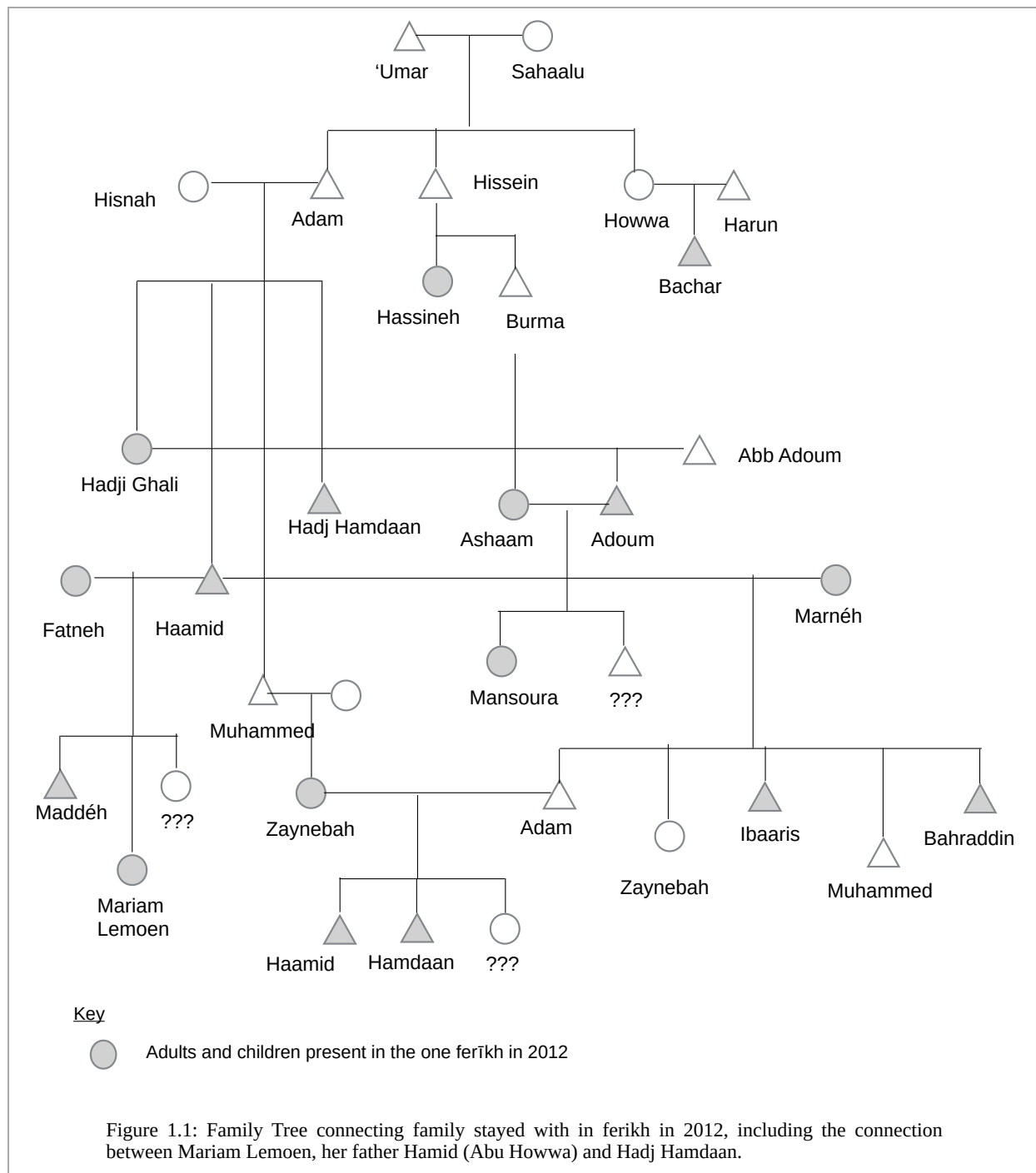
Through the access that Hadj Hamdaan, whose case was introduced in the previous chapter, and Bachar gave me to the rest of their extended family, I was able to meet Zaynebah, one of Hadj Hamdaan’s nieces, as well as the other women who became main informants in one way or other:¹³³ Marnéh, Hassineh, Ashaam, Hadji Ghali, and Fatnéh. These five women all lived in that same camp in 2012. I would stay with Zaynebah, Marnéh, and Hadji Ghali, setting up my fold-out bed next to the *barsh* (tent) in which Zaynebah, her youngest son, and Hadji Ghali slept. The latter is Hadj Hamdaan and Abu Howwa’s eldest sister. Marnéh in turn is Abu Howwa’s first wife and a p/maternal cousin of Bachar. Zaynebah is the daughter of the brother whose inheritance Hadj Hamdaan was dealing with in the Introduction. She is married to Marnéh and Abu Howwas’s son Adam. The story of Zaynebah and Adam figures in Chapter 5. Fatnéh is Abu Howwa’s second wife and the mother of Mariam Lemoen. Hassineh is Hadj Hamdaan’s wife as well as his cousin—their fathers are brothers, which also makes her Bachar’s cousin. Adoum and Ashaam were the youngest couple living in the 2012 camp, and Adoum, a son of Hadji Ghali, carried a lot of the daily responsibility for their combined herd of cattle. Ashaam is the daughter of Hassineh’s brother Burma. (See Figure 1.1)

The foregoing has introduced a number of individuals whose stories form the basis of the following chapters.¹³⁴ Adoum Judah, the man who went to work in Sudan as a youngster, was one

¹³² See Jackson (2013: 9) on intersubjectivity, ‘[...] the everyday interplay of human subjects, coming together and moving apart, giving and taking, communicating and miscommunicating’. He goes on to provide a definition of ethics which resonates with my own approach to the field. Basing himself on Levinas and Sartre respectively, he suggests ‘[...] that ethics begins in our face-to-face encounters with others and our responsiveness to the other...’ and ‘[...] that “essentially, ethics is a matter of one person’s relationship to another” and that “ethical conscience” arises from one’s awareness of always being, to some extent, in the presence of another and conditioned by this sense of being-in-relation with him or her.’

¹³³ The mere spending of time in their camps, sharing meals, tagging along when they went to fetch water, going through our evening and morning rituals together, and the listening to their conversations are the basis of this ethnography.

¹³⁴ In this sense I align myself with Köhler’s (2016a: 24) approach when it comes to the way people’s stories were recorded: ‘[...] instead of recording complete life histories of a great number of individuals—an approach that, if taken seriously, would demand an extremely high degree of depth and complexity with questionable usefulness for the envisaged results—I have put a focus on chapters or “portions” of life histories, as proposed by Vansina (1980: 266): I was less interested in recording whole life stories than in biographically based yet thematically focused accounts of specific events.’



of the first people that would come and greet me in the mornings on his way to the field or *'eidd*. He lived in the same ferikh as the one Bachar and I stayed in during fieldwork in 2012. The experiences and thoughts of his son, Muhammed, are related in Chapter 3. Adoum Judah was also among the many men who greeted Bachar and me on that first visit in October 2011. He is one of the few I remember distinctly, joking around with the little Mariam Lemoen (approx. three years old at the time) whose story, and that of her father Abu Howwa, are also used in Chapter 3. Mariam Lemoen, too, lived in that same ferikh in 2012.

Throughout all the fieldwork phases, it was these family members with whom Bachar and I always stayed while in the Fadje area. The set-up of their camps sometimes changed, depending on the needs of the herds of cattle and camels. There were of course many others whom we would see

daily, passing through ‘our’ camp, at the ‘*eidd*, over a meal, just passing time in a shady spot, or on visits to a weekly market.¹³⁵ Their mobile lifestyle, related to the care of herds or agricultural fields and also to wage labour, commerce, or study, is reflected in the multi-sited fieldwork carried out.

Reflections on collaboration and anonymity

Within the CTD research group, we have had many discussions on how to deal with anonymity, especially when working with ordinary people (not only the informants and co-creators).¹³⁶ How to deal with anonymity when writing up an historical section on a specific tribe or family? Anyone familiar with the region and wanting to know could probably figure out who the anonymous informants were or at least which group they belong to. This is not a new issue for ethnographers, and there are ways of dealing with this. In relation to CTD, each researcher has made his or her own choice based on the specific context of their research terrain and the wishes of their informants. In the case of Bachar and the Walad Djifir, consent was given to tell their story and to have them figure in it. I can only hope that it will do justice to them and to their trust in me. Having said that, I remain the one responsible for the words in these pages and thus also for any and all mistakes in them.

The people we work with on a daily basis while in the field, those we share meals with and sometimes the most bizarre moments, are not only sources of information but at times collaborators or ‘co-creators’ of questions and findings. In their writings, photographs, and films, researchers can acknowledge and give a voice to such people and the processes involved.

Within my own fieldwork, three main ‘characters’ not only formed the basis of the data collected but also shaped the forms of collaboration in different ways. Hadj Hamdaan had a fairly traditional role as main informant, through whom we were introduced to ‘*ferīkh* life’ and the world connected to it. While his presence and actions determined many things, Bachar and Zaynebah were the ones with which I had a deeper understanding. Bachar did not play the role of co-creator so much as that of ‘side-kick’, in the sense that we formed a team and in reality took turns being each other’s side-kick. He was both interpreter, the initial provider of access, and informant. In his role as informant, his story figures throughout the ethnography (especially in Chapter 4). The collaboration with Zaynebah was on a more personal level, perhaps facilitated by us both being young women who had been in contact with ‘other’ worlds outside of the *ferīkh*. The nature of the ‘relationships’ I had with both Bachar and Zaynebah deserve further reflection in order to understand their and my position in the field.

Bachar

¹³⁵ To name a few in Fadjé: Abu Ramla, Al-Hurr, Fedellelah, Djibreen, Mansoura and her sister Khadidjah, Hassineh’s mother, Burma, Harun, Hassan, Marnéh’s own daughter Zaynebah, Nagah, Ibaaris, Bahr ad-Dīn, and of course the young children: Mariam Lemoen, Maddé, Haamid, Hamdaan, Mansoura, Duglum, Sassileh, Muhammed, and many others.

¹³⁶ A co-creator is a main informant with whom one develops the research as it goes along. The Matsutake Worlds Research Groups’ (2009) notion of collaboration as, in and of itself, being a process contributing to knowledge resonates with the idea of a co-creator.

As mentioned, Bachar is related to this specific group of Walad Djifir through both his mother and father. Without delving too much into Bachar's story at this point, suffice to say that he left his parental *ferīkh* at a young age and, after various detours, set up a home and family in N'Djaména. The fact that he was working with me and that we had the use of a car meant that he was able to spend a lot more time than he normally would have in the *ferīkh* and among his extended family. His role as negotiator in family affairs, as well as adviser on numerous issues, had already been established prior to our working together and probably facilitated my being able to carry out the fieldwork I did.

We work well together, Bachar and I. We both enjoy being *en brousse*, preferring to sleep out under the stars rather than under a tent (even on cold nights). It is a working relationship, in the sense that I employed him for the duration of the fieldwork and provided him with food and accommodation in addition to a salary. There were many ways in which this situation could have been highly unequal (and uncomfortable). It was my research project and I was the one that had hired him. I was in my early thirties and he somewhere in his late fifties. I was a young (unmarried yet not single)¹³⁷ woman and he a married man of eight children, whom he had to provide for. At times, his frustration at being dependent on me (and others) was evident, taking the form of short, curt replies. To be fair, such moments were often mutual. Most of the time, however, we found a way to work together as equals. I too was dependent on him, on his knowledge of the terrain, on his thoughts about what was wise in a particular context, and on his access to the community. We made decisions together, and there was space to vent frustrations about each other or a specific situation. Spending a lot of time with any one person is bound to create some tension, but I feel like we found a way to make it work for both of us early on. The walks we would take together, sometimes without talking, helped—as did the occasional periods of rest-and-relaxation in Mongo, where we could each go and do our own thing. At the same time, he made good use of the months spent with his extended family, and they made use of his presence. I, in turn, was the one who had facilitated this bringing together and observed it all.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ My husband Bouk, came to visit in December/January of 2012–2013. We spent time in N'Djaména, with colleague Souleymane's family in Mongo, and a few nights meeting Hadj Hamdaan and the others in the *ferīkh*. Here, Bouk seemed most impressed by the extensive method of greeting. We then took a short break in Zakouma National Park, together with Bachar, his eldest daughter Hadji Mariam, and youngest son AbduSalaam. The most memorable part of the trip to Zakouma is the car breaking down and our spending two nights camping out in the enclosure of the water tower at Deresna (see Map 1.2). We will be eternally grateful for Ahmed, building a stadium in Am Timam, who kindly towed us to the spot and left us behind with a meal. We are still in touch. Souleymane was able to send us a spare oil filter by motor from Mongo. Bachar fixed the car and we continued our journey, taking the risk that it may have been a different part which was causing the problem.

¹³⁸ My own Dutch origins and a fair amount of Egyptian Arabic, including some *fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic), meant that a 'shared interest' in cattle and a means to communicate about them were established early on. The fact that I am a foreign woman, in a predominantly Muslim society, meant that I could eat with both men and women alike. My 'being different' opened up possibilities, while of course also having its limits. The opening excerpt reveals how I did not get to know any of the women until my second visit in 2012. Even then, it took some of the women a while to feel comfortable enough to open up about various subjects. This also had to do with language and vocabulary, to be more precise. The men had often learned to recite and to a certain extent understand the Qur'ān and perhaps traveled further. Their daily listening to radio broadcasts in other Arabic dialects meant most were able to make sense of the Arabic I spoke, being creative in their listening skills and responses. With time it was my Arabic which adapted itself to incorporate Chadian Arabic.

The setting was of course somewhat unnatural, not only through my presence but also through that of Bachar, who normally lived and worked in N'Djaména.¹³⁹ Bachar, too, was an outsider in certain regards, having been away since his youth and no longer living the nomadic life. As mentioned, his advice and mediation were often asked, a trend which already existed before we started working together and which then continued and became more intensified. Talk of Bachar becoming the family's *chef de canton* is closely linked to this (Chapter 2). We also facilitated Zaynebah and Hadj Hamdaan's travel to N'Djaména, for example, timing it to coincide with our own return (Chapter 5). Our visit to Koundjaar allowed Fedellelah and Adoum Judah to tag along and speak to Brahim Said, whom they hoped would help their land ownership case (Chapter 2). There is no denying that our presence, and our mobility, must have altered the course of some aspects of daily, ordinary life, as well as the more extraordinary moments. At the same time, it also very much re-enacted existing structures present in the field, including gender hierarchies and power relations.¹⁴⁰

Zaynebah

With the women it generally took a longer time before we were able to have proper conversations, and with some women this never really worked.¹⁴¹ Because Bachar was a direct family member, either as cousin, nephew, or uncle, he was able to join in on conversations with the women and often shared meals with us. Later, I did not need him to be around as much in order to have a successful conversation. It helped that a handful of the family we stayed with spoke French, in addition to Chadian Arabic. Zaynebah, for example, was one of them, and I think that her growing up in Bangui and being relatively 'new' to nomadic life helped us bond. She was able to explain things I wanted to understand but that the other women considered so normal that they sometimes could not grasp my questions. Next to Bachar, Zaynebah often functioned as an unofficial translator when I was alone with women whom I found it difficult to communicate with. They in turn used her to ask me all sorts of questions, not always daring to ask me directly. The most pertinent ones being: did I have any children, why not, and what did I do about having my period?

I got to know Zaynebah and 'her story' while at the same time spending mornings, afternoons, and evenings together in a variety of settings. It was next to her tent in the *ferikh* that I set up my own bed, and it was with her that most evening meals were eaten while there. I had the chance to travel with her to N'Djaména, spending some time together there on two different occasions. In between I was able to visit her in her 'home' in a remote village in CAR, where she showed me the

¹³⁹ See Irwin 2006 on inequalities between researcher, research subjects, and informants.

¹⁴⁰ Irwin (2006) describes the way data gathering, writing, and relationships can collude with, enact, or resist historical exploitative practices and relationships. I follow her definition of structure, by which she means 'the properties encouraging social practices (especially inequalities) to become patterned and systematic over time and space' (p. 156)—though I believe there is always room for exceptions.

¹⁴¹ Many women thought I was a doctor at first, traveling with Bachar and coming to help them. This reveals something about their previous encounters with foreigners. Even afterwards, I was often asked for painkillers or medical advice by both men and women alike. I had brought along a fair amount of paracetamol and ibuprofen from home, which I was happy to hand out when Bachar and I thought it could help. When in Mongo we would sometimes ask local nurse Geeske for advice. We would refer people on to the nearest clinic when their case seemed serious.

rooms her father had built and the photos of him and the rest of the family and friends residing in Bangui. Throughout these moments it became clear that the weight of gendered and familial expectations figure heavily in the courses her life has taken. Her story also revealed how the intricate layers of belonging—as daughter of her father, part of her father’s family, daughter-in-law to her father’s siblings, wife to her husband and mother to her children, as Chadian but also as someone born and raised in urban Bangui—can at times provide support and act as a form of personal constraint, two sides of the coin I have dubbed ‘groundedness’.

Ethnographic research among the Walad Djifir could very well concentrate on ‘just’ the *ferīkh* and all its intricacies;¹⁴² but because this *ferīkh* life is so connected with goings-on outside of it, the field of research reflected this and thus incorporated various locations, informed by specific connectors between *ferīkh* life and the world ‘outside’. Whatever the reasons, historically and currently—finding pasture or suitable wells, commerce, family obligations, labour migration, conflict—Walad Djifir like Zaynebah, Bachar, and Hadj Hamdaan are a mobile people living their lives over various places and spaces. As illustrated above, there is a purpose to this mobility, as well as there being social and economic networks which become engaged and with which people link up, or ‘connect’. This linking up / connecting, in turn, informs feelings of and motivations for belonging. What, then, are the various ‘circles of belonging’ to which the Walad Djifir relate? In examining Walad Djifir’s positionality toward their origins, we see a tendency to identify themselves as Arabs and Muslims. Within this identification, however, there are nuances and layers to be discerned, with motivations for belonging varying depending on the situation. A similar trend is observed in relation to socio-political structures, whether they be the state, canton, nomadic tribe, or familial leader. Here, factors shaping belonging are a nomadic freedom/flexibility to continue a way of life, identifying with specific pieces of land in the Guéra and Batha and adhering to familial loyalties. The next chapter will look at social organization in the context of the *ferīkh* and at familial expectations and obligations as sources of conflict. While there is a certain continuity to land issues between sedentary and pastoral/nomadic populations, with former agreements suddenly being overturned, nomadic pastoralists also have their own fair share of land strife among themselves.

¹⁴² Here Appadurai’s (1997) discussion on practices of intimacy, in relation to fieldwork in a time of globalization, comes to mind. I hope to show that everyday social practices of intimacy span physical spaces. An intimate emotional moment, whether joyous or sad, can have its roots in practices taking place elsewhere. A further reflection on the role of intimacy in this ethnographic fieldwork, and the position intimate moments take within the narratives, are something I would like to discuss in a separate publication analysing the many photographs and video footage.



1.1 Setting of the first gathering of those with whom I would end up carrying out this research, October 2011. At the time, the camps of the Walad Djifir were located east of the road between Mongo and Ati. The car and ferīkh are pictured in the background.

1.2 Fedelellah (third from left) next to Bachar. On the far right, Al-Hurr, with next to him Djibreen, October 2011. All of the men in the front row, bar Bachar, are members of the ferīkh council. Al-Hurr is also the *khalifa* of the Walad Djifir, making him responsible for the collection of taxes when members of his group sell an animal. Fedelellah is the *chef de village* of Tchoufiou Deux Arabe.



1.3 Packing up after the first morning, Hadj Hamdaan seated on the bed on the left and Bachar standing in the middle, October 2011. Zaynebah's son, little Hamdaan, is playing around in the left-hand corner.

1.4 A shy Sassileh thought the doctor had come to give her vaccinations, October 2011. Sassileh is one of Hadj Hamdaan and Hassineh's younger daughters and named after the town in CAR where her uncle and father spent several years. It was not until the second longer stay in early 2012 that the link with CAR was made and I learned how much time some family members had been spending there and how regular the contact was between them.

1.5 Adoum Judah standing at the back of Zaynebah's tent, March 2012. As a young man, Adoum travelled to Sudan for work, returning with a horse. He and his family do not have a large herd, and he complements this with agricultural activities. His son now does seasonal work in N'Djaména, selling blocks of ice along a main road.



1.6 Within the camp, young men are seated at a distance in the morning after our first stay, October 2011. Due to the landscape—grazing land as opposed to the more wooded area on the other side of the Bambam, which Walad Djifir prefer earlier in the year due to its proximity to ground water— there is an open feeling to this camp. Another *ferīkh* (camp) is visible in the distance.

1.7 Setting of the *ferīkh* in Fadjé, March 2012. Fadjé is located on the west side of the Bambam and at approximately the same height as the sedentary village Tchoufiou II Arabe. This area is wooded and becomes very muddy once the rains start, marking the time to relocate to different grounds. Notice the tents in the background, with Zaynebah walking towards them on the left.



1.8 Zaynebah's tent and personal space, with my bed leaning against it, March 2012. Hadji Ghali, one of Hadj Hamdaan's older sisters, is seen tending to the cooking pots on the left. You can make out Zayenbah's bed in the left corner of her tent, with Hadji Ghali's bed placed in the centre.



1.9 View of Zaynebah's tent, with boys' circumcision tent on left and Marneh's tent to the right, March 2012

1.10 Bachar and Hadj Hamdaan walking back from a visit to the village, March 2012. Hadj Hamdaan had had a meeting to attend with other members of the ferikh council, and we joined him. The area close to the road between Mongo and Ati and before you reach the Bambam is less densely wooded.



1.11 Discussing and passing around photographs, December 2012. Bringing back many of the pictures I had taken during the previous two fieldwork visits allowed me to interact in a different way with those with whom I had been living. We would talk about the people in the photographs and one subject sometimes led to another. It was also a great way to connect family members, who had not seen each other in a long time owing to physical distance.



1.12 Hadj Hamdaan's son Muhammed practising his Qurān, March 2013. The young boys in the *ferīkh* would practise their recitations around a camp fire at first prayer—and at times again in the late afternoon. The rest of the day was spent tending to the animals. Hadj Hamdaan hoped that this particular son would be noticed by a travelling *marabout* and offered a scholarship to study further in Egypt.



1.13 Hadj Hamdaan (far right) heading to a wedding, March 2013. This is the day we had news by text message of the coup in CAR. The man in the middle has a son who lived in CAR for many years and then went to try his luck in Libya.





1.14 Haamid and Adoum Judah resting, March 2013. Both men were a large part of everyday life on each visit to the ferīkh. Men and women work hard and there is not much time for lying around. Especially Haamid always seemed to be busy with something.

1.15 Hassineh with her newest baby, March 2014. She is in her own living area next to the tent she continued to share with Hadj Hamdaan. At this time, Hadj Hamdaan had moved to a ferīkh closer to Bitkine, teaching youngsters the Qurān.

1.16 The ferīkh setting in March 2014. They were located a little further away from the Bambam than previously, yet still on its western bank. The trees were a little further apart than where they had camped in early 2012 and early 2013. It is easy to distinguish the ground which has been swept clean of cow dung and vegetation.

TWO

BROTHERS IN ARMS: FERĪKH POLITICS

In 2009, Harun's ten-year-old son was killed in a road accident, hit while herding livestock on the road to Am Timam, in the Salamat region. Harun is one of Hadj Hamdaan's younger brothers. As Islamic custom dictates, the issue was settled among those responsible and the victim's family. Harun's family sent an envoy of five to six members of the *ferīkh conseil*¹⁴³ to collect the body and receive compensation for the loss (known as *dīya* or blood money).¹⁴⁴ Traditionally, the amount of 1,500,000 CFA (2,287 EUR)¹⁴⁵ is distributed among the relatives. In this case, the money was not distributed evenly by Hadj Hamdaan, in his capacity as *chef de ferīkh*. For reasons still unclear, one particular *ferīkh* had refused to send a representative along with the envoy. In return, Hadj Hamdaan now refused to give them their full share. Instead of paying 500,000 CFA (762 EUR), he had given them 250,000 CFA (381 EUR). The situation escalated and has caused a rift in relations among members of the Walad Djifir.

— Based on fieldnotes, 26 April 2012

The excerpt above preludes the dynamics found within the *ferīkh* and also the complicated social organization within the Walad Djifir as extended family and the Misseria Rouges as a larger group. It illustrates the way in which personal conflicts (informed by a tragedy in this case) are communal property and require organized action. These communal actions, however, are not always as unanimous as they may seem; and, in this case, Hadj Hamdaan's individual action has led to a rift

¹⁴³ Unfortunately it is not clear to me what the relations are between those who were sent as envoy. Generally speaking, such things as blood money are issues dealt with by kin relations. Whether this is the case here, and how close their relationship is, is unclear. Khazanov (1994) says the following: 'It is curious that sometimes even co-operation and mutual aid in the nomadic community seem to follow two courses. One is the neighbourly course and is concerned primarily with the needs of production; the other is based on kinship (for example, payment of bridewealth, participation in blood feuds, etc.) and is more connected with social functions. Thus it is not always the same group of individuals which has to be involved in both forms of mutual aid. Individuals from different communities, for example, may participate in mutual aid based on kinship. This may be very clearly observed amongst the nomads of northern Arabia. Here it is thought that all neighbours are obliged to help out with such work as sheep shearing (Musil, 1908: 285). However, assistance in the event of festivals of circumcision, marriages and, particularly, payment of blood dues is thought to be in the main the business of kinsmen, particularly of *khamsa*, i.e. members of one of the kin groups (Hess, 1932 [1938]: 32; Musil, 1928: 48; Daghestani, 1932: 202)' (p. 135).

¹⁴⁴ In relation to the Berti of Darfur, Holy (1974) defines *dīya* as 'a financial or material compensation by which cases of accidental killing or damage to person or property committed outside the maximal lineage are settled' (p. 132).

¹⁴⁵ French CFA to euro conversions are based on a constant assumed exchange rate of 655 CFA/EUR over the relevant time period. The online market exchange rate is 655.957 CFA/EUR.

within the community. While the incident took place in 2009, by 2012 the situation had still not been resolved, and Harun¹⁴⁶ had started paying off the ‘debt’ in person—a debt which, according to ferīkh consensus, was not his to pay but Hadj Hamdaan’s. Through intermediation by another family member (Bachar), the situation had been somewhat calmed. Bachar spent endless hours speaking to each party in turn, trying to convince them of the importance of sticking together and not creating a rift. He argued that it would not do to have other sub-tribes hear of the internal discord within the Walad Djifir—they would be laughed at for letting such a split happen. Something like this had never happened in the history of their forefathers, and they had to be sure not to let it happen now. When Bachar went to speak to the ferīkh of the *opposantes* in April 2012, he went alone and was gone the best part of the day.¹⁴⁷ Recounting the incident to me afterwards, he said he had talked partly *par force* and partly in a calm manner. He had explained that he did not think this incident was a reason to split up their *chefferie*, presided over by Kolokos. Hadj Hamdaan was only one man, and many of the others did not agree with his stance. After much discussion, the opposing ferīkh agreed to make up. In the presence of ‘three old men with white hair’ (Bachar’s words), the rest of the money would at some time have to be handed over. On Bachar’s return from this lengthy discussion, he did not speak to the *conseil* as a whole but first took Fedellellah aside, and together they went for a long walk. He later informed Kolokos of what had been agreed with the other party, and Kolokos assured him he would ensure promises would be kept. On an earlier visit to Kolokos in mid-March 2012, Bachar had asked why he had not interfered. After all, as *chef de tribu* of the Walad Djifir, he outranked both the *chef de village* (Fedellellah) and the *chef de ferīkh* (Hadj Hamdaan). In the end, Kolokos agreed to pay the remaining 150,000 CFA by selling one or two of his cows. He would find his recompense by collecting among the *tribu*.¹⁴⁸

In the meantime, Hadj Hamdaan had acquired a group of staunch supporters around him, all members of his ferīkh’s *conseil* and, in general, the most outspoken ones. They stuck to their position and refused to contribute toward recompensing Kolokos. Over time, and probably due to several awkward social occasions where people were or were not greeted, the ferīkh which was owed the debt became known as the ferīkh of the *opposantes*.¹⁴⁹ When, in March 2014, the 29-year-old son of their own *sheikh* went missing, Hadj Hamdaan and his followers within the *conseil* refused to join the search party.¹⁵⁰ When, on the morning the boy had been discovered missing, Bachar (and I) arrived in the ferīkh and learned of what was happening, he countered the decision, claiming that it was in everyone’s interest to work together, especially in a time of need. Much discussion followed, but it was enough to rally the troops to join the search. The boy—as they

¹⁴⁶ In October 2017 on a visit to N’Djaména, I learned that Harun had passed away.

¹⁴⁷ Fieldnotes, 1 May 2012.

¹⁴⁸ The use of the French word *tribu* here reflects the way the Walad Djifir refer to themselves, as opposed to my placing this categorization upon them.

¹⁴⁹ What it means to be an *opposante* will be explained in more detail later on in this chapter. For now, suffice to say that an *opposante* is one who opposes the current leader. This can occur on any level (*chef de ferīkh*, *tribu*, or *canton*). Most *opposantes* are supported (financially) by members of their community.

¹⁵⁰ Fieldnotes, 8 March 2014.

referred to him themselves despite his age—was found in a grave condition on the third day after his disappearance. He had undressed and would not speak. Piecing the information together, it was discovered that he had just returned from a Qur’ānic school in the eastern city of Abéché. He had come back with malaria and had already received a first *perfusion* (medical drip) at the hospital in Mongo. On the night of his return, he had got up, most probably in a fever dream, and walked away. It was a young goat herder who had found his clothes strewn about miles away; and after finding the boy, he alerted a nearby search party on horseback.¹⁵¹

These are just a few details of a story involving many actors, factors, and much social hierarchy. It is not clear whether the animosity against that particular *ferīkh* was pre-dated by other events. Why, for example, did they not join the envoy when Harun’s son was killed? What is clear is that Hadj Hamdaan’s actions soured inter-*ferīkh* relations even further, instead of improving them. By March 2014, the *opposante* *ferīkh* was looking to join an even larger *opposante*, namely the *opposante* of the Misseria Rouges’s *chef de canton*.

This chapter presents two separate yet intertwined case studies: the aftermath of the death of Harun’s son, and Abdoulaye Goudjeh’s—the *chef de canton* of the Misseria Rouges—unlawful¹⁵² selling of Walad Djifir land. In both cases, the role and strategies of several leaders come to the fore, with Bachar being one among them. Their stories reveal normative narratives of what is good for the *ferīkh* or Walad Djifir in general. The connectors of this chapter are thus the various self-proclaimed ‘leaders’. By focusing on *ferīkh* politics¹⁵³ we are able to examine the nuanced complexities of social relations. The drivers of *ferīkh* politics are closely linked to the navigation of social cohesion and power relations. These are in turn related to kinship relations, enforced by cattle distribution and land-use rights, and by shared Islamic norms and values. However, by focusing on people, namely ‘leaders’, we allow room for the agency or choices of an individual which are perhaps not only linked to familial obligations but can be of a different nature. At the same time, I would like to follow up on something Marielle Debos wrote in relation to the state and its actors. She suggests:

The state’s practices are neither unambiguous nor coherent; they are the product of many decisions, sometimes contradictory, taken by various actors at different levels. However, the intentions of the known and unknown architects of this mode of government count less than their effects. (Debos 2016: 120)

¹⁵¹ During such searches, the community usually really comes together to help and everyone is concerned, men and women alike. These situations happen from time to time, though not always with a good outcome. Phone calls are made from *ferīkh* to *ferīkh*, and people also spread the news on horseback. Searches are organized by sending some men from early morning to nightfall on horseback, splitting into groups. Others go on foot. It takes a lot of manpower; but in such conditions as we find in the Guéra, time is everything.

¹⁵² It is very difficult to know whether the selling of land was actually unlawful or ‘merely’ unjust.

¹⁵³ Here I follow Ladislav Holy’s description of political activities as ‘whatever actions contribute to the maintenance of the conditions for safe co-existence among individuals’ (1974: 125). Of course, it is debatable whether everyone has the same idea of what is ‘best’; and even at a very basic level, power hierarchies and manipulation can be observed.

This shift in focus from the intentions of individuals, or even those of a community, to the *effects* of their actions is something to bear in mind when reading the following case studies, as it seems to be precisely these effects which create a certain fission and fusion among the Walad Djifir. Debos goes on to argue for ‘a non-normative analysis of concrete forms of the exercise of power (and of violence)’ (ibid.) to understand how such a mode of governance works. While this ethnography accepts being narratively normative in some way or other—if only because the stories told through specific informants/people and reproduced by the author (myself) cannot escape a certain subjectivity—it can perhaps contribute to an understanding of *ferīkh* practices as being simultaneously just as ambiguous and non-coherent. Together, these practices provide the context in which individual Walad Djifir function and operate. And in forming such a context, *ferīkh* practices reveal a framework in which the various ‘connectors’, around which the following chapters are centred, function and derive their meaning.

Before continuing with the present-day situation, we first need to provide a sketch of how this present has grown out of the past.

From the past to the present

Administrative changes under the French

In *The Juhaina Arabs of Chad*, Frederic C. Thomas Jr (1959: 147) describes the dispersal of certain Arab groups in Chad, mentioning the Misseria on occasion. According to Thomas, sections of the Misseria crossed over to the French in 1907—escaping Ouaddaïan reign in eastern Chad—who had by this time come as far east as Lac Fitri.¹⁵⁴ In doing so, the Misseria installed themselves well to the west of their former homelands. Brahim (1988: 39) describes how in 1906 one of the Ouaddaï *aqīds* (Ahmad Magné of the el Zabada) confiscated all of the camels of numerous Misseria sub-tribes. The move away from Ouaddaïan reach followed the 1904 move of several other groups taking refuge under the French against hostile neighbours, raiders, and unreasonable tax confiscations by the *aqīds*. The 1920s saw a shift in French policy when, in an attempt to improve the administrative control over highly mobile Arabs, certain chiefs were awarded considerable authority (the *grand kadmūl* policy).¹⁵⁵ In doing so, some tribes became linked under one chief without there being clear family ties between them. A Humr Missairi chief, for example, was given command over all the Misseria, the independent Haimad tribe, and even the non-Arab populations of three cantons (sedentary tribal areas) to the north of the river Batha. By 1935, due to excessive

¹⁵⁴ The French first started taking a colonizing interest in Chad in the late 1880s / early 1890s, not establishing themselves there until 1909. As part of the AEF (est. 1910), Chad was more of a strategic asset for the French, a gateway to the British Sudan. Most effort was put into developing the southern part of the country—infrastructurally and economically—though most roads (if any) were laid out for tactical (military) purposes. See Ardit 2003; Azevedo 2004; Rense 2006; Souleymane 2017.

¹⁵⁵ The *grand kadmūl* policy was an extension of indirect rule, ‘[...] a policy which respected local traditions, customary institutions and habits. In utilising the indigenous authorities it had the obvious advantage of relieving the French of many of the less important tasks of administration and reducing expenditures at a time when economies were most needed.’ (Thomas 1959: 149)

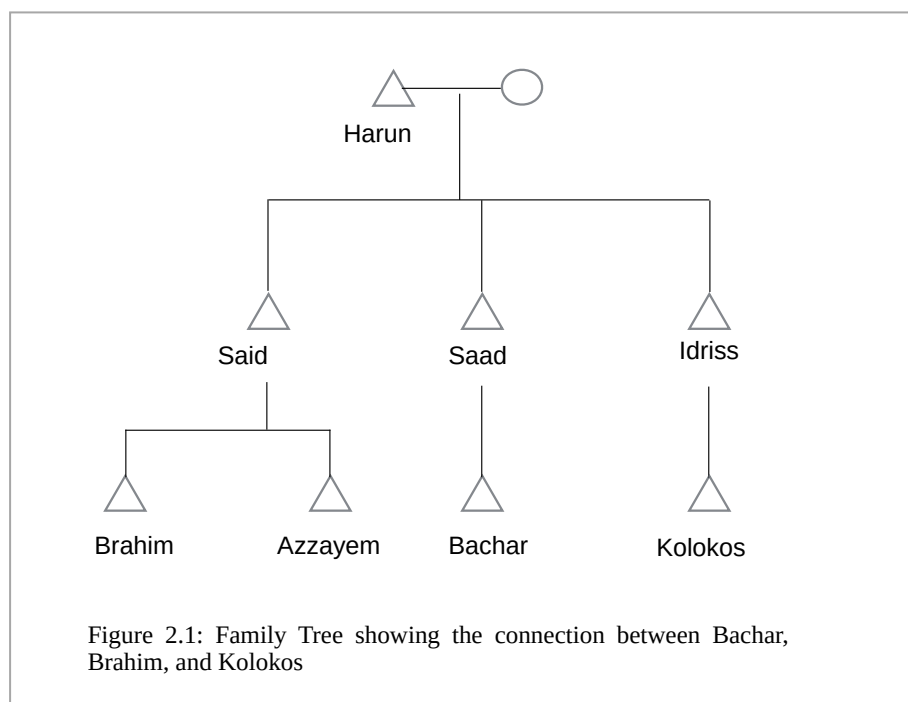
taxes by these French-raised chiefs, the Misseria were dispersed over ten administrative districts, while previously having been restricted to only one. They and other Arab nomads also altered their movements, leaving early from the north and staying longer in the south, to protect their herds from chiefs' taxes—at a cost to their own health and that of the herds. By the early 1940s, the French acknowledged the now weak position of their chiefs, both financially and socially. The chiefs were removed from their positions and replaced with new chiefs, this time those who were supported by leading sheikhs and the community (Thomas 1959; Collelo 1990: 65).¹⁵⁶ For administrative purposes the French had become interested in sedentarizing the nomads. In order to stimulate this, they increased the taxes on herd owners/animals and decreased taxes on straw-hut owners. In one district, the cantonal chiefs (mostly sedentary non-Arabs) were given authority over all the residents of their canton, including Arab nomads temporarily installed there. Some chiefs deprived the Misseria of the use of pastures and wells and charged heavy fees for usage. This ended in a tribal war between the Misseria Humr and Ratanin in 1947, in which 150 people were known to have been killed (Hugot 1997). In 1947 the French took away power once again from the tribal chiefs, forbidding the collection of *zakaat* unless it was voluntarily paid. The French also took over many tribal responsibilities and now had both 'civil and commercial powers'. Goudjeh Walad Hamatta, for example, was named *chef de canton* of the Misseria Rouges by the French in 1943, following the arrest of Sheikh Adoudou (aka Doudou)¹⁵⁷ for not collaborating with the French (Dangbet 2015a: 214). By replacing him, they also simplified the tasks of future *chef de cantons*—sheikhs like Goudjeh Walad Hamatta would no longer have the status of *chef supérieur* in the Batha region.

Under the French, the town of Koundjaâr, located in the Batha and falling under the canton of Assinet, became the seat of the canton of the Misseria Rouge (see Map 1.3). Administratively, the Walad Djifir fell under this *cantonage*. The paternal cousins Bachar and Brahim recall how the power over the Misseria Rouge canton came to be placed with the sheikh of the Walad Sûrûr, Goudjeh Walad Hamatta, in 1943 (Hugot 1997: 121). Upon this proclamation, the French also made it mandatory for each sub-tribe's sheikh to give one of their sons to be raised in Koundjaâr. Writing about the situation in 1949, Pierre Hugot names Said Hassan as *chef de tribu*, aka Sheikh of the Walad Djifir. According to local sources, his name was Said Harun, Brahim Said's father and Bachar's uncle (see the Family Tree in Figure 2.1). Consequently, Brahim was brought up in Koundjaâr, alongside Goudjeh's own son and current *chef de canton*, Abdoulaye Goudjeh. After Said Harun, his younger brother Saad Harun became the sheikh. Saad Harun was Bachar's father.

¹⁵⁶ See Collelo 1990 on how the French tried to impose an administration based on territory yet ended up ruling the Arabs through their kin-based social structures; see De Bruijn 2004 for an article detailing the example of a Hadjeray/Dadjo family whose lives were altered due to such policies. The Walad Djifir were also affected by French changes to local leadership, as we will see later.

¹⁵⁷ Sheikh Adoudou succeeded his father in 1911 and was quick to gain French trust. Between 1932 and 1935 he was tasked with regrouping the Misseria Rouges under his authority. In 1935 he was installed as Sheikh Kabîr of both the Misseria Rouges and Noirs, as well as of the sedentary populations of Oumhadjer. Adoudou and his sons succeeded in alienating those they had been put in control over, failing to unite them in any politically stable or economically productive way. In 1943 the French administration had also had enough and re-divided the Misseria Rouges and Noirs, reinstating former *chef de tribus* and *canton*. The sedentary populations took this opportunity to create their own canton, *canton des Sédentaires du Dar Misserié*. However, the rights to pasture, villages, wells, and cultivation land still belonged to the Arabs—a situation which still creates tensions, especially by rivalling *chefs de canton* (Brahim 1988: 41-44).

The current sheikh of the Walad Djifir is Kolokos, the son of the brother who followed Saad Harun.



Land strife and strengthening allegiances

By March 2012 it had been three years since the Walad Djifir had left the canton of Abdoulalaye Goudjeh.¹⁵⁸ As *chef de canton*, Abdoulalaye Goudjeh had begun giving away—or rather selling—land to other sub-tribes. In the case of the Walad Djifir, he had forcefully taken a piece of Habilai and sold one part to the Walad ‘Umar and another part to the Mazaknéh, in exchange for money and livestock (*‘boeufs vivres’*, in the words of the Walad Djifir). The incident occurred in the month of October, when most of the Walad Djifir can be found on their dry-season lands in the Guéra. It had started out with a visit to the terrain from the *chef de tribu* of the Walad ‘Umar. As most people do not live on al-Habilai year-round, a guard is appointed to protect their terrain, the focal point of which is now a deep, constructed well.¹⁵⁹ This guard, a brother of Brahim Said named Azzayem Said Harun,¹⁶⁰ received the aforementioned visitor. The chef of the Walad ‘Umar claimed that a specific part of the terrain belonged to the Walad ‘Umar. The guard denied this: ‘Since my father, I have never heard of such a thing—that there were Walad ‘Umar in this area.’ A meeting was

¹⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, 4 April 2012.

¹⁵⁹ On the Wodaabe of east-central Niger, Köhler (2016a: 156) writes: ‘De facto, the owner of a well in the pastoral zone enjoys priority use rights over the surrounding rangeland (see Thébaud 1990).’ It is not clear whether a similar system is in place in Chad. From accounts gathered, it seems that wells are not necessarily owned by anyone but very much shared between certain groups in specific locations and that these locations coincide with claims made to grazing land.

¹⁶⁰ Same father, different mother. See Figure 2.1.

organized with the Walad ‘Umar, Walad Sūrūr, and Walad Djifir. The Toumaï, who are not Misseria Rouges, were called in by the Walad Djifir to act as witnesses and confirm who the rightful owner was. The chief of the Walad ‘Umar refused to accept this, even after they had sworn on a copy of the Qur’ān. Here the information on what happened next is somewhat unclear. However the meeting went exactly, the outcome was one with which the Walad Djifir did not agree. When they voiced this, soldiers and gendarmes arrested them and placed them in the full sun¹⁶¹ for 25 minutes, after which they were released. The indignity of having been held unjustly is what everyone remembers most when recounting the story.¹⁶² One may assume that the Walad ‘Umar (the Mazaknéh were not mentioned in this situation) were directly supported by Abdoulaye Goudjeh when placing their claim on the terrain.

In the beginning, attempts were made to resolve the issue directly with the two sub-tribes who had occupied the land, and with Abdoulaye Goudjeh himself. None of the parties would budge; and as a protest and out of desperation, the Walad Djifir left the *canton* of the Misseria Rouges and joined that of the Dadjo.¹⁶³ When Abdoulaye Goudjeh heard of the definite transfer, he undertook several steps to try and win them back. He first visited the Dadjo *chef de canton* to persuade him to give him back his people. The Dadjo chef advised him to go and speak to his own people instead of coming to him. He then offered the *ferīkh conseil* ten million CFA, or whatever they wanted. The Walad Djifir refused every amount proposed—‘even 14 and 20 million’, as one person recounted. Abdoulaye Goudjeh then decided to visit the *préfet* in Mongo to lodge a complaint. When this complaint arrived at the level of the Walad Djifir, Hadj Hamdaan called Bachar for advice. Bachar told him that they should go to see the local (and only) political party, the MPS (Mouvement Patriotique du Salut).¹⁶⁴ The case was put forward and an appointment was made to which Abdoulaye Goudjeh was also invited. At this appointment, Abdoulaye Goudjeh was told that the MPS had brought democracy, which meant that every Chadian has the right to live where he wants, whether this is on a mountain or in a tree.¹⁶⁵ So if a *chef de canton*’s people wanted to leave his *canton*, they were free to do so. Following this meeting Abdoulaye Goudjeh retracted his complaint and returned to the Batha, where he continues to negotiate with those who left—although this now happens in a more passive manner. In the meantime, those tribes that had sworn on the Qur’ān that a part of al-Habilai had always belonged to them and not to the Walad Djifir had left the territory. Bachar joined several others to confirm this. No one is allowed to touch the land until the Walad Djifir have decided whether they will continue to fight for it or not. The land is guarded by the same man as mentioned earlier, Azzayem Said Harun, and his family.

¹⁶¹ Perhaps an unnecessary reminder: temperatures in Chad during the day, in the sun, reach the mid-40s, if not more—also in October. Also a note on soldiers, gendarmes, and police: the police play a role in towns and villages, while the gendarmeries are responsible for the security *en brousse*.

¹⁶² Based on a conversation with Bachar Adoum Judah and Fedellelah Uthman in Tchoufiou II Arabe, 13 April 2012.

¹⁶³ The Dadjo belong to the ethnic-linguistic group known as the Hadjeray and make up a large part of the sedentary population of the Guéra.

¹⁶⁴ The MPS was created in Darfur in 1990 and initially supported by France, Sudan, and Libya (Debos 2016: 63).

¹⁶⁵ This is literally what was said; conversation with Bachar, 4 April 2012.

On a visit to Koundjaar on 11–12 April 2012, Bachar and I stayed in the *chef de canton*'s compound following an invitation from Brahim Said and Abdoulaye Goudjeh himself. In accordance with French regulations, Brahim Said, as son of a *chef de tribu*, had been raised in the household of the *chef de canton* in Koundjaar, together with the sons of other sub-tribes (*khashim beyt*). In practice, this meant that he had been sent to school, which greatly influenced the possibility of his education in Romania as a veterinarian, his subsequent work as such in the Ministry of Pastoralism, and later ministerial posts under both Habré and Déby.¹⁶⁶ In 2012 he still occupied a seat in the Conseil de Présidence. His being raised alongside Abdoulaye Goudjeh (*'ils sont ensemble depuis'*), together with his political function, partly explain his loyalty to the man. His family *en brousse*, however, do not understand why he fails to take their side and to oppose Abdoulaye Goudjeh. Bachar explained that it was politics. If Brahim does not report certain developments to the Gouverneur of the Batha, there will be consequences to be faced.

On the way to Koundjaar, we had run into Fedellellah and Adoum Judah, who, after hearing where we were heading, decided to take advantage of the occasion (car transport and the added benefit of Brahim's presence). They hoped they could talk to Brahim about the land issue, refusing to speak directly to their former *chef de canton*. In practice, this led to a somewhat awkward (and to me almost funny) rotation of who would be inside the *chef de canton*'s main building at the same time. The building in which the *chef de canton* held office was built over fifty years ago by Abdoulaye Goudjeh's father. It is a square building with entrances to the front and rear. The traditional building style, using mud, wood, and branches, means that it stays relatively cool during the day—its high ceilings allowing the hot air to rise up and escape through the small window slits under the roof. The floors are covered by rugs—some of which seem to be specifically *a la mode*, as they are the same ones Brahim, Bachar, and Hadj Hamdaan own and use for special occasions.¹⁶⁷ The rest of Abdoulaye Goudjeh's household is spread out over a large compound, housing his three wives and their children. He used to have four wives, but one left. Each wife has her own enclosed compound. On this occasion, we spent the night in the second wife's compound. In honour of Brahim's visit, a calf was slaughtered.¹⁶⁸ Several armed men in army uniform were in the compound at the time of our visit. They were not there to guard the *chef de canton*—he hardly has any weapons of his own—but on a separate governmental mission.

Returning to the reason for Fedellellah and Adoum Judah's presence in Koundjaar: the Walad Djifir's *conseil* had agreed that if Abdoulaye Goudjeh did not come up with a solution within three

¹⁶⁶ 'There was a policy by many communist countries to offer scholarships to potential allies, thus maybe not on a country-specific level in the case of Chad, but certainly as part of a wider strategy.' From a conversation with Andrea Behrends, fieldnotes, 28 March 2012. Brahim, now retired, lives in N'Djaména but tries to visit the Batha regularly, on private and state business. On the occasion of our joint visit, he had taken his wife and children along with him.

¹⁶⁷ This specific rug is imported from Libya. Bachar advised Hadj Hamdaan against buying such an expensive rug for use in the *ferikh*, as he claimed they would not know how to care for it properly.

¹⁶⁸ By the time we left the next morning, the left-over calf's meat which had been hung out to dry was already being taken off the lines—this is how dry the air is in Koundjaar!

months from then, they would group themselves and attack.¹⁶⁹ When presented with their proposed plan of action, Brahim did not agree with them. Fedellellah, speaking for the *ferikh conseil*, had hoped Brahim would raise their issue at a national level. The ever-diplomatic Brahim instead remained very calm and passive during this heated yet low-voiced discussion and advised them to, instead of taking up arms, build a case proving the land had always been theirs. He suggested a book written about the Misseria Rouges in colonial times, which mentioned which lands belonged to which sub-tribe. It was the book written by Pierre Hugot in 1997, dealing with the situation as it was in 1947 in relation to the Misseria Rouges, based on colonial archives and most probably on the work of Courtecuisse et al. (1971). When I later found the book at Librairie La Source in N'Djaména and brought it back to Tchoufiou for Fedellellah, we found that, indeed, the Walad 'Umar are never mentioned in it in relation to al-Habilai. In fact, according to Hugot's sources, in 1947 their terrain was far away from that of the Walad Djifir. It is important to note that it is sometimes difficult to prove which land belongs to which group of people.¹⁷⁰ This is especially the case because much of such ownership has been passed down orally, and archives—if there were any—have often been destroyed during the various rebellions.

By switching to the Dadjo canton, certain benefits have arisen.¹⁷¹ The Walad Djifir have had a sedentary village along the road to Ati for thirty years. The village is known as Tchoufiou II Arabe and is just a few kilometers north of the Dadjo village, Tchoufiou. Tchoufiou 'Deux' Arabe, simply 'Tchoufiou' from now on, has fairly recently been given official status by the local Mongo government officials, and with this official status the inhabitants have been able to apply for a

¹⁶⁹ Luckily, an attack never occurred. However, on our way back from Koundjaar in 2012, we learned that the Mazaknéh had grouped themselves in Oum Hadjer in preparation for an attack on the same *chef* in Koundjaar. They too had a land issue with their *chef de canton*. In the case of the Mazaknéh, he had allowed the mobile telephone company Tigo to build an antenna on their land. The *chef de canton* had received money from Tigo in return. His argument was that the land belonged to the canton as a whole, giving him this right. The Mazaknéh did not agree and thus had prepared an attack. News travels fast, and before the attackers could properly leave Oum Hadjer, they had been detained by government forces. After having learned of the situation, Brahim had informed the Gouverneur of Ati, who had in turn called the *sous-préfet* of Oum Hadjer. Bachar explained that these situations happened more often and that it was a tactic sometimes to get the issue brought to court. By being arrested for an attack, the Mazaknéh would now be brought before the Court of Judgement in N'Djaména. To my question about why they did not just approach the court directly, he answered: 'That's now how we are. We will first try to solve it with the person or group. If that doesn't work, we fight for our right.' On our return to Fadje we heard that the Mazaknéh were also grouping together in Mongo.

¹⁷⁰ De Bruijn & van Dijk (2007: 62); Van Dijk 2003; De Bruijn 2004. Souleymane (2017) highlights how this remains a problems in the Guéra and Sido area, where refugees are encroaching on land. The few archives that used to exist have been destroyed.

¹⁷¹ For the situation of the Wodaabe in east-central Niger, Köhler (2016a: 155) writes, '... the establishment of schools and other physical structures like cereal banks and store rooms must also be understood in the sense of a political strategy to establish a permanent and visible presence at a specific site in order to be able to claim priority use rights over the pastoral resources of the respective area. In order to understand this aspect, it is important at this point to introduce the notion of *terroir d'attache*.' The colonial administrator J. Latruffe (1949: 18) noted down several measures that need to be taken vis-a-vis the Misseria to encourage them to be more sedentarized, e.g. by increasing the taxes of those living in tents year round without having a 'fixed' (sedentary) village. It may be that the needs of the Walad Djifir and the wants of the colonial administrators overlapped to create the sedentary village of Tchoufiou II Arabe.

public school.¹⁷² The process was a long and tiresome one, with a lot of bad will from the neighbouring Hadjerai population; but on Monday 19 March 2012, the first school day became a fact. The Walad Djifir are not the only ones who see the benefit of splitting from their former *chef de canton* and joining that of the Dadjo. Another sub-tribe experienced a similar problem not long after and requested to join the Dadjo canton and be given land. They were refused by the Dadjo, however, and told to go back and talk to their former chef. Although relations between the Walad Djifir and the Dadjo chief are relatively stable and peaceful, the Dadjo chief is still dealing with issues which arose when he gave the Walad Djifir land. He does not want to add to this by taking on another tribe.

Old leaders and new ‘*opposantes*’: ‘*Chaque chefferie cherche un canton*’¹⁷³

In March 2014 Abdoulaye Goudjeh’s *cantonage* was increasingly finding itself in troubled water. This tendency to malpractice by Abdoulaye Goudjeh had affected his relationship with other sub-tribes under his *cantonage* and, consequently, opposing *chef de cantons* had arisen. There were now four or five¹⁷⁴—three of which have official backing by the state, although it is not clear what this means exactly. Abdoulaye Goudjeh’s malpractice is not the only reason for this rise in *opposantes*. In the whole of Chad this tendency can be found, a tendency linked not only to issues of income but also to injustices carried out by these leaders and or their designation as such in the first place. In colonial times, a *chef de canton* was given a salary. After independence, this practice was suspended for a while, or the salary was negligible. With the influx of petrol revenues, salaries once again became worthwhile.¹⁷⁵ Under the French, then Habré, and up until fairly recently—before the coming of petrol as state revenue—taxes were paid for both people and cattle. These taxes were collected by the *chef de khashim beyt*, who would pass them on to the *chef de canton*, who in turn

¹⁷² In the case of the school in Tchoufiou, the parents joined forces to raise the money for a classroom to be built. They also constructed a *kouzi* (round hut made of stone bricks and a straw roof) for the teacher and jointly paid his salary. For a discussion of problematics and trade-offs with this format of schooling, see Swift 2011; Siele et al. 2013; Köhler 2016a: 150–55. Unless this has changed, the school’s curriculum was French. The children speak a Chadian Arabic dialect. Arabic has been taught in public schools in Chad since 1994 (Ben Yahmed 2006: 42) but is often a form of Standard Arabic (*fusha*), which is like teaching Italian-speaking children Latin. Swift (2011) points out that education encompasses more than scholarization. There is also a social aspect, and choosing one type of schooling over another could cause children to lose out in terms of their knowledge of more ‘traditional’ techniques related to nomadic life, leading to a potential loss in becoming part of relevant social and economic networks. How best to merge the best of both worlds whereby children are given the opportunity to be part of both their local nomadic world and a wider national social and economic network? This ethnography argues that, in fact, they already are part of various local and national worlds, yet at times they miss the tools (such as literacy) to become even more successful in their endeavours.

¹⁷³ ‘Every *chefferie* is looking for a [to make their own] *canton*.’ — Conversation with Bachar; fieldnotes, N’Djaména, 21 January 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Fieldnotes, N’Djaména, 13 May 2012.

¹⁷⁵ With the decline of the oil sector and the empty treasury, we can only guess what consequences this may have for future motivations. From 2016 onward, the frequency of protests and strikes increased. These protests were often a reaction to the months of unpaid salaries of government workers and teachers.

would hand them over to the *sous-préfet*. Nowadays, the *khashim beyt* pays them out directly to the *sous-préfet*, as large portions were ‘getting lost’ in transit—namely, at the level of the *chef de canton*. It is said that the *chef de khashim beyt* is known to sometimes keep some of the tax revenue aside, leaving the *sous-préfet* to make up the difference out of his own salary.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the post of *chef de canton* is first and foremost a political one—it is the state which appoints a *chef de canton*, thus also holding the power to dismiss and replace them from their post. A certain affinity with the current political powers (MPS) is necessary.

In terms of the appointment of a new *chef de canton*, it costs two million CFA to put someone’s name forward at the level of the state. In order to do so, one thus needs to be either well endowed or have the financial support of others. In general, a new *chef de canton* should be brought forward by his *tribu*. While in practice this does still happen in some cases, in other cases it is the aspiring *chef de canton* who rallies support among his *tribu* (and is, more often than not, well connected to certain members of N’Djaména society).

Opposing *chefs de canton* among the Misseria Rouges

The first *opposante* to Abdoulaye Goudjeh was Muhammed al-Tubukh,¹⁷⁷ currently an officially recognized *chef de canton* of the Mazaknéh. Another such *opposante* is Muhammed Souleymane, a member of the Matanine *khachim beyt*.¹⁷⁸ Muhammed Souleymane lives in a three-storied house¹⁷⁹ in N’Djaména and makes his living as a successful merchant. As a young child, he was placed under the care of a *marabout*, like so many other Chadian children.¹⁸⁰ As *muhadjireen*, children take part in Qur’ān lessons in the early morning, afternoon, and evenings, while begging for food the rest of the day. The exact sequence of events is unclear, but at one point he had started selling three or four litres of *essence* (petrol) to get by. Slowly but surely he was able to climb up and develop a steady business. He now owns a petrol station (not an official one but functioning nonetheless) and has built a nice house, both in Ati. Muhammed was able to come to N’Djaména with the help of Brahim Said, who helped him obtain the right papers to be able to work as a merchant. His petrol station in N’Djaména is well frequented by government *fonctionnaires*. More recently, he has moved on to the building of schools in the interior of the country, obtaining a state contract to build a total of 200 schools. When we discuss the man’s ambitions, Bachar says, ‘*Il a jeté la tasse*’ (lit. ‘He has thrown away his bowl’), referring to the silver bowl the *muhadjireen* carry around when begging for

¹⁷⁶ From a conversation with Brahim Said, N’Djaména, 25 February 2014. In 2012, the tax per person was 500 CFA—just under one euro. Fieldnotes, 7 March 2012.

¹⁷⁷ There is some discrepancy as to the name of the *chef* of the Mazaknéh. In fieldnotes, Oyo village, 18 March 2014, the name of the Mazakné *chef de canton* is said to be Mahamat al-Kabbak. While in a conversation with a Mazaknéh, Zamzam of Mongo, on 15 February 2013, he is named as Muhammad al-Tubukh. Bachar referred to him as Muhammad al-Takas.

¹⁷⁸ Fieldnotes, 21 January 2013. See Table 2.1 for an overview of chefs de canton including the *opposantes*.

¹⁷⁹ This is exactly how his existence was introduced: *trois etages*! Although N’Djaména is a fast-developing city, especially since Chad’s oil exploitation took off in 2003, multi-storied buildings have only started springing up more frequently as of 2010, usually for commercial or governmental purposes. Private properties consisting of multiple stories are still fairly rare, though definitely becoming much more prominently visible by October 2017.

¹⁸⁰ See De Bruijn 2014 on itinerant Qur’ānic schools in central Chad.

food—he has left his *maraboutage* far behind. Although he is well known, the state acknowledges his position as such; he has submitted the necessary paperwork, though his position has not yet been officially declared. Nevertheless, he is still invited to all state occasions where *chefs de cantons* are requested to be present, such as for a *défilé* for the president or on one of Chad's national days. One such important day, especially for nomadic communities, is the yearly festival in Wadi Djadid. On this occasion, the state donates cattle, camels, sheep, rice, flour, and sugar to the various *chefs de canton* and their people.

Table 2.1: Chefs de canton Misseria Rouges (including opposantes), 2014

Chefs de canton Misseria Rouges	Seat (sous-prefecture)	Khashim beyt
Abdoulaye Goudjeh (official, colonially appointed)	Koundjaar	Walad Sūrūr; colonially appointed
Mahamat al-Tubukh (<i>opposante</i>)	Wadi Djadīd	Mazaknéh; since 2003
Capitaine Baïne (<i>opposante</i>)	Assinet	Adjadjiré; since 2001
Muhammed Souleymane (<i>opposante</i>)	N'Djaména	Matanīn

It was this Muhammed Souleymane who approached Bachar on several occasions, finally convincing him to meet him at his house. Here he tried to convince Bachar that he and his *parents*, the tribe led by Kolokos, needed to leave the Dadjo canton and join his instead. He argued that the Misseria Rouge as a tribe needed to stick together—they belonged together and not with the Dadjo. ‘You live in N'Djaména, Bachar; you are an intellectual, not like your family *en brousse*.’ Bachar replied that this was something the *parents* would decide together. When he related his conversation with Muhammed Souleymane to them over the phone and again on one of our visits to Fadje in 2013, they answered that this was a decision that they had to reflect on calmly and slowly. Now was not the moment to act—‘*avec “x” temps*’, translated Bachar.

Bachar himself believes that they are fine where they are with the Dadjo for now. In his opinion, over time they should decide whether to stay with the Dadjo, whether to create their own canton, or whether to join the new *opposante*, a Walad Djifir. Ideally, they would want to have a *chef de race*,¹⁸¹ who would function like a *chef de canton*, to whom they could go to settle internal disputes. Only if a solution could not be found within the tribe would they put the case forward to the Dadjo *chef de canton*. In reality, the position of *chef de race* is equal to that of *chef de tribu*, which is now

¹⁸¹ The position of *chef de race*, like that of *chef de canton* and so on, was created under the French. A *chef de race* is like a *chef de canton* but without the *canton*. In most cities, one will find a *chef de race* for each tribe/ethnic group. In practice, however, here too we see the tendency to split up resulting in several *chefs de race* per *tribu*.

held by Kolokos. Kolokos, however, is not seen to be an assertive leader. To deal with things on the level of a *chef de race* (i.e. canton), they would require someone else.¹⁸² According to the *conseil*, this someone else should be Bachar Saad Harun himself.

By early 2014, Bachar had been told by his family in Fadjé that he himself should step forward as their *chef de canton*. Their plan was to then leave the Dadjo canton and join him. Bachar has refused to accept the proposition, but they are convinced that, with time, he will accept. When asked if there was no one better suited, Bachar replied that the problem is that there are very few family members who can read and write French.¹⁸³

Bachar, from intermediary to candidate

In the cases described throughout this chapter, the figure of Bachar keeps returning. This is not surprising, as he was my main research informant; and wherever he went, I went (and vice versa). Nevertheless, the role he has played throughout is a meaningful one to analyse. Through Bachar's intermediary role, one which at turns he took up and at other times was imposed upon him, certain actions and decisions were made. Bachar's role is one of close family and outsider at the same time. Firstly, the history of his father's position as *chef de ferikh* in the time of the French has influenced Bachar's prestige and respect throughout the *tribu*. His father was a highly respected man and many fond, bravado stories were often brought up on hot afternoons with elder generations. It is difficult to prove, but Bachar's lineage appears to have given him a certain validity as a person of leadership. Secondly, Bachar left his nomadic lifestyle behind at an early age, working for a group of Mbororo in Cameroon for several years before settling in N'Djaména and pursuing a career as driver for various national and international organizations. Although he picked up the ability to read and write French at a late age, he does possess these skills. This fact, combined with his reliable reputation, has made him the go-to intermediary. A third contributing factor is his proximity to Brahim Said, the ex-minister, retired and living in N'Djaména. Brahim and Bachar are direct paternal cousins; their fathers are brothers.

Taking the legal route

The Adjadjiree are another of the Misseria Rouges' sub-tribes who left their former canton, namely that of Abdoulaye Goudjeh, around 2001 to recreate their own. In an interview¹⁸⁴ with Capitaine Baïne, the current Adjadjiree *opposante chef de canton*, he explained that his family had been leaders (*3agiib*) long before the colonial powers came and placed another family in power. Their *sous-préfecture* is at Assinet (Batha Est); and according to him, the colonial archives in Paris show that the *cantonage* of the Misseria Rouges used to belong to them. Since 2013 they have filed official paperwork at the Ministry of Interior, claiming their canton back. Submitting such a claim is free of charge. It seems that only in the last few years, people have started reclaiming their former, mostly pre-colonial, rights. At independence, the Chadian government took over the existing

¹⁸² Conversation with Bachar, 21 January 2013.

¹⁸³ Conversation with Bachar, 21 February 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Interview held in March 2014 in Mongo, together with colleague Souleyame Adoum Abdoulaye.

colonial structures of governance. For a long time afterward, the government was more like a dictatorship—there was no possibility for people to exercise their own rights, according to Capitaine Baïne. In the last few years, this has become possible.¹⁸⁵

Capitaine Baïne grew up as a nomadic child—behind his family’s livestock, as they often say. Life was good, he recollects. On 2 April 1979 he left the *ferikh* to join the rebels. He left because life for nomadic people had become difficult (*sa3b*). He noticed that nomads were not being given the same rights as others in Chad: there was no schooling provided for them, and they were being marginalized. He joined the rebels to gain literacy skills and to help reverse the nomads’ inferior status. When the rebels were overrun by Déby in 1990, many were incorporated into the state army. This was also the case for Capitaine Baïne. He retired from his army post in 2011. The knowledge he gained during this time has made him aware of his and his people’s rights. By approaching and becoming a part of the state’s power, people have thus received rights and are now aware of these rights. The claim was submitted in 2013. Speaking in early 2014, Capitaine Baïne says patience is of key importance. It has always been that way. ‘We will talk and discuss and wait until we find a solution. We prefer the fair [legal] course of action; it is very important to us. And it is our right. Carrying out this process the legal way will help us in the long run.’ His advice echoes that which Brahim Saïd had given Fedellelah.

Leaders as strategy and resource

What is interesting here is who these opposing *chef de cantons* are and how leadership figures are seen, in a way, as a strategy and resource by the community. As might already have been deduced from the stories of Muhammed Souleymane and Bachar himself, being connected to the right people plays a role. But who are these ‘right’ people, and is this all? There is a real inclination to put those forward who speak French, have some form of non-Arabic education, and generally have ties with those in N’Djaména. Having a leader literate in French facilitates communication with authorities on various matters. On the very first visit in October 2011, for example, Bachar was asked to read a letter which Al-Hurr had received. Al-Hurr is the *khalīfa* and responsible for collecting taxes on livestock sold at the weekly markets. The letter informed the community of taxes to be paid per head of cattle. There are other ways to find out what the letter said, and I suspect that whoever handed it to Al-Hurr probably explained its contents to him. Nevertheless, having someone who could read and speak French within the community would be an obvious benefit. The cases of the Adjadjiree, and that of Abdoulaye Goudjeh, show the importance of having a leader who knows how to navigate the legal system and who has contacts in N’Djaména who may aid their cause.

Leaders thus form a ‘resource’, if you will, with specific qualities and are utilized to perform a specific role.¹⁸⁶ The leader-as-resource is managed by the community, while there exists at the same

¹⁸⁵ Referring to Niger, Köhler (2016a: 179) writes: ‘It should be noted that this multiplication of administrative chiefs is not a recent phenomenon, but has occurred since at least the mid-20th century.’ In the case of Chad, the multiplication itself may also not be a recent phenomenon, but the judicial act of challenging the existing chiefs is.

¹⁸⁶ Connections are a resource, (re)creating forms of compartmentalization in society (De Bruijn & van Dijk 2012). As such, connections and connectors are embedded in power relations, access, and wealth—and vice versa.

time a certain dependency on one another. A leader is nothing without his following, and loyalties can change—as the numerous cases of opposing *chefs de canton* show. There is often a financial aspect to these positions, not only the raising of money to put forward a new *chef de canton*, but also traditionally the collection of taxes and access to these kinds of ‘income’ later on. Perhaps the tasks of these newly chosen leaders are slightly different from what they used to entail—of this I am unsure.¹⁸⁷

In a way, the changes in choice of leaders—based not only on lineage as was previously the case, but also on their capabilities, skills, and connections, next to their general character—can be seen as a strategy which embodies both flexibility and control. Through choosing certain individuals, the Walad Djafir (and other sub-tribes) show the ability to be flexible while hoping to increase the control they have over their own lives.¹⁸⁸ De Bruijn and van Dijk (1995: 406) argue that flexibility cannot exist without political and cultural control, and they describe it as ‘[...] the basis of virtually all forms of organization, agricultural techniques, resource distribution, social security arrangements, and normative frameworks’. There are, however, numerous strategies which individuals and communities can choose from, and there is no set format.

At the time I was revising this chapter in 2017, Bachar had not taken up the position his family would have liked him to. His role as mediator still exists; yet owing to his current job¹⁸⁹—the transportation of people and goods from N’Djaména to Ati, and between the various weekly markets around Ati—he often does not have the time or mobile network to be in such close contact as he was when permanently based in N’Djaména, or indeed during the various fieldworks periods with me. Nevertheless, the cases of Abdoulaye Goudjeh, Hadj Hamdaan, and Bachar himself are examples of how those in various positions of leadership can have both a connecting and disconnecting role, roles which they themselves take up or which are placed upon them as a result of decisions they have made.

In a way, a focus on leaders as both connectors and disconnectors reflects the histories of mobility and fluidity we often find in nomadic societies. Cordell explains how this need for flexibility with security provides a way of understanding the ‘local histories characterised by confusing and seemingly contradictory narratives of raids and counter-raids, of pacts made and pacts broken’ (1985: 322-23). In certain contexts, *ferikh* members pull their strengths together and are as close as can be (fusion). In other cases, for whatever reasons, they ‘fight’ each other. In a way, they are brothers in arms (fighting a common battle), but also brothers *at* arms (fighting each other). Throughout the other chapters, this dualism—or paradox even?—returns in some form or

¹⁸⁷ It is not clear to me how this would be arranged. When discussing the various new and opposing *chefs de canton*, this aspect did not arise and I neglected to focus on it myself. It would be strange for Bachar to be the one to collect taxes while living in N’Djaména, so it is likely that a different structure would have been created.

¹⁸⁸ See De Bruijn & van Dijk (1995: 503-6) on the dialectical relation between flexibility and control.

¹⁸⁹ Bachar’s current employment is partly a result of Chad’s economic decline—he would have preferred a job as a driver for one of the NGOs or other aid organizations based in N’Djaména, but he says there are not that many positions available—and those that exist are usually given to family or friends. It is difficult to get your foot in the door without the right connections. This seems ironic when one remembers that Bachar’s extended family had asked him to become their new *chef de canton*, and it shows how relative this connectivity is.

other, informing choices which are either for or against the consensus of the group, the *ferīkh*, or that of an individual family member. Fission and fusion.

Brothers in *and* at arms: On fission and fusion

This chapter has delved into some of the challenges the Walad Djifir have recently faced in terms of leadership-strife, land use, and the subsequent forming or strengthening of allegiances. Without doing so explicitly, the cases described show the structure and functioning of the *ferīkh* as a non-isolated unit. The consequences of a very personal tragedy—namely, the accidental death of Harun's son—is simultaneously a communal tragedy with monetary and other implications for the *ferīkh* and also very much a test of solidarity and social cohesion. This is a test which Hadj Hamdaan and company, in this specific case, failed to pass—according to Bachar and others—and which has resulted in a rift between members of the same *khashim beyt*, ultimately leading to the creation of an opposing *chef de ferīkh*, who is contemplating splitting from Hadj Hamdaan's group and joining another (*opposante*) *chef de canton*. While the events which have led up to this potential divide are probably more numerous than I was able to discover, the result is the same.¹⁹⁰

Returning first to the case of the death of Harun's son as one illustration of socio-political relations within the *ferīkh*, we will add to the complexity of family and allegiances. Harun Adoum and Hadj Hamdaan Adoum are in fact brothers, Harun being the youngest son of their father and a different mother. On his own departure to CAR in May 2012, Hadj Hamdaan had refused to acknowledge his younger brother's departure greeting. He had even been rude and told him to go away when he had come to visit him. This action caused their eldest sister much distress. Harun had been able to come up with most of the money owed to the other *ferīkh*. Hadj Hamdaan had been furious when he discovered Harun had done this without his explicit blessing. In a way, Harun had shown himself as the better man—in the end it is his *own* son whom he will never see again. Members of the *conseil* (Abu Ramla, Djibrine, and Adoum Judah specifically) still agreed with Hadj Hamdaan. When I asked Bachar how a *marabout*, which both Hadj Hamdaan and Abou Ramla are, could agree to this and what the '*grand*' *ferīkh marabout* had to say about it all, he replied that even the *grand marabout* had talked until he was tired ('*il a parler fatigué*'). They would not listen to him. Bachar was greatly affected by the situation and feared it would break up the family.

In the case of Abdoulaye Goudjeh, another kind of injustice lies at the foreground—namely, that of land dis-ownership. The themes of a perceived injustice and calling on certain family members—brothers, if you will—to aid the community's cause seem to run through both case studies. By highlighting the actions of certain individual leadership figures, the non-coherence and unambiguity (see Cordell 1985; Debos 2016) of these actions come to the fore: people are contradictory in nature, interpreting the importance of certain values in different ways. In the case of Harun's son,

¹⁹⁰ Debos (2016: 120) draws a distinction between the effects of actions and the intentions behind them.

the issue has caused a certain divide (fission)¹⁹¹ among the community. The land issue with Abdoulaye Goudjeh, in turn, has resulted in a feeling of needing to unite. At the level of these leaders, their actions and choices seem to be between 1) protecting the cohesion of the group, and 2) making choices, individual or otherwise, which break the group apart. Interestingly, these almost contradictory reactions can and do exist at the same time.¹⁹²

Traditionally, the idea of fission and fusion in relation to pastoral-nomadic groups has usually been in reference to exactly that: the group. With these case studies, I have wanted to question whether such processes can also take other forms or be discerned at other levels of social organization, borrowing aspects of the human geographer's notion of a 'politics of scale'¹⁹³—or rather, as Brenner would have it, 'a politics of scaling',¹⁹⁴ whereby the process of scaling is one '[...] through which multiple spatial units are established, differentiated, hierarchized and, under certain conditions, rejigged, reorganised and recalibrated in relation to one another' (2001: 600). At its most basic, human geographers see scale as a form of hierarchy whereby there is a fluidity of movement across the scales, and the scales themselves should not be seen as fixed entities. We are thus borrowing this notion of 'scale' (see Smith 1996; Marston 2000; Brenner 2001) yet using the actions of individuals and communities to define/construct what the scales themselves are made up of.

The actions of *ferīkh* members at these various 'scales'—individual, family, and larger tribe—are framed and also situated within specific geographical and non-geographical spaces; and even though there is a certain fluidity of space, it is 'fundamentally premised on some quite traditional spatial fixities' (Smith 1996: 70). Spatially, there are different levels of interaction and decision making: the level of the family, or brothers even (i.e. Hadj Hamdaan and Harun); the level of the *ferīkh* (i.e. Hadj Hamdaan, the *conseil*, and the *opposante*); the level of local politics (i.e. the *chefs de canton* of the Misseria Rouges, the Dadjo, and the *opposante*); and the level of national politics

¹⁹¹ On fission and kinship structures determining the composition of the splitting up of the village, see Holy (1974: 64-65, 171). Fission, in the context of the Berti of Sudan, is often due to disputes—i.e. loyalty to a certain sheikh over land shortages—or when a village's population has grown and thus the village has had to spread out too much. On historical changes in ethnic affiliation in relation to fission and fusion (group reconfigurations), see Köhler (2016a: 37-38). On discussions of integration, withdrawal, and marginality in relation to the state, see Azarya (1996b: 66-67). In the case of the Walad Djifir, moments of fission are often related to the size or composition of a herd, with *ferīkhs* splitting up to accommodate the larger numbers of cattle or to allow camels the space they need. In this ethnography, we explore other forms fission may take—not just the physical splitting up of a group but the splitting of opinion and the (re)actions involved. This places the emphasis—of the result of fission and fusion processes—on social relations and the creation of opportunities through the destabilization of existing hierarchies.

¹⁹² See Rosen (2017: 37) referring to Evans-Pritchard (1940: 142-44) on 'the odd contradictions that may arise when two low-level segments are in conflict with one another at one level, but in alliance at some higher level'. See Djama (2010: 108) on the 'balance of power', a structural model of political equilibrium between social groups, '...the members of a kinship group may fight against one another in the course of a conflict but will join forces against another more distant group in genealogical terms'. Here Djama revisits the writings of I.M. Lewis.

¹⁹³ These geographical scales are very much socially constructed and primarily linked to capitalism. See Brenner (2001: 599) for some history on the 'politics of scale' notion: 'the notion of a politics of scale denotes the production, reconfiguration or contestation of some aspect of sociospatial organisation within a relatively bounded geographical arena—usually labeled the local, the urban, the regional [...]'.

¹⁹⁴ A politics of scaling acknowledges the various 'differentiations, orderings and hierarchies among geographical scales [...] their embeddedness and positionalities in relation to a multitude of smaller or larger spatial units within a multitiered, hierarchically configured geographical scaffolding'. (Brenner 2001: 600)

(involving decisions made in colonial times, the working of the justice system, and proving the right to land). We see how various actors, ranging from individuals to families and groups, make different decisions at these different hierarchical levels, and see that perhaps this hierarchy is in the eye of the beholder, as well as dependent on the situation.¹⁹⁵ The interplay between notions of loyalty and security (informing feelings of belonging) seems to impact how people deal with these different levels, whereby one should always leave some wiggle room for the role of pride.

Throughout the negotiation and decision-making processes of the Walad Djifir, multiple spatial units are established (see Brenner 2001: 600). Arguments are made as to where loyalties should lie: with certain individuals due to their lineage or reputation, or with the larger group. There is a certain ambiguity to this process, which brings us back to why this ‘politics of scale’ approach is useful for understanding how the *ferīkh* (as space) is socially constructed. Gille & Ó Riain (2002) word it nicely when they refer to Brenner’s (1999, 2000) ideas on a ‘politics of scale’ and the need to show how an understanding of space as socially constructed is positioned within ‘the negotiation of the hierarchy and legitimacy of different scales of social action’. This is important in that it reveals

a destabilisation of the existing hierarchies’ spatial scales (...) [and] also opens up opportunities for social actors to develop new combinations of local, national, transnational and global social relations. (Gille & Ó Riain 2002: 278)

Hadj Hamdaan’s individual actions have caused some to question his position as leader, while others have even gone against his decisions. At the same time, he is still sheikh, and so not much has changed. His actions, however, have created opportunities for the agendas of those he slighted and who have now decided to join the *opposante*—new combinations of leadership are forming while old patterns of entitlement are sometimes fallen back upon. The allegiance with the Dadjo is another example of shifts in the legitimacy of leadership and the opening up of opportunities. It is socio-historical processes such as these, even if they are unambiguous and perhaps exactly because of this, through which the *ferīkh* as spatial form ‘is established and differentiated as a unit of socio-spatial organisation, activity, conflict, struggle, discourse and/or imagination’ (Brenner 2001: 599).

How then can all of this help us understand what the *ferīkh* as a place and space entails? Smith (1996: 71) argues for the continued importance of fixed spaces and places, explaining how the relationship between the fluidity and fixity of space is itself restructured, though not in a uni-directional manner. The notion of place is therefore not made obsolete but perhaps reinvented at a different scale (ibid. 72). Returning to the case studies, the notion of the *ferīkh* and all that it stands for is seen to be conceptualized in different ways in different situations (scales), reinforcing what it stands for as opposed to rendering it obsolete. Is the *ferīkh*, then, as a socially constructed space,

¹⁹⁵ A description of the Wodaabe of east-central Niger resonates here: ‘The personality of a chief is important in attracting followers, but politico-administrative affiliations seem to have been subjected also to highly strategic and opportunistic considerations since long in the region. Political shifts can be occasioned by conflicts internal to the community: A man might change his affiliation because he does not get along with the chief (*arāḍo*) he had followed to date, or because he strives himself after political power. In practice, changes in politico-administrative affiliation are often linked to processes of group fission, on the one hand, and to mobility and migration, on the other.’ (Köhler 2016a: 173)

one which binds the Walad Djifir together—whether through cohesion (fusion) or friction (fission)? I would say that it is.

That which causes this cohesion or friction to come about is in part determined by the actions of individuals, such as leaders, and the communal reactions to them. These reactions seem to take place within a certain framework of ‘politics’—that is, in reference to what is deemed to create security mixed with a certain pride and sense of being wronged (Holy 1974). The functioning of the *ferīkh* thus exists through the choices people make and their ideas (perspectives) of how things should be in reference to individual and collective grievances, of wrong and right, and of wants for the future, such as schooling and security for their children.

So how does the *ferīkh*, in relation to socio-politics, inform or act as a frame of reference for the Walad Djifir? In answering this question, we see a continuity in historical trends and a fluidity of belonging amidst rupture. The naming of Goudjeh Walad Hamatta as *chef de canton* placed in his hands a certain power to decide over land use and ownership—a power which seems to have been misused by his son (the current *chef de canton*) and which in turn has led to a change in leadership alliance on the part of ‘his’ subjects. While Koundjaar remains an important historical seat of power for the Misseria Rouges, having jurisdiction over the terrain to which the Walad Djifir feel they belong (al-Habilai), this has not prevented the Walad Djifir from seeking security with a different canton. These dynamics of socio-political strife are not a new phenomena but are characterized by a certain historical continuity. In turn, the interplay between notions of loyalty and security may be interpreted as aspects informing feelings (emotions) of belonging. Contrary to the way fission and fusion is usually used in relation to a nomadic group, this chapter questions its usefulness as a way of analysing similar processes at other levels of social organization. Even though the *ferīkh* functions as a framework of reference toward which people justify their actions, this does not mean disparities and ambiguity do not exist. There is, one may say, a certain fission and fusion in the way Walad Djifir as a sub-tribe, members of an extended family, and even individuals (leaders and non-leaders) relate to this framework when justifying their decisions.



2.1 Visit to the home of *chef de canton* of the Misseria Rouges in Koundjaar, April 2012. We were invited by Bachar's cousin, who had been raised alongside the current *chef de canton*, and joined by Adoum Judah and Fedellelah.

2.2 Seeking network reception in the home of the *chef de canton* in Koundjaar, April 2012. This building was built over fifty years earlier by Abdoulaye Goudjeh's father. It is a square building with entrances to the front and rear. The traditional building style, using mud, wood, and branches, means that it stays relatively cool during the day—its high ceilings allowing the hot air to rise up and escape through the small window slits under the roof.



2.3 Bachar receiving a phone call from Hadj Hamdaan asking for an update, with the market of Koundjaar in the background, April 2012. It was not a market day, but we had come to where there was a generator so that we could have our phones charged by the man running this as a business. Hadj Hamdaan had to wait for his answer, as Bachar did not feel free to talk openly in public. In addition, neither Adoum Judah or Fedellelah ever spoke with the *chef de canton* directly. Instead, we spent most of the afternoon hanging around, with Bachar and his cousin discussing the land situation and trying to mediate the more fierce reactions of the other two men.





2.4 Kolokos's *ferikh* in Fané, March 2012. Kolokos (in green) is the *chef de tribu* and a direct cousin of Bachar and Brahim. Fané is located just north of Bandaro.

2.5 Hadj Hamdaan (middle), his brother Haamid (far right), December 2012. Several others of the *ferikh conseil* turned up to discuss the land issue. Zaynebah's son Haamid is seen sitting to the right of Hadj Hamdaan. I had just spent a few months in CAR, and little Haamid was evidently eager to hear any news about his mother.



2.6 Harun and Burma working on Hadji Ghali's arm, April 2012. This picture was taken shortly before Hadj Hamdaan and Zaynebah left for Sassileh (CAR). At the time, Hadji Ghali was very upset that Hadj Hamdaan refused to say goodbye to their brother Harun and mend their differences before he left. Here, Harun is using his knowledge of tending to the limbs of his livestock to help his elderly sister, who had fallen and broken her arm.

2.7 Two of the council members at a wedding, March 2013. Al-Hurr, pictured on the right, was one of the men who did not always agree with Hadj Hamdaan's ways and said he was like the weather: hard to predict.



2.8 Abu Ramla, another council member, and *fakir*, March 2014. Abu Ramla was also one of the milder men in the council, supporting Harun's actions and trying to reason with Hadj Hamdaan.





2.9 The new school at Tchoufiou II Arabe, March 2012. The school was an initiative of the parents. The teacher is paid by the parents and offered a home (*kouzi*) and food.

2.10 A second classroom was soon added to the school in Tchoufiou, January 2013

2.11 Parents (men) clearing the grounds before the first day of school, March 2012. Many members of the *ferīkh* council as well as some other parents helped sweep up and clear any prickly branches so that the children could play outside during recess.



2.12 The village of Tchoufiou II Arabe, May 2012. It houses a mixture of nomadic tents and permanent huts made with bricks and straw roofing.



THREE

THE WALK OF LIFE: LIVESTOCK AND WEALTH

Mariam Lemoen:¹⁹⁶ *Wadeet as-sirī ma'a al-djamal. Al-djamal bas akheer.*

I want to transhumance [travel] with the camels. The camels are the best.

Inge: *Leeh?*

Why?

Mariam Lemoen: Because we can place our things on their backs.

Bachar: And which milk do you think is the tastiest?

Mariam Lemoen: *'an al ghanam bas helu, al-labn.*

That of the goats is good, the milk.

Inge: What would you like to do when you are older?

Mariam Lemoen: *Biyimshu al-'eidd, ma' Ibaaris.*

Go to the watering hole with Ibaaris.

Inge: And where is Ibaaris now?

Mariam Lemoen: *Al-waqt da, Ibaaris saarih. Ibaaris maashi babi' al-natron min al-hilleh. Al-beyt da 'an Fatneh. Timillah bi-l'eish. Kaan imbakr tisurtuh, timshu bi-ha. Tisrah aleena. Tisrah leku bi-lghanam walla djamal. Hija matifatish al-khanazai. Timillah foq al-'eish.*

At this time, Ibaaris is travelling. Ibaaris has gone to the village to buy natron. That house is Fatneh's. She is preparing food. When tomorrow Ibaaris leaves again, he will take it with him. He will travel with the goats or camels. She is getting the sheep [now]. She will give them food.

Bachar: *Almi bishribu ween?*

Where do they drink water?

Mariam Lemoen: *Foq al-'eidd.*

At the 'eidd.

Bachar: *Kaan inti kabiri, tisrah bi shunuh?*

When you are big/older, what will you travel [transhumance] with?

Mariam Lemoen: *Tisrah bi-djamal walla baqqar. Ammi biyamilluh 'eish.*

¹⁹⁶ At the time of this conversation in 2014, Mariam Lemoen was a five- or six-year-old girl. She had been living in the same encampment (ferīkh) as I was on my stay with them in 2012, so we saw a lot of each other. She shared a tent with her mother (Fatnéh), older brother (Maddé), and father (Hamid). In 2014, she had lost neither her curiosity nor her mischievous look.

I will travel with camel or cattle. Mama will make the *boulle* [also when she is older].

— Conversation with Mariam Lemoen, five/six years old, 9 March 2014

The conversation above is illustrative of how engrained the nomadic way of life already is at such a young age. In fact, children's games often consist of mimicking the daily activities of their elders—using a long stick to simulate the shaking down of edible leaves for the goats and sheep to eat. From a young age, children are familiar with the *ferīkh*'s daily activities and are encouraged to help out. They sit alongside their elders when discussions are held on decisions that need to be made. As in many pastoral-nomadic groups, livestock, livelihood, and social organization go hand-in-hand, but both are of course not limited to the domain of the *ferīkh* alone. As discussed in the previous chapter, those living in the *ferīkh* do not do so as isolated units, and livestock provide one of the reasons for socio-economic interactions with the world outside the *ferīkh*.¹⁹⁷ Where in the past livestock were the primary source of sustenance, nowadays—as in many other pastoral-nomadic communities—livestock have become commodified, and other sources of sustenance are sought. With this transformation, the value of cattle in a cultural sense and the relations that are informed by this value are shifting.¹⁹⁸

Granovetter (1985) shows us that economic relations are embedded within society, implying that a physical commodity, such as cattle, is more than its physical characteristics. Conceptually speaking, it is part of a system with specific conditions. Such a line of thinking is linked to agency, as Gertel and Le Heron (2016) go on to say that if the former is true, pastoralists also in turn structure the commodity.¹⁹⁹ This echoes the idea of the hybrid as an object having both properties which define it and vice versa—that is, they can both carry a 'flow' and stop it.²⁰⁰ Perceptions and attitudes toward cattle can thus help explain the actions of individuals and groups; they reveal such things as kin relations and are simultaneously explained by these same kin relations. In a sense,

¹⁹⁷ Khazanov (1994) speaks of the 'outside world' in relation to sedentary people. In this ethnography I would like to (a) move away from the sedentary–nomadic dichotomy in the sense that the world 'outside' the *ferīkh* includes both sedentary and nomadic populations; and (b) show that there is no clear-cut 'outside' or 'inside' world as such: everything is connected, and these 'worlds' are fluid.

¹⁹⁸ See De Bruijn 1995, 1997; Casciarri 1995; Shehu & Hassan 1995; Hodgson 1999; Gertel 2007; Holtzman 2009; Marfaing 2014; and Gertel & Le Heron 2016 on the diverse effects of the commodification of livestock on women/female agency/gender inequality, and on the factor of access to money—as opposed to livestock—for pastoral diet, social organization, and economic activities.

¹⁹⁹ The idea of something being defined by its own intrinsic properties as well as by the meaning it is given by others is reflected in Khazanov's words: 'Both the sociopolitical organization of any nomadic society as a whole and many of its specific forms can and should be looked at from two angles: from within, as having risen directly out of the needs and particularities of the functioning of the society itself; and from outside, as having been stimulated, completely or partially, by the particularities and needs of its relations with the outside world' (1994: 123).

²⁰⁰ See Strathern 1996 in relation to 'cutting the network'.

livestock provide, both for the Walad Djifir and analytically speaking, a certain groundedness²⁰¹—they are inherent to a pastoral-nomadic way of life and provide a focus in the interactions with external forces, revealing continuity amidst changes to ways of making a living.²⁰²

Cattle, therefore, are the common denominator of this chapter. The attitudes of people, in this case the Walad Djifir, toward cattle bring out different themes, which are interwoven within various domains—the familial, economic, social, and even political. These themes emerge in the way people explain the decisions they or others have made vis-à-vis making a living and can be linked to a variety of concepts often discussed in nomadic studies. By opening with the little conversation between Bachar, myself, and Mariam Lemoen, I wished to start at the base, there where cattle—indeed livestock in general—form a primary subject of attention and knowledge for those Walad Djifir brought up and still living in the *ferīkh* setting. With cattle come such subjects as transhumance, the need to be flexible (more on this later), the role of kin relations in how herds are grouped and split up, and the devastating effects of droughts and diseases.

Numerous researchers have concentrated their efforts on studying various economic dimensions of the pastoral-nomadic way of life in relation to markets.²⁰³ Others have written about the role of uncertainty or insecurity on an ecological or income level as drivers for labour migration.²⁰⁴ Köhler (2016b: v-vii) takes these studies a step further by focusing more on the way in which urban endeavours have also ‘opened up new and attractive resources’. He looks at how transformations within pastoral-nomadic ways of life, such as engaging in labour migration to urban centres, have created ‘new spatial orientations affect[ing] inter-group relations and, closely related, processes of identification and the construction and redefinition of social boundaries’.

In a way, the young life of Mariam Lemoen is already linked to several of the above angles of research, showing how her relatively mundane life is connected to the more ‘extraordinary’ globalizing wilderness we spoke about in the Introduction chapter. At the time of our conversation, her father was in charge of a large portion of the camels her uncle had bought as part of an inheritance—an inheritance which would be shared among the family members according to Islamic law; an inheritance which, as the Introduction already showed, was based on the assets of another of Mariam Lemoen’s uncles, who had been living and working as a merchant in CAR. The reason for choosing to invest in camels instead of cattle is most probably linked to their ‘retail value’—the possible profit to be made between buying, rearing, and then selling the camel again.

²⁰¹ The idea of groundedness will be developed further but should be understood along the lines of ‘being a grounded person’, linked to an intrinsic knowing/familiarity in relation to cattle. It is something perceived at the level of the individual, though may be used to understand movements and decisions of extended families.

²⁰² As for the Shuwa Arabs of the Nigerian Chad Basin (and for Baggara Arabs in general), the idea of a ‘cattle complex’ is not necessarily relevant to the Walad Djifir. Instead, cattle are predominantly seen in terms of economic rationality, as well as being a source of prestige. I am unsure if I would go as far as calling it a ‘mercenary attitude’ concerning cattle (Braukämper 1996: 64), but they do also regularly sell a percentage of their herds.

²⁰³ See the edited volume by Gertel & Le Heron (2016), with Part III containing case studies from Chad, Sudan, Kenya and Morocco; see Ciabbarri 2010 on social changes in relation to kinship, trade, and the livestock market in northern Somalia.

²⁰⁴ See Manoli et al. 2014 on Fulani in the pastoral reserve of Ferlo, Senegal; Köhler 2016a, 2016b on the Wodaabe of east-central Niger.

These and other shifts in livelihood strategies come with consequences. For Hamid and Hadj Hamdaan, the inheritance of their brother and subsequent investment in camels have impacted the family's daily workload, the composition of the *ferīkh*, and, ultimately, social relations. Similarly, the move to a semi-sedentary lifestyle has (in)directly affected women's interactions with market/economic activities outside of the *ferīkh*—a process which also entails a monopolization of access to goods (and information) by the men who go to market. Whether agreeing to decisions made or not, and whether satisfied with limits on market-going, everyone finds themselves following the new patterns.

Kin, cattle and flexibility

Mariam Lemoen's father, Hamid Adam, is a man whose body shows the signs of hard labour. His back plagues him and his hands are arthritic.²⁰⁵ From 2011 to 2012, Hamid shared a *ferīkh* with his younger brother Hadj Hamdaan, taking care of their joint herds. He is married to two women, the first a direct cousin and the second a woman from a different sub-tribe. Hamid no longer herds the cattle to and from their grazing lands, yet he does actively help out at the '*eidd* (عید). The daily watering of the cattle at the '*eidd* is hard work, pulling up the 40-litre sacks of water from their shallow wells. In a way, cattle require the most work, along with goats and sheep. Cattle need to graze and drink water every day; and as the dry season continues, they need to be led further and further away for suitable pastures. This latter task is most often carried out by the younger boys, allowing the elderly men to rest during the evenings. In turn, the herder boys rest at the '*eidd* during the day. Camels on the other hand can go for a week without water, and they tend to be herded by one person. Depending on how densely populated the area is, camel herders will either roam around the relative vicinity of the *ferīkh* or stay away for up to five or seven days at a time before returning to the watering holes (and the vicinity of the *ferīkh*).

Early in 2014, Hamid and his young family (with his second wife, Fatnéh) had been put in charge of a large herd of camels. Together with a newly-wed son (from his first marriage), he now lived at some distance from the other camps. His son herded goats and sheep, staying away two to three nights at a time but visiting the '*eidd* every day. This situation was the result of an inheritance which had been left to the family. The inheritance came from Hamid and Hadj Hamdaan's elder brother, Muhammad, who had passed away a few years earlier. This brother had built up a commercial business in CAR.²⁰⁶ With his passing, following Islamic custom, his inheritance was to be distributed among the family, with one-third going to his direct male relatives and two-thirds to

²⁰⁵ A study conducted amongst Fulani (593) and Arab cattle breeders (377) and Arab camel breeders (122) of Chari-Baguirmi and Kanem prefectures showed that joint pain and back pain represented 11.6% and 10.8% respectively of the health issues found amongst those over 46 years of age (Schelling et al. 2005: 21). Sixteen out of 18 people with arthritis in the knee were cattle breeders.

²⁰⁶ Details will be discussed later on in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

his only daughter.²⁰⁷ Hadj Hamdaan was in charge of selling off the capital found in CAR. This capital took the form of cattle, herded by a group of Mbororo,²⁰⁸ and the form of land and some shops. The cash this raised was transferred to Chad and re-invested in camels.

The question to ask here is why Hadj Hamdaan decided to invest in camels instead of in cattle, a type of livestock which they were already herding. Already in 2012, the influx of camels into their camp had led to a necessary split.²⁰⁹ From one day to the other, Hadj Hamdaan had moved his wife and young children²¹⁰ to a terrain known as Al-Berekeh, some three days' walk away, and located about 21 km to the south of Mongo but along the same *wadi* (see Map 1.3). The move had caused an upheaval among the family members left behind and also with the *ferikh conseil*, whom he had not consulted. 'Al-Hadj is like the weather,' Al-Hurr commented. 'You never know what he will do.' Hassineh, Hadj Hamdaan's wife, suffered greatly on the journey; and in the days after the move, every one of the children was brought to the hospital on different occasions.²¹¹ As the move was made in such haste, little was prepared in advance. In addition, day-time temperatures in this period (early April 2012) can easily rise over 40 C. Hassineh and the children suffered from dehydration symptoms (headache, fever) and were all at different times placed on a drip. The youngest of nine months had a bad infection of the ear and throat glands. The eldest son was treated for a skin disease on the head involving huge welts of puss. On such occasions, when a camp is displaced, time is not taken to prepare a warm meal; instead, left-overs are eaten, sometimes with milk.

²⁰⁷ According to Islamic custom, there are three classes of inheritors: (1) *Fard*: husband, wife, children, mother, father; (2) *Aceb*: family of the male, i.e. younger sons, grandfather, brothers of same father; (3) *Ahla rihm*: family of the female, i.e. maternal grandmother, daughters (Brahim 1988: 65).

²⁰⁸ The Mbororo are a group of nomadic pastoralists (Fulani), commonly found in the CAR–Cameroon region but many of whom fled into eastern Cameroon following the outbreak(s) of violence after the 2013 coup and the increased presence of armed groups in general on their pasture lands. When we visited Zayneb in the village in CAR (December 2012), among the women and children gathered in her household were several Mbororo. See Amadou 2012, 2015; Amadou et al. 2016; De Vries 2018 for a more in-depth view of the Mbororo's situation, discussing such issues as political inclusion, social exclusion, gaining refugee status in a 'home' country, and the role of the mobile phone in a context of immobility.

²⁰⁹ Khazanov (1994: 26) says about camel rearing: 'The idea that camels are undemanding about what food they eat in actual fact only applies to desert plants which are rich in salt. When camels raised in desert conditions feed in rich pastures they grow thin and finally die (Baskin, 1976: 71).' This partly explains the need to move elsewhere with the camel herds, as they have different dietary needs from the cattle, though the Guéra and Batha do seem to provide well for both. Khazanov continues: 'In the extremely arid conditions in which the Bedouin of Arabia, the Tuareg of the Sahara and the Somali of the Horn of Africa live, camel-rearing, on the one hand, and sheep- and goat-rearing, on the other, are rarely compatible and usually differentiated in different areas of economic activity' (p. 27). This does not seem to be the case in the Sahelian regions of the Guéra and Batha, where one sees camels grazing alongside goats and sheep.

²¹⁰ Five children aged nine months to twelve years.

²¹¹ Hampshire (2002) describes the role of seasonal fluidity in social and domestic organization and how this can constrict women's abilities to mobilize networks to access health care. At certain times in the year, when the camps are spaced fairly closely together around an '*eidd*', women have easier access to their social/supportive networks. When the camps disperse or, as in the case of Hassineh, her nuclear family moves to a more remote area, the resources and support/advice others could offer are lacking and health issues tend to be left unaddressed (for too long). It is a combination of access to health care, as well as the support of other women when it comes to household tasks, which can affect how easily a woman recovers. Hassineh was lucky in that Hadj Hamdaan acknowledged the health issues and transported them to the hospital in Mongo. It is, in fact, his duty as a father and husband.

Hadj Hamdaan had moved his family's camp because the camels needed more space. As Hassineh's half-sister and her husband were already camel herders, he relocated to be with them. This placed a strain on those that now had to take care of Hadj Hamdaan's cattle herd, which he had left behind. When, a few weeks later, in mid-May 2012, Hadj Hamdaan left for CAR, Hamid was put in charge of the camels and sent to Al-Berekeh to replace him. This placed an added strain on those that now had to take care of both Hadj Hamdaan and Hamid's herds, as Hamid had always been an active worker. When Hadj Hamdaan returned from CAR in December 2013, he regrouped the camp to encompass both his and Hamid's cattle, along with the herd of camels. By February 2014, we found Hamid and family living on the east side of the road to Ati and at a distance from the *'eidd* on the terrain known as Fadjé. Although they were not as isolated as they had been in Al-Berekeh, the women complained that they disliked being left 'home alone' while the men were away herding for nights on end. The nearest camp was that of Hassineh's half-sister and her husband, who also still had camels, and together with whom Hamid herded. But the distance was too great for a woman in need of help to be heard.

Flexibility and shifts in strategies

The foregoing account serves to show how, on the one hand, decisions involving the social organization of the camps are strongly related to the composition of the herds and require a level of flexibility from those involved.²¹² Camels need more space and thus lead to a certain isolation. Cattle, in contrast, due to their watering and grazing needs, are best tended to by numerous hands. As herds are passed on from parents to children, the preferred marriage is between direct cousins, keeping the herd within the family.²¹³ At times when the herds are too large to be taken care of by the number of men available in the *ferīkh*, the herd and their owners will split.²¹⁴ In the previous chapter, we also discussed such processes of fission and fusion yet added a dimension—namely, the reasons *and* results in light of socio-political relations and the creation of opportunities through the destabilization of existing hierarchies.

On the other hand, kin relations and herd compositions are not the only factors informing nomadic flexibility. The semi-sedentary status of the Walad Djifir has its roots in the years after the cattle disease and droughts. The livestock that were left were too weak to continue making the long journeys. In addition, the transhumance is costly, as little profit is made from selling the tired

²¹² Throughout the ethnography it will become clearer what flexibility entails in relation to the Walad Djifir. While Walad Djifir flexibility is linked to various forms and reasons for mobility, there is also a more personal aspect to it—the walk of life—which resonates with Michael Jackson's (2013) concept of 'the wherewithal of life'. On a conceptualization of flexibility in relation to pastoral studies, see De Bruijn & van Dijk 1995, as mentioned in Introduction and Chapter 2 of this ethnography.

²¹³ It must be noted here that women from other nomadic tribes do marry into the Walad Djifir.

²¹⁴ See Greenough 2012 for an example from the Fulbe in Niger, seen transitioning between forms of agropastoralism and exclusive pastoralism, partly causing fission and fusion, as large herds mean people have to move away to look for grass.

animals, profit with which material necessities are met.²¹⁵ While, in one way, settling in camps along a *wadi* near Mongo for longer periods of time has provided a certain rest for the Walad Djifir, it has also brought more work. Women used to make and sell products at the market such as churned milk, butter, woven mats, and baskets.²¹⁶ The money earned went toward the daily nourishment of them and their children, with men joining in these meals. Nowadays, at least among this sub-tribe of the Walad Djifir, there are not many women left who earn a little money of their own. During conversations held in March 2012 and 2014, both men and women claimed it was due to the changes in their transhumance patterns that they no longer had time to engage in these kinds of activities. Men in turn take care of the cattle and trade with other men.²¹⁷ Traditionally, men did not take part in trade; it was only the women. Women would, and some still do, trade in vegetables, milk, butter, peanuts, and so on with each other at the markets. At Banda's weekly Thursday market and Mongo's daily market, one can indeed see a divide with women selling vegetables, fruit, and other fresh produce such as eggs, baked items, dried tomatoes, and garlic at one side of the market and goods such as tea, sugar, rice, and clothes being sold primarily by men in a different section.²¹⁸

Now that much of the year they stay put, the women spend most of their time collecting wood and water, preparing food, and taking care of their youngest children. During transhumance fewer meals are cooked, saving time. The wood that is needed is collected en route, as is water. Nowadays, women spend several hours every two to three days gathering wood, having to go further and further the longer they stay in the area. Most women in charge of their own *barsh* (tent)²¹⁹ make two trips to the 'eidd per day, using their donkey to fetch about 80 litres every time. Throughout the various fieldwork periods I did observe younger women get together to weave mats or baskets, but there seems to be some truth in statements that the majority of them are older women. One man even claimed that many younger women do not have the knowledge or techniques required. I am unsure that this is entirely true, as some women were still selling their woven products within the *ferīkh* itself. However, depending on how large the female household is, more hands can do the work, thus leaving more time for other activities. Women with little support

²¹⁵ Azarya (1996a), referring to certain pastoralists, seems to say the opposite: that being sedentary/settled is more expensive. It must depend on the state of the animals and on the environment—times of drought versus optimal conditions for fattening of the herds. Holtzman (2009: 235) explains how the Samburu preferred to stay fixed in one place due to the access to a range of services (markets, healthcare, education) and the added benefit of not having to disassemble and then set up camp again, a fairly laborious task.

²¹⁶ See Brahim 1988 on economic activities of the Misseria Rouges.

²¹⁷ Conversation with Hadj Hamdaan, fieldnotes, 2 March 2012. De Bruijn 1995 (Fulbe in Central Mali), Casciarri 1995 (Ahamda pastoralists Central Sudan), and Hodgson 1999 (on Kisongo Maasai) describe how the market economy and commodification of cattle contribute to this phenomenon of men taking over what used to be traditional methods of income for women. Shehu & Hassan 1995 (Fulbe of north-west Nigeria) discern a different trend, in which access to cash through participating in the dairy industry has given women leverage in terms of counterbalancing their control in the household, increased regular contact with current events through market trips, and stimulated the daily integration of rural areas with urban markets.

²¹⁸ I am unsure when the markets became configured in this fashion (and for what reason). It is a trend one sees in other national contexts as well.

²¹⁹ Traditionally, these tents used to be made from woven mats (palm leaves) and wooden poles. Nowadays the wooden structures are still the same, but the covering itself has often been replaced by a heavier tarp. People explained that the tents used to be high enough for a person to stand up in. Due to the weight of the material now used, one has to partly bend over while inside.

are hardly seen ‘lazing’ around. The direct consequence of women no longer selling their hand-made products at markets is an increased dependence on their male family members. Women own their own livestock through marriage and inheritance. In practice, it is the men who go to market to sell animals—so even if a woman is the owner, she will need a family member to agree it can be sold and to go and sell it.²²⁰

It is difficult to say whether every generation has faced some form of change and the adoption of new patterns or not. Historical depth is lacking here.²²¹ What we can discern, however, is that previous nomadic studies on Chadian Misseria Rouges encompass only a fairly limited understanding of what factors constitute or bring about change. Access to pastures and transhumance routes are one such factor; but changes in economic relations, on several levels, have introduced a different type of economy, to which Walad Djfir have been able to adapt and in which they now take part. Due to their relative wealth,²²² we cannot speak of survival or coping strategies *per se*. Instead, this inherent, nomadic flexibility is very much an entrepreneurial skill, a skill which is partly influenced (and regulated) by the workings of a capitalistic market economy and at the same time very much dependent on the motivations and character even of the individual.

Through Casciarri’s (1995: 110-11) work among the Ahamda pastoralists of Central Sudan, we learn how these entrepreneurial skills can also be informed by socio-economic factors and status. For the Ahmada there is a certain honour linked to women not working outside of the domestic domain, restricting the economic activities of women within a context of imposed monetarization and labour diversification. At the same time, there are women who do go out to work, though they often have a particular status in Ahamda society—for example, widows, divorcees, or elderly women from poor households. But what about those non-divorcees, non-widows, and younger women who may still have chosen to go out to work? How can we explain their capability (or need) and choice?

Martin Wiese (2004: 364) argues:

Every enterprise and each single decision is connected with an immediate experience of gains or losses in terms of the family’s livestock-capital. Nomadic people are engaged in a permanent process of everyday empiricism, in which all their livestock-capital is involved and which must be learnt from an early age.

Wiese warns that there is considerable heterogeneity, however, among and within nomadic societies (p. 365). This may not be surprising but does help us to not forget and to perhaps understand the

²²⁰ Further study needs to be undertaken in relation to practices among the Walad Djfir. It is unclear to me at this point to what extent a woman requires her husband or brothers’ agreement when wanting to sell her own animals. Instinctively, I would say this depends on the woman herself, her specific situation, and her relationship with male family members whom she can ask to go to market for her. Even if she feels the need to sell/trade an animal and a husband is unwilling, she could, strictly speaking, find a younger family member (brother, cousin, son) to do it anyway.

²²¹ De Bruijn, van Dijk & Djindil (2004: 10) describe how migration by the sedentary population of the Guéra to N’Djaména increased in the last four decades, changing the orientation of the economy. The result has been low remittances and an increase in female-headed households.

²²² Note that this does vary per family and individual, with elderly widowed women seeming to suffer most from a lack of familial support to provide them with basic needs.

movements and daily life decisions of certain individuals, male or female, widowed or young and single.

One of Bachar's maternal uncles, for example, used to be a merchant selling cattle in CAR. When, under Habré's regime (1980s), the situation in Bangui became risky, he decided to quit the business and become a *marabout*. He settled himself and his family in Habilai, their wet-season terrain in the Batha region (Chad), and began working the fields. When his extended family saw what he was doing, they were surprised—and even more so when, on their way back from a dry-season period in the Guéra, they found him and his family still alive and well, living on the yield. He had started cultivating sesame, flour (*mil*), and cucumber. When these did well, he added sorghum and *berbéré*. Slowly but surely other people also stayed to pursue agriculture. The maternal uncle has now passed away, but his children still live on the terrain and the previous season's yield had been a good one.²²³ From the way Bachar spoke about his uncle, his move back to Habilai to take up agriculture was not the norm. Where this man may have made the decision to move, first to CAR for commerce and then back again only to take up agriculture, another uncle in a similar situation may have made very different choices. In the case of Muhammad, who made his move to CAR—and for Bachar for that matter—it seems a certain boredom or dissatisfaction with the status quo of *ferikh* life instigated their pursuit of other means of making a living.

Is it possible to understand how these differences in decisions come about? In searching for answers we touch upon the dialectical relationship between flexibility and control (van Dijk & De Bruijn 1995), whereby we not only mean political and cultural control but also the individual's aspirations for their own lives. In describing and analysing the experiences of three young migrant men, Michael Jackson (2013), for example, makes room for the creativity and adaptability of these individuals in relation to other people and other societies and also in terms of changes in their life's course.

That Emmanuel, Roberto and Ibrahim all sought out a lifeworld beyond the one they were born into, which so many around them accepted as inevitable, destined, or right, suggests that a gap always exists between what is given and what is imagined, and that, for some of us, this gap is never fully closed, leaving us both fulfilled in what we have achieved 'against all odds' and frustrated that we can never reconcile the person we have become with the person we might have been had we never left our native shores. (ibid. 219)

Jackson's book *The Wherewithal of Life* reveals that there is a basic, primitive humanity which is

often compromised by moral codifications, masked by the generalizations and abstractions of social science, and destroyed by the stereotypes and doctrines in whose name the worst violence of the twentieth century was committed. (ibid. 199)

Jackson argues instead that we need to not forget the spontaneous actions and minor experiences of individuals, which can illuminate such things as chance, luck, contingency, resignation, and hope.

²²³ Interview with Bachar, 25 February 2014, in N'Djaména.

Apart from the socio-economic and political frameworks shaping opportunities and people's decision-making processes, there is thus also a person's attitude toward life and ways of making a living—and particularly toward their role in life—which informs their flexibility and shapes their futures, if only to a certain extent. At times a person's will and efforts alone are not enough, and the power of societal, economic, or political constraints are too strong to overcome ('duress').²²⁴

In the following section, we highlight how the choices people make are influenced by the structures in which they find themselves and by opportunities, but also by certain 'ideas'—values, norms, aspirations—they may have concerning the taking up of wage labour to supplement the sustenance that dwindling herds can provide.

Cash and cattle: On earning 'free money'

The trend among young men, in the years of fieldwork, was most definitely to go to Libya and work there as a guard of livestock (goats, camels) or a guard of a compound, and I even heard of a young man having worked in a plastics factory in Tripoli. Ecological circumstances, the development of infrastructure, and an increased security have led to the search for alternative incomes as well as a shift in attitude toward cattle. Walad Djifir work as merchants, with and without cattle, in the capital city and also in countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria, Sudan, Libya, and CAR.

How is it that the traditional forms of nomadic mobility and flexibility have come to encompass such non-specifically pastoral activities?²²⁵ Many previous studies on other nomadic/pastoral groups point to a need to supplement incomes/means of living, as livestock are not providing enough—due to drought, disease, or mismanagement of the herd.²²⁶ Related to this may be the fact

²²⁴ The concept of 'duress', as introduced in the edited volume by De Bruijn & Both 2018, provides an analytical means of understanding situations of enduring and accumulating hardship, whereby crises have formed numerous layers and have become deeply engrained in a society. The process linked to duress is one in which a certain normalization is discerned, coupled with a form of deeply constrained agency.

²²⁵ I was unable to find studies examining these trends among other Chadian nomadic populations. A comparable dynamic exists among their neighbouring sedentary populations. Among the latter, shifts are seen in agricultural methods used and the focus of income and food generation altered or diversified as reactions to a long period of drought, famine, and conflict in the region (See van Dijk 2003, unpublished).

²²⁶ Manoli et al. 2014 provide examples of what these dynamics look like in the pastoral reserve of Ferlo, Senegal where the majority belong to Fulani communities: 'After periods of drought and losses of animals, the settlements used three main strategies to survive. One strategy was that one or more members of the settlement developed a new diversification activity in the local area (10 occurrences) or at a long distance (3). Examples of these activities were employment at a sugar cane company near the Senegal River, working as salaried herdsman or in the livestock trade, and obtaining temporary jobs in local cities or in Dakar. A second strategy was to modify their familial organization (10) with dispersal of the settlement or regrouping into smaller settlements as a method to balance the number of workers, consumption needs of all persons and herd size. During dispersals, men of the settlements went to cities in search of new activities. Furthermore, they took advantage of a large stock of animals (11), keeping a sufficient number of animals even after a major loss to ensure the natural growth of the herd. This also enabled settlements to acquire cash and savings from livestock sales to assist in recovery.' (p. 7). Catley & Aklilu (2013) argue that any analysis of people leaving pastoralism must take the variations in their wealth (assets) into account. Some wealth groups are better suited to dealing with the mixed effects of droughts, conflict, and commercialization, while others take much longer to replenish their herds. In certain regions it is easier to find alternative work which is still related to pastoralism (e.g. herding the cattle of wealthier pastoralists); in other regions, the alternatives are very limited and we see people moving out and away into urban centres.

that families often have a large number of children and smaller herds to pass down to them. This means that sons are motivated to look for complementary sources of income to grow their herds before and after marriage. Destitution alone is not always the main or only reason for diversification. In fact, the diversification of economic activities does not necessarily constitute a deviation from the norm or a reaction to crisis alone (following van Dijk 1995: 66). Köhler (2016a: 203) describes how such urban activities should be seen as part of ‘a gradual development in response to the new possibilities for economic diversification and supplementary activities outside pastoralism—in particular wage labour—that the urban environment offered’. Among the Fulbe Wodaabe (Niger), it is, he continues, those who can afford to leave their herds behind, having the right support (social networks) to compensate for their absence from livestock rearing (ibid. 205).

So what does this ‘gradual development’ look like in relation to the Walad Djifir? There is not much information available on the forms of migrant work and wage labour past generations may have carried out. The stories told by people alive today suggest a certain continuity in economic diversification and in the fact that attitudes of some individuals have always been open to change.

Shifts in value: From cattle as capital to cash in hand

Traditionally, the Walad Djifir did not engage much in commercial activities with their cattle. Cattle were primarily kept as a form of capital in the sense that they provided insurance for the herder and his family. One Walad Djifir compared sheep and goats to the money in one’s wallet and cattle to that which one has in the bank—safely kept away.²²⁷ To keep the herd healthy and growing, cattle were sold and bought strategically. When cattle were beyond their prime, they would be brought to a local market and traded in for commodities. Cows were hardly ever sold while they could still produce calves, while bulls were popular on the market in their prime, fetching a good price. In a way, this strategy is still very much in place, but it has been slightly transformed and is often supplemented with other income-generating activities.

In the past, three or four head of cattle would be sold per year in order to buy grains, tea, sugar, oil, and other necessities. When the cash this had brought finished, other cattle would be sold. When the herds thinned drastically during the droughts and cattle disease of the 1970s and 1980s, the Walad Djifir had to look for alternative ways to earn cash. Some began to work the fields, and people today still use the grains this yields to supplement their diet. By turning to cultivation, they avoided having to sell animals in order to buy certain food commodities at the local market.

Those who had not lost as many cattle turned to a different strategy, investing the money earned from selling livestock into buying other livestock to rear and sell on later. It is the profits made from this livestock fattening that are then used to buy material goods. The trend toward exchanging livestock for cash (instead of livestock for livestock or goods) is a general one among many nomadic/pastoral communities.²²⁸ While in the past one could exchange a particularly nice horse

²²⁷ ‘The sheep are like a bank account. The cows are the savings. You don’t touch them, together with the camels—to ensure the children [are provided for].’ Interview with Bachar, 25 February 2014, N’Djaména.

²²⁸ See De Bruijn 1995; Casciarri 1995; van Dijk 1995; Shehu & Hassan 1995; Braukämper 1996; Hodgson 1999; Unusa 2012; Holtzman 2009; Elliot 2010; Gertel & Le Heron 2016; Mahmoud 2013; Manoli et al. 2014; Köhler 2016a.

bought in Sudan for three or four cows, nowadays you can buy cattle and horses with money only.²²⁹

On one particular occasion, while visiting the Mongo livestock market in March 2014, Bachar and I came across one of his nephews (the son of the elder brother in whose care Bachar had left his cattle, near Bandaro) and some of this nephew's friends. One friend proudly displayed the side-mirrors he had bought for his motorbike, which he had not come to market with. On seeing the side-mirrors, Bachar jokingly asked him why he had invested in such a thing, implying that such a commodity was more relevant to have in a town or city with actual traffic—what did he expect to see in them when riding his motorbike *en brousse*?²³⁰ The young man replied that he had bought them because they were pretty. The nephew Muhammed, in turn, had sold his horse at the market and bought a baby camel, keeping a profit of 5000 CFA. He did not say what he meant to do with the money.

The increase of access to cash has come with a few lifestyle changes, in line with advancements in technology (e.g. owning a mobile phone, radio, or memory discs with music or videos on them), clothing (e.g. plastic-based sandals and shoes as opposed to the longer-lasting kind made from leather, factory-made clothes instead of the locally sewed traditional clothing), and transport (e.g. owning a motorbike). Where in the past one may have invested in a horse to travel with from camp to camp or market, some men now opt to buy a motorbike.²³¹ However, in all the months we spent in and around the ferikh, I would argue that only a handful of men purchased a motorbike: Al-Hurr the *khalifa*, who needs to be at the weekly cattle markets to collect taxes on behalf of his *tribu*; a young man working as a merchant trading wares in the region; this friend of Bachar's nephew; and an ex-soldier who had returned to live in the village of Tchoufiou. In a conversation one afternoon with Zaynebah, her aunt Hadji Ghali, and Hassineh's mother, we talked about the changes to their way of life throughout the years. Hadji and Hassineh's mother claimed that everything was better in the past. In the past, there was no sugar or pretty clothes to buy. Later on, when we talked about what we would do if we had a lot of money to spend, they both immediately said: 'Buy sugar, tea and nice clothes!'²³² This idea of 'wasting' money on such luxuries as tea, sugar, and clothing is also reflected in the stories of those sending money back to family in the ferikh. The variety of goods to be bought are more easily accessed with cash in hand, cash which is often still gained through the selling of smaller livestock. Do Walad Djafir then perceive a difference between the various ways to earn cash?

²²⁹ 'People said in the old days a horse from Sudan could fetch you 3–4 cows, even 5 if it was a particularly nice horse. Nowadays you can only buy animals with money, 200,000–250,000 CFA. Sometimes even 500,000 to a million CFA.' Fieldnotes, Al-Berekeh, 19 April 2012.

²³⁰ Fieldnotes, Mongo, 5 March 2014.

²³¹ Djohy et al. (2017: 127) describe the presence of Chinese motorcycles among Fulani pastoralists in northern Benin, explaining how communication costs are managed by using these motorcycles to charge mobile phone batteries.

²³² Conversation on a visit to Hadji Ghali at Hassineh's mother's tent, where the elderly Hadji had been forced to prolong her own visit, as she had broken her lower arm and could not comfortably be transported back to her own tent. Fieldnotes, 2 May 2012. Hadji, Zaynebah, and I shared a tent in the months I was with them in 2012.

Attitudes toward wage labour and cattle herding

As mentioned earlier, rearing cattle is hard work. There is no break one can take. Every member of the family participates in one activity of sustenance or another. Men and boys take care of the livestock, while the women's domain is that of the household. Every animal requires a different form of care, the one more intensive than the other. The hours of walking that the herders do to bring the livestock to suitable grazing land is tiring at best. The young men/boys that sleep with the cattle, camels, and goats/sheep bring only a certain amount of food with them, and there are usually no warm blankets to cover them during the often cold nights. One man explained to me that, compared with the hard physical labour involved in tending to the animals, working as a merchant was like a rest or holiday. '*Quand tu fais le commerce, c'est le repos.*'²³³ In this section I would like to explore what lies behind this statement, returning to the opening of the chapter: how ingrained nomadic livelihood is.

Muhammad Saaleh was the man who referred to doing commerce as a period of rest. When we met, he was temporarily working in N'Djaména.²³⁴ The first time he had travelled to N'Djaména was in 2001 or 2002. Before this he had been working for a cattle merchant, accompanying cattle from the market in Mongo. When prices at the N'Djaména market were not high enough, they would travel on to Nigeria. He had initially started working in the cattle trade to supplement his family's income but left it when he could not make enough profit. In the 1980s they had lost a lot of their herds during the periods of drought and cattle disease. As of 2011 he has been selling blocks of ice along the roadside in N'Djaména. He usually does this in the dry season, spending four to six months in the capital, depending on the income he is able to earn. With the coming of the rainy season, he returns to help work the fields. While he is away, his cattle are herded by his father and his younger brother (same father, different mother), and the goats and sheep are herded by his young children. The money he earns in N'Djaména allows Muhammed Saaleh to buy clothes and a few things to eat for the children, a new *djallabeya* for his father, and such things as sugar, tea, and flour. In Fadje, the terrain on which his *ferikh* is located, there was not much work for him to do during the dry season. With his brother and father helping out with the cattle and the children taking care of the smaller livestock, there was little left for him to do, motivating him to look for a way to earn some extra cash. Like many Walad Djifir, he prefers not to sell the animals unless it is absolutely necessary. As he explains himself, Mongo is not so populated, and there is little work to be found. The first time he had visited N'Djaména as a cattle merchant, he had noticed how the selling of ice blocks was a lucrative business. Only last week he had sent 20,000 CFA to his father and another 20,000 CFA to his wife and children. He prefers to stay just until the rainy season starts, as he is afraid that if he returns to the *ferikh* earlier the money he has earned will not last as long, the temptation to buy cows or sugar being too great.

Before leaving for N'Djaména, he had discussed it with his father and received his permission, promising him he would be away only for a few months and would return straight afterward—not leaving for Libya as so many others were doing. His wife and brother also agreed.

²³³ 'When you do commerce, it's like taking a break.'

²³⁴ Interview with Muhammed Saaleh Adoum Judah, 23 May 2012, N'Djaména.

While working in N'Djaména, Muhammed Saaleh stays at the house one of his family members has built,²³⁵ along with several others temporarily working in the city. He would never consider moving his family to the city—how can they ever sell their animals? He considers going to Libya one day, but it is hard as his children are still very young; and as his mother has already passed away, there is no one to help his wife take care of their children and his elderly father. In reality, however, he dreams of alternatives to the temporary work he finds in N'Djaména. In the future, he hopes to either travel to Libya or find work which is not seasonal. If he had had more cattle, he would have sold them all and bought a piece of land in Mongo on which he would have built a shop. If there was any money left, say three to four million CFA, he would bring his wife, young children, and brother to live with him.

As Muhammed Saaleh puts it, when one can earn money without selling one's own animals, it is money you have earned for free—'*quand tu trouves les choses gratuit [...]*',²³⁶ you should do it. As Muhammed explained it to us, working with your hands does not cost anything; you do not lose anything physical.²³⁷ Yet when you sell an animal, you lose it; and finding another one of similar value to replace it is difficult. His explanation illustrates the importance that cattle still have as a form of capital and insurance. At the same time, it also says something about the motivations behind searching for other forms of cash. Work is seen as something anyone can do at any time. Cattle, on the other hand, cannot be sold at any moment if one wants to preserve the herd. It illustrates a certain attitude toward wage labour, an attitude informed by the value of cattle. Ultimately, it also reveals a perception of money and wealth.

Moving away but not 'out', and the investment in land

Upon seeing sixty of their cattle succumb in one season during one of the bovine epidemics in the 1980s (1984–1985), Bachar had decided that it was time for nomads to start thinking about other livelihoods. He did not see a future in 'walking behind one's animals'. After having tried his hand as a rebel at first, he soon realized that that was not the life for him. He returned from his rebellion only for a few months before leaving his parents once again, this time for good. Suffice to say that he left without cattle, only to take up a position as a cattle herder for a merchant in N'Djaména. Leaving this position after a few months, he travelled on to Cameroon, where he was employed by a group of Fulani (Mbororo). Although he bought livestock with the money he earned in the years

²³⁵ This is the house of Brahim Said, the son of the Walad Djifir's former *chef de khashim beyt* and the one who grew up with the *chef de canton* (see previous chapter). Brahim was sent to veterinary school in Ukraine and has had several ministerial posts under the past two regimes. He is now relieved of his post in the *conseiller de président*. The house Muhammad Saaleh was staying at is his private house. Brahim and his family, however, still live in a house provided by the state on his veterinary pension and on the income his wife brings in trading in gold and selling jewellery and perfume, which she buys in Saudi. At both of his houses he receives visitors, with the state-owned house being the one where most visitors flock to and stay. There is a seasonal aspect to the number of visitors lodged in the compound, with the busiest time being during the dry season.

²³⁶ 'When you find the things for free (...).'

²³⁷ Interestingly, people working in Chad's oil sector make a link between 'easy' money and the devil. Yorbana (2017: 77) writes: 'Some oilmen consider oil to bring about easy money and consumer goods, with the devil acting as a guiding force. So if you buy a piece of paradise with oil money, you will discover that it is just a mirage.' I did not encounter similar manners of speaking among the Walad Djifir about money earned by not working with cattle.

with the Fulani, upon returning to Chad he did not return to the *ferīkh* with his cattle. Instead, he stayed on in N'Djaména with his paternal cousin, Brahim Said. Brahim's father had been *chef de khashim beyt* of the Walad Djifir before Bachar's father in the time of the French (see previous chapter). Here he pursued a primary education, which he was forced to stop when N'Djaména was attacked heavily in Déby's bid for power in 1990. As a restless man and one eager to provide for himself, he started taking driving lessons. During his later career as a driver for various organizations, and especially for the Ministry of Pastoralism, he was able to make enough money to invest it. While he did invest some of his savings in cattle, now reared by his eldest brother in Fané, most of his money was invested in the buying of land in N'Djaména. Currently, he owns four plots of land and has built and is living on one of them.²³⁸

The investment in land is not yet a very common trend among the Walad Djifir, yet it does take place. The preference is still for investment in livestock—as Hadj Hamdaan's case shows—but one or two people do now own land in and around Mongo. Zaynebah's father Muhammed was one of the first to buy land in Mongo, but also in Moundou and of course in CAR. The land in Moundou lies vacant, and on the plot in Mongo five rooms have been built, which were rented out until Zaynebah and Adam moved there in 2015.

So how can we understand these developments, framed by the general trends of cattle commodification, the increased presence and use of cash, and developing infrastructures? Is Bachar changing or modernizing his nomadic flexibility? Is it part of a sedentarization process, or can the idea of 'the wherewithal of life' provide insight?

I would argue that these developments reinforce existing values, even if the means to do so have changed. Bachar will never not value the ownership of livestock. It is too ingrained in him and is a way to mediate kin and other relationships. Bachar's cattle help provide the brother tending them with milk and some income, even if Bachar thinks they could be tended more efficiently—claiming his brother does not sell and buy cattle at the right times, often leaving them to become too old to sell well at market.²³⁹ Bachar also sees the value in investing in other forms of capital—in his case land and housing. He believes that cattle are too risky as insurance. Land holds its value in the sense that it is something his children can inherit and live on. Money earned from herding or selling the cattle he would leave behind for his children would be fleeting and not nearly enough to sustain all of them.²⁴⁰

This mediating and maintaining of kin relationships is also very important for those young men carrying out wage labour elsewhere. They depend on the social networks within the *ferīkh* for help

²³⁸ In 2017 this changed upon his taking a second wife and selling one plot of land to help pay for the marriage. His first wife was entitled to half of the proceedings from selling the land.

²³⁹ When I asked him why he then did not place the cattle with another brother better at managing herds, Bachar replied that as it was his eldest brother, he could not just take them away. It would be a sign of disrespect. Instead, in the event of his acquiring any new cattle, his tactic would be to place these with someone else (brother or cousin).

²⁴⁰ This is a trend which Roitman (2005) too observes amongst sedentary Cameroonians when discussing tax as price, though for perhaps different reasons (p. 67-68). She links it to the legacy of *la politique des prix* which constitutes an attempt to regulate prices by the French and the introduction of the French franc (later CFA), which continues to be associated with instability. Money is seen as something that can disappear, while cloth and pots are items which will remain and can be returned if need be.

in tending any animals left behind, and for ensuring that female relatives (wives, mothers) are provided for when cash cannot immediately be sent home.²⁴¹ At the same time, part of the motivation to travel away for work is to earn enough to marry, to have some ‘loose change’ for spending without having to sell livestock, or to buy more livestock (increase their wealth) in order to secure the future for themselves and their families.

Apart from keeping cattle as capital and engaging in wage labour, Walad Djifir also take part in the national and regional cattle trade. In the next section, we will examine other ways in which developments in economic diversification reveal specific attitudes to the ways of making a living and building/holding on to wealth. The continuities and changes involved in the taking up of commercial activities outside of the *ferīkh* setting are explored in relationship to insecurity or crises faced—and ultimately to decisions made.

Cattle, commerce, and CAR

While it is certainly true that the search for alternative incomes is not merely destitution-driven, at times it has been. The ecological insecurity which was at its most extreme in the early 1970s and 1980s continues until today and has been one of the major incentives for complementing a traditional ‘walk of life’. At the same time, a changing politico-economic situation has provided a context in which such incentives could take place and were formed. During the period in which Hissein Habré was president (1982–1990), the Walad Djifir refer to there being a lot of insecurity in the country (see also Chapter 1). Travel and thus also commerce were almost impossible. Rebel groups looted and killed, while military troops robbed travellers of their possessions. Following Habré’s persecution of Arabs, many fled the area, settling in CAR or further afield.²⁴² With the relative peace²⁴³ that Déby’s presidency brought from the early 1990s onwards, commerce and travel picked up.²⁴⁴ Improvements to roads and the more recent arrival of Toyota pickup trucks around the year 2000 have contributed to facilitating the movement of people and goods. As one informant said so aptly: *‘C’est grace a Dieu que les petites Toyota sont venues.’*²⁴⁵ Infrastructure—whether in terms of physical local markets or communication technologies for the sending of

²⁴¹ The role of (familial) networks and ‘trust’ when it comes to the sending home of money will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

²⁴² It is not yet clear (to me) when and where the Arabs of the Guéra and Batha were threatened, but Souleymane and I encountered several of their stories while in Bangui. See Kilembe 2015 on general movements of Chadians to CAR; Hicks 2018 on the prosecution of Habré and crimes committed.

²⁴³ As Azevedo notes (2004: 112–13), Déby’s presidency was able to build on that which Habré had left behind, a government which was able to function again. In the early 1990s, however, he did not restrain himself from persecuting those loyal to Habré, sending 3,000 troops to attack towns around Lake Chad (December 1991), and admitting to the massacre of southerners in April 1994 by government troops.

²⁴⁴ The rebels that came through Mongo on their way to N’Djaména from the east in 2006–2007 do not seem to have disturbed the Walad Djifir. Perhaps their herds and camps were too far from the main roads to be of much use to the rebel forces.

²⁴⁵ ‘It is with thanks to God that the little Toyotas [pickup trucks] have arrived’.

information or money—has historically gone, and continues to go, hand-in-hand with socio-political and economic contexts. Walad Djifir, like many other pastoral-nomadic communities, not only found their way into the national and regional export of cattle but also started importing Chadian cattle when conditions to do so became right.

The cattle trade

The cattle trade has once again become one of Chad's main domains of export²⁴⁶ and has been influenced by technological advancements as well as socio-political situations. Unfortunately for the state, it does not bring in an equivalent in revenue.²⁴⁷ On the comparison between the oil and livestock economies, Martin Wiese (2011: 59) writes:

The direct contribution of the oil production accounted for 33.4 per cent of the GDP in 2004 (1.16 out of 3.47 billion Euro). It provided 163 million Euro in national revenues, covering 32.1 per cent of the national budget in 2004 (106 out of 331 million Euro). However, only 3,600 Chadian citizens were directly employed on the oil fields with six people placed in positions of higher responsibility. Indeed, contrary to the growing GDP, which includes values repatriated by foreign petrol companies, the gross national product, GNP, has actually decreased by 2 per cent with the start of petrol exploitation in 2003. Consequently, the direct benefits of the oil-economy are rather imperceptible for most of the Chadian population which depends essentially on the redistribution of petrol-dollars via government spending. Such redistribution mechanisms are actually weak, fragile and biased towards the elites and the urban centre of N'Djaména. The preset political-institutional crisis of the country is particularly unfavourable to any effective redistribution of the national oil revenues into social welfare and poverty reduction. In contrast to the oil-economy, agriculture and livestock breeding constitute the livelihood for 80 per cent of the population, accounting for 24 per cent of GDP in 2004. Livestock breeding alone produces 38 per cent of the agricultural GDP (i.e. 320 million Euro) and supports the subsistence of 40 per cent of the active rural population in Chad.

In the past, Sarh used to house a large slaughterhouse, known as SIVIT,²⁴⁸ which distributed meat to Congo, Gabon, Zaïre, and CAR. It was established by Tombalbaye in the mid-1960s as part of his plan to make his own southern region Chad's economic centre. It was shut down after only four years, having made a substantial loss, but its activities were taken up again in 1974 by Climatât.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ For several years (since 2003), oil was the main source of revenue, but the decline in world-wide oil prices—and a general mismanagement of the oil production process and revenue—has left the state's treasury with a large deficit. For ethnographic studies on oil in Chad, see Behrends 2011; Reyna 2011; Hoinathy 2013; Behrends & Hoinathy 2014; Yorbana 2017.

²⁴⁷ For more details on the Chadian cattle trade and the official and non-official processes, people, networks, routes, and amounts involved, see Abderamane & Halley des Fontaines 2011; Koussou & Aubague 2011; Wiese 2011; and Koussou 2013.

²⁴⁸ Société Industrielle de Viande du Tchad (SIVIT)

²⁴⁹ Koussou (2013) explains how the slaughterhouse in Sarh was opened and shut several times. He writes [translated from French]: 'In 1968, SIVIT (the Industrial Meat Company of Chad) was founded in Sarh in the south of the country. The company had an integrated beef-processing complex to supply all of Central Africa. Due to the narrowness of the local market, these facilities were almost entirely devoted to exports. The bankruptcy of this public company after four years of operation put an end to these exports. The installations were taken over in 1998 by a private company with French and Chadian capital: Africa Viande. Yet activities ceased as early as 2001' (p. 5).

Around the events of 1979, during which Habré's FAN²⁵⁰ and Goukouni's FAP battled for N'Djaména against government forces which in turn were joined by part of Kamougue's FAT forces, the slaughterhouse in Sarh was closed. Following the battle for N'Djaména, Goukouni was named head of a coalition government and the country became divided into four almost autonomous regions, signalling the demise of the Chadian state.²⁵¹ Currently, the slaughterhouse at N'Djaména's Farcha (AFF),²⁵² created in 1958, remains the only one in the country, despite plans for building others which will qualify to export meat to the international market (Mravili et al. 2013). The main means of exporting livestock is on foot, with Nigeria the largest market for Chadian cattle.

Many Walad Djifir take part in the cattle trade in some way or other. The animals they rear and bring to market are bought up by merchants, who sell them nationally or herd them to the markets of Nigeria. Several men work for these merchants, transporting the cattle on foot to the market in N'Djaména or further afield. In some cases, herders are hired to rear cattle for large cattle merchants. While I did not encounter this practice among the Walad Djifir themselves, it most probably does exist. In a conversation with Hadj Hamatta, a member of the Guéra's sedentary population, in Mongo in March 2014,²⁵³ he explained how the price of cattle is discussed in both Nigeria and Chad's local markets. An open line of communication exists nowadays due to the mobile phone, and merchants hearing that the price for cattle has gone up in Nigeria will be quick to buy up livestock in Mongo. He related how the cattle market in Mongo was established in 1983 at a time when Mongo itself was in ruins. The proposal was made by the population in the hope that it would help rebuild the economy.²⁵⁴ It was communicated by drum (*tam tam*) to the surrounding villages that, from then on, a livestock market would be held every Wednesday. With its establishment, the government and *khalifa*'s were able to profit from the taxes levied when an animal was sold, and merchants were able to sell other goods alongside. When asked how the rebels roaming the region affected the market, Hadj Hamatta said they were primarily after money and not cattle themselves and therefore robbed merchants. Nowadays, the mobile phone allows merchants to warn each other of *coupeurs de route* being active in certain locations. Robbers do not steal as many as before, he said; they are local bandits who will take one, two, or three head of cattle instead of the hundreds looted in the past. Sometimes, these stolen cattle will be recovered, unless they have been slaughtered for consumption.

In general, the export of cattle remains an expensive and risky business. Taxes make up 25 per cent of the final commercial value (Wiese 2011: 63), and there are more informal payments to be made along the way. The fluctuating value of the Nigerian naira is another source of risk. A trend

²⁵⁰ Forces Armées du Nord (FAN); Forces Armées Populaires (FAP); Forces Armées Tchadiennes (FAT).

²⁵¹ See Azevedo (2004: 104-107) on the events of 1979.

²⁵² L'Abattoire Frigorifique de Farcha (AFF)

²⁵³ Interview with merchant Hadj Hamatta in Mongo, 19 March 2014, together with colleague Souleymane.

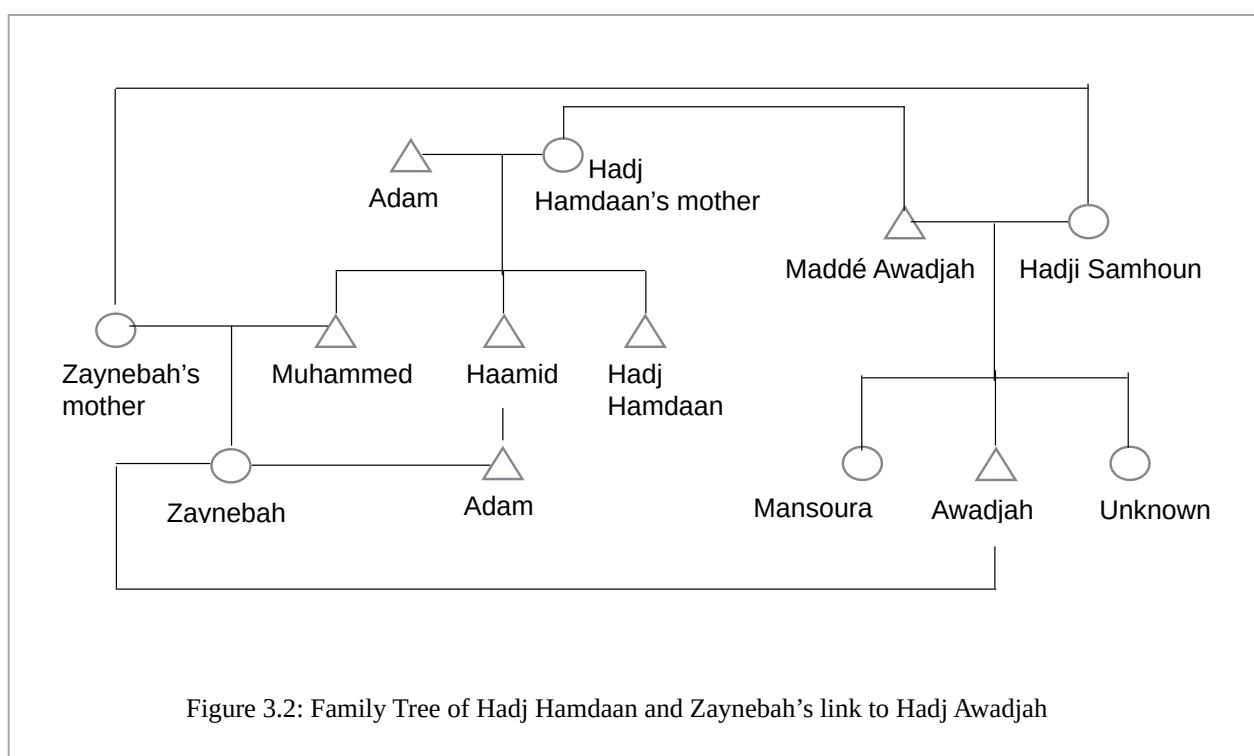
²⁵⁴ According to the Tchad edition of *Atlas de l'Afrique*, many cattle markets were created after the dry period of the 1970s and 1980s, when several nomadic groups moved further south and certain regions became more populated. Before that time only the city of Sarh had a regular cattle market (Ben Yahmed 2006: 46-47).

which has continued into the present day is the investing of profits made from cattle export into Nigerian consumer goods, which are then transported back into Chad and sold locally. Hadj Hamatta recounted how, in the past, merchants would travel to and fro with large sums of money hidden on their person. When I asked where and how exactly, he grinned and said: ‘That is a secret.’ Nowadays, merchants are able to transport or wire money to Maiduguri—‘You leave your money there, and it is either transferred on to Nigeria or back to Chad.’

Politics and economic changes: Chadian Walad Djifir in CAR

While several Walad Djifir involve themselves in various aspects of the cattle trade and, in so doing, interact with the developments and changes within this sector—increased security, technological developments such as the means to transport money, and so on—others have commercial ties to CAR. This next section introduces the impact of political insecurity and crisis as a context of economic change, through a focus on decisions surrounding cattle and commerce.

Hadj Maddé Awadjah, one of Hadj Hamdaan’s maternal uncles (see Family Tree in Figure 3.2), began doing business in CAR as early as the 1960s, bringing Chadian cattle into the country and selling them at local markets. According to a researcher at Farcha’s veterinary department, CAR did not have its own herds of cattle before 1973, partly explaining the relative success Hadj Awadjah had, which allowed him to later diversify into other commercial activities (more in Chapter 5).²⁵⁵



When the drought hit Chad in the early 1970s, the cattle had to move further south than normal. To help the herds survive, strategies were developed in order to make space for the cattle by moving sedentary villages. CAR agreed to this policy as cattle provided an interesting source of economy for the country—they had no cattle of their own.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Adam Abdelkarim working at Farscha as a researcher, 20 February 2014, N’Djaména.

By 1960 and 1970, one could find Sudanese, Nigerians, and Lebanese carrying out commerce, manufacturing products, textiles, and dealing in meat in CAR. For a long time, the largest butcher in Bangui was a Nigerian. Then, during the turmoil of 1979—which included clashes between students and government troops in Bangui, the arrest and killing of around one hundred civilians by Bokassa’s government troops, the consequent imposing of military and economic sanctions by the French, and the eventual deposing of Emperor Bokassa I—many foreigners lost everything and left.²⁵⁶ The vacuum they left was, to a large extent, filled by Chadians escaping Chad’s civil war.²⁵⁷ For several years afterward and throughout many more mutinies, changes of state heads, French backing, and Libyan and Chadian support, Chadians in CAR were generally able to prosper.

At the same time, Chad’s political arm could still be felt. In the Bangui of the early 1980s, Hadj Awadjah was assassinated, supposedly under Habré’s orders. During Habré’s reign, many Chadians fled to CAR and became small traders or shopkeepers. Among them were not only southerners, whose ethnic homeland often crossed the national Chadian–CAR border, but also Arabs. Marchal (2015: 173) describes these Arabs as being primarily from the Salamat region²⁵⁸ and belonging to a faction opposed to Habré. It is not unlikely that other Arabic groups may also have joined this opposition group. As a popular businessman, Hadj Awadjah would receive many Chadian visitors at his home. Habré, in his mission to suppress any form of dissent, targeted Arabs within Chad but also in the wider region. Awadjah’s daughter, who was five at the time of his death, claims he did not have any political motivations and that it was merely his harbouring of those who did which sealed his fate. He was killed in broad daylight while crossing one of Bangui’s smaller canal bridges in his car. The legacy he left behind is still connected to current-day *ferikh* life—it was he whom Zaynebah’s father Muhammad went to join when he made the move to CAR.

²⁵⁶ David Dacko had taken Bokassa’s place up until his ousting in a military coup in September 1981. He was followed up by General Kolingba, whose Military Committee for National Recovery was diplomatically recognized by Libya. Several years of elections and changes in constitution ensued, resulting in the election of Angé-Felix Patassé as president in September 1993. His presidency was challenged in 1996 by a mutiny of rebel soldiers, but he was able to stay in place due to French military backing, with some 100 civilians being killed during this period. The following year, some 1,000 civilians were killed and at least 70,000 displaced as another mutiny by rebels groups took hold of Bangui, despite the signing of peace agreements in January 1997. Years of internal fighting continued to rock the country and its civilians, including a rebellion involving Kolingba in May 2001 and finally resulting in the coming to power of François Bozizé in March 2003, an act condemned by the French, European Union, UN, and African Union. Economic sanctions ensued, and Bozizé asked Chad for help in creating order in Bangui. Chad sent 300 troops in March 2003; and by June, CAR was being supported diplomatically and economically by CEMAC. For a concise overview of political events in CAR from 1960 to the present day, see <http://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/central-african-republic-1960-present/>, accessed 6 June 2018. For a more elaborate and deeper understanding, see Carayannis & Lombard 2015; Marchal 2015; Smith 2015; Lombard 2016.

²⁵⁷ Already at the time of the AEF, most traders found in Bangui, Bambari, and other large cities were of Chadian origin. CAR itself had very few native traders (Kilembé 2015; Marchal 2015: 170).

²⁵⁸ Maddé Awadjah belonged to the Sulmani tribe and was a brother of Hadj Hamdaan’s mother.

In the 1990s a new wave of livestock breeders from Chad arrived in CAR. These herders were well-armed and soon known as being violent toward local populations.²⁵⁹ In Bangui's market district of PK 5, they disrupted the prior peaceful status quo by inserting themselves into the cattle business and small-scale trade. Those entering the cattle sector clashed with the long-standing Central African Association of Cattle Merchants (ACCB), comprised mostly of Fulani and others of Chadian origin. This was the birth of a new association, the Association of Cattle Merchants of Central Africa (ACOBECA) (Kilembe 2015: 90-1). The enmity toward Muslims in general increased from the mid-1990s onward, especially when Bozizé came to power with the support of young Muslim merchants from the PK 5 district. These victorious 'liberators' were responsible for much violence and plundering among civilians (primarily Christian) (ibid. 96). With the all-too-recent upheaval following the overthrow of Bozizé in March 2013, and the role of the Séléka (many of Chadian origin), tensions again rose even further. The political situation has impacted inter-community relations, as well as changing the economic context in which the cattle trade and other commercial activities in CAR are carried out. Physical spaces, such as the PK 5 district, have been altered, prices have gone up (if products can be found at all), and 'trust' has become an issue.

Following the coup, cattle herders have fled back into Chad and market prices have gone up.²⁶⁰ One informant, referring to livestock, claimed that what used to cost 300,000 CFA now costs 900,000 CFA. The Chadian merchant Hadj Hamatta corroborated this by saying that in March 2014 a bull would sell for 300,000–350,000 CFA and a cow for 160,000–175,000 CFA at Mongo's market, compared with one million (bull) and 500,000 CFA (cow) in Bangui. Even with the costs incurred on the way from Chad's local markets to the markets in Bangui, the normal price would not have been doubled. By 2014 it had become difficult to find meat at the markets in Bangui. According to Adam Abdelkarim, a researcher at Farsha, herders will eventually return to CAR when things have calmed down.²⁶¹ This might, however, create new conflicts around space and resources between newcomers and those who had already been there but temporarily fled.

Insecurity and decisions²⁶²

The Walad Djifir's activities in CAR have taken place within the context sketched above. Hadj Awadjah's migration to the country in the 1960s and consequent building up of a successful business pulled other family members to him. One such a man was Zaynebah's father Muhammed, the elder brother of the Hamid and Hadj Hamdaan mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. His

²⁵⁹ See Kilembe 2015; Marchal 2015 on these dynamics. Chapter 5 elaborates on how it was not only Chadian livestock breeders that caused tensions to rise; there were other factors which contributed to the escalation.

²⁶⁰ In his own dissertation (forthcoming), colleague Adamou Amadou describes the dynamics surrounding Mbororo previously based in CAR, fleeing and 'returning' to Cameroon. See also De Vries 2018.

²⁶¹ Interviewed at Farsha, N'Djamèna, 20 February 2014.

²⁶² Parts of this section have been adapted from a piece written for the 'Connecting in Times of Duress' website, published in the form of a web dossier on CAR on 14 January 2015 and comprising pieces by myself and colleagues Catherina Wilson and Adamou Amadou; <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/wd-car-unexpected-forces-that-shape-chadian-citizenship-from-fluid-to-fixed-belonging/>, accessed 12 January 2018.

full story will be told in the Chapter 5. For the purpose of this chapter, I will briefly recount the more recent history of Zaynebah and her husband, Adam.

In the initial few months after the March 2013 coup, Zaynebah and her family had not felt threatened in their village in south-west CAR. By December of the same year, the situation had drastically changed and the Chadian families living in the area were forced to flee. Adam, who had taken over Zaynebah's father's business after his death, refused to leave the cattle they still had with the Mbororo behind. While his wife and two young children made their way across the border and into the Cameroonian refugee camp at Kentzouh, he decided to safeguard their cattle. The evening before the village they had travelled to was attacked, Adam and several others who had come to the same decision made their way south toward the border with Congo. In the following weeks, they made their way through the thick bush, only occasionally hearing evidence of other people's presence. They carried only non-automatic weapons. From the southern border, they turned west toward Cameroon in order to change direction again and follow the border north into Chad. Adam called his uncle (Bachar) in N'Djaména from southern Chad on Sunday, 23 March 2014. Three days later, he made his way to the capital with the money that was transferred and was reunited with his Zaynebah and their children, who had by that time already been transported to N'Djaména by the Chadian government. Adam and his companion were exhausted when we collected them from the bus station in N'Djaména.²⁶³ Relief was visible in both their faces. As the evening passed, they recounted how they had safely made it to the north of CAR. On approaching the Chadian border, they had been attacked and robbed of all their cattle. The journey had been in vain. Bachar criticized Adam for having decided to protect his cattle over protecting his wife and children. His family in the *ferīkh*, however, understood. The fact that the cattle Adam had tried to protect were only a part of what was left of his wife's father's inheritance did not factor into his thinking. In the years following Muhammed's death, Hadj Hamdaan had after all been selling off capital and re-investing it in the form of camels as a way of dividing up the inheritance among family in the *ferīkh*.

The cases of those living in CAR and that of Bachar are somewhat special when compared with the choices other Walad Djifir have made. Not everyone has a successful uncle to join or such a stubborn and inventive nature as to decide to make oneself a different life. Currently, the most common form of economic activity outside of the *ferīkh* is that of agriculture, small commerce, and temporary wage labour—either in Chad itself or in Libya. Among some nomadic communities, such as the Wodaabe of Niger (Köhler 2016a: 206-7) and Dazagada of Chad (Wiese 2011: 69), it is a source of shame to admit that one has to look for ulterior means of sustenance. For the Walad Djifir this does not seem to be the case, as so many of them were affected in the 1970s and 1980s, forcing a majority to complement their otherwise primarily pastoral lifestyle. This trend has continued into the present and is accentuated by the improvements made in infrastructure (transport, communication), while still also influenced by national and regional insecurities and subsequent economic changes.

²⁶³ Bachar, his eldest son Brahim, and I drove to the Express Sud Voyage bus station in Dembé to pick them up around four o'clock in the afternoon on 26 March 2014.

How then do Walad Djifir envision their prospects in and outside of Chad? Risking generalization, and if one follows the money, most seem to be finding a way to invest it ‘back’ into the *ferīkh* setting—cattle or land within Chad itself—making use of social ties/networks in doing so. Where in the past Hadj Awadjah and Zaynebah’s father’s assets had primarily been in CAR, the explosive situation, especially *vis-à-vis* Chadians, has forced them to continue their affairs elsewhere. In Zaynebah’s case, most of her father’s assets had already been liquidated, as is the custom under Islamic law after a death. Awadjah’s daughter still seems to be running some business in CAR but was also looking for places and means that would give her more security (see Chapter 5).

Examining Walad Djifir’s moves and motivations when faced with insecurity or crisis, through an analytical focus on cattle/livestock, reveals a certain groundedness amidst possible disruption—a groundedness linked to wealth (in livestock, land, social networks) and a flexibility *vis-à-vis* economic diversification. It is a groundedness which is also reflected in the ‘walks of life’ of those not necessarily faced with the more ‘extraordinary’ moments in life.

The walk of life: On ‘nomadic ways’ amidst economic change

In the case of the Walad Djifir, the ‘walk of life’ is not only the very literal transhumance and herding of livestock which still forms the day-to-day occupation of a large part of the group; it also refers to mobility and flexibility as engrained in the Walad Djifir way of life. But for what reasons, in this day and age, will the Walad Djifir ‘walk’? This chapter has looked at the more economic incentives for Walad Djifir mobility and flexibility, incentives related primarily to ideas about livestock, wealth, and family. These are ideas which are embedded not only in their livelihood as pastoral nomads but also in the context in which they find themselves—the need to supplement incomes, increasing possibilities in terms of transport and infrastructure or due to insecurity, whether at home or abroad.

Just as the paths animals and humans make around wells reveal patterns and traces of movement, making visible ‘[...] the social relations and contacts of people coming together, meeting and again separating, and defining a particular place by their interaction [...]’ (Köhler 2016a: 162),²⁶⁴ cattle as a connector embody the economic, social, and at times political relations within Walad Djifir society.²⁶⁵ The various cases and descriptions above reveal patterns and traces which link back to the *ferīkh* setting and a ‘nomadic way’ of doing things. In a way, such an analysis echoes the words of Khazanov: ‘Pastoralism is not only a way of *making a living*; it also a way of *living*’ (1994:

²⁶⁴ ‘Cattle paths that intersect and concentrate around wells are a readily visible example of how a pattern left by the traces of human and animal movement is literally inscribed to the surface of the earth, to the landscape, and thus makes place visibly a result of the social relations and contacts of people coming together, meeting and again separating, and defining a particular place by their interaction [...]’ Köhler 2016a: 162.

²⁶⁵ See Granovetter 1985; see also Introduction to this ethnography.

xxxiii). So what changes and continuities exist in the way Walad Djifir adhere to a ‘nomadic way’ of life, in light of economic developments, political and ecological insecurity, and regional mobility? The patterns revealed point to flexibility, wealth, and family as cornerstones (layers) of ‘the Walad Djifir way’ (connectivity), ultimately informing a sense of groundedness.

Returning to the beginning of this chapter: each Walad Djifir has an idea about what his or her livestock (assets) mean to them. Even the young Mariam Lemoen has ideas about the future, linked to transhumance and a preference for what animal she will ride or what milk she prefers. In the case of the increase in camels as a result of Zaynebah’s father’s inheritance, the situation put added strain on several members of the family. At the same time, we see that situations and composition of herds change continuously—owing to drought or disease or through an inheritance—with people learning (and choosing) to be flexible to accommodate the changes in their daily tasks/life/work load. The attitudes of such men as Muhammed Saaleh toward wage labour, or indeed Adam’s guarding of livestock in the face of danger, are grounded exactly in the way they perceive and value ‘wage labour’ and ‘livestock’ themselves. Cattle as capital are not easily replaced. More importantly, cattle as capital (wealth) provide a safety net for the future of one’s family.

At the same time, this exact value of cattle differs per person and has changed over time. The modernizing dynamics surrounding cattle, and thereby also the ‘control’ over their potential value, are defined not only by the Walad Djifir or the local market, but also by N’Djaména’s market dynamics and state-determined export regulations. In addition, choices vis-à-vis (dis)continuing with cattle as a primary livelihood have been influenced by ecological circumstances, infrastructural advances, and the improvement in or lack of security, among other factors. Walad Djifir such as Bachar, living and working in urban N’Djaména, have chosen to invest any surplus into the purchase of land. While he does still own cattle, herded by a brother, this seems to be more of a symbolic investment than one meant to help secure the future of his children.

It thus seems that we cannot speak so much of ‘new spatial orientations affect[ing] inter-group relations and, closely related, processes of identification and the construction and redefinition of social boundaries’ (Köhler 2016b: v-vii). While changes are most definitely perceived, they continue to be formulated within a specific ‘nomadic’ framework which is flexible and always has been. Is this the ‘primitive humanity’²⁶⁶ that Jackson (2013) speaks of? Within the varying contexts of economic change (commodification of cattle, diversification of economic activities) and insecurity (ecological, political), the importance of wealth (whether in the form of livestock or land) and social relations (family) provide a certain groundedness to people’s lives, an ‘anchoring’ in which both the more mundane and extraordinary events are embedded and by which they may be given meaning. This anchoring provides a framework within which even the most spontaneous actions and minor experiences (Jackson 2013) of individuals are lived, and it also shapes this ever-shifting and fluid framework.

²⁶⁶ It is the idea of an inherentness (or primitiveness) of contradictory characteristics which I find intriguing in Jackson’s work—an inherentness which is often overlooked.



3.1 & 3.2 Mariam Lemoen bringing the goat's milk she has milked to Zaynebah, May 2012. From a very early age children help with daily chores, games often mimicking aspects of tending to the animals.

3.3 Mariam Lemoen's father, Haamid, on his horse, December 2012.



3.4 Camp of Haamid and Faatneh in the distance, March 2014. You can just make out the tent of Haamid's son Ibaaris (to the left), who lived there with his new wife. Ibaaris was tending to the goats and sheep at this time, while Haamid and another family looked after the camels. The women felt isolated. It was a long walk to get water at the 'eidd, and there was no one to hear you if you needed help.

3.5 Haamid making tea with his camp in the background in an old millet field, March 2014.



3.6 Faatneh and Mariam Lemoen heading off to the ‘*eidd*, March 2012. Ashaam and her daughter Mansoura, who lived in the same ferīkh, are pictured in the background. The women would often make the trip to the ‘*eidd* together, usually twice a day.

3.7 Faatneh and Mariam Lemoen hauling water at the ‘*eidd*, March 2013.





3.8 Hassineh and Marneh working together to crush grains, March 2012. Shortly after this photograph was taken, Hadj Hamdaan decided to move his family and their camels further south, to al-Berekeh. The whole tent was taken apart and all their belongings packed onto camels and cows. It took the better part of the morning, with many hands helping, and the women visibly emotional.

3.9 Hassineh cooking at their new camp in al-Berekeh, March 2012. There were just two tents in this camp, hers and that of her sister, who was in charge of a large group of camels, together with her husband. It was fairly isolated and hard work.

3.10 Hassineh with three of her children, March 2013. Reunited with the others, Hassineh seemed to have more energy again, despite her new pregnancy causing her a lot of heartburn and headaches—symptoms many of the pregnant women were dealing with.



3.11 The *'eidd* seen from a distance, March 2012. On the right is a shaded overhang under which men and children find their rest while the cattle drink and others tend to the watering. You can make out two circular shapes which are the *hutts* from which the animals drink.

3.12 A woman giving camels water at the *'eidd*, March 2014.

3.13 Adoum drawing water from a *birr*, with a *hutt* and cattle pictured behind him, March 2014.



3.14 Cattle drinking at a *hutt*, March 2013. The branches in the middle prevent the animals from walking across it and thus destroying the mud-structure.

3.15 The inside of a *birr*, March 2012. Notice how the walls at the very bottom have been fortified with branches. It takes the men four days to dig and fortify such a well. The surface water is never very clear and the branches contribute to its quality (often murky and somewhat smelly). A *birr* will last until the rainy season takes over, at which point a new (and shallower) well is dug.

3.16 Men working the '*eidd*', March 2012.



3.17 Women come to collect water at the 'eidd, March 2014

3.18 Hanging out at the 'eidd, March 2012. The young men and boys often arrive at the 'eidd in the late morning or early afternoon, having spent the night *en brousse* with the cattle. They spend a few hours resting and eating in the shade before heading off again to let the cattle graze. How many hours they spend walking depends on how far away the best pasture is.

3.19 Young herders eating their meal, March 2013.



3.20 Souq at a ferikh gathering, March 2014. One of the young men running the souq had recently come back from Libya, having worked in a plastics factory in Tripoli.

3.21 The much-loved sugar and tea, March 2012. These block of sugar are made by a Chadian company and cost CFA 2250 a piece at a market in town.



3.22 Soap, toothbrush twigs, Omo sachets, flashlights, and sweets at a ferikh souq, March 2014.

3.23 Bags of red, green, and black tea sold at a ferikh souq, March 2014. Each town in the region has a different market day. Mongo's large market (with livestock) is held on Wednesdays. The village of Banda holds theirs on a Thursday. Whenever we frequented one of the market days we almost always met Walad Djifir we knew or that knew (had heard of) us.



FOUR REMITTANCES: NEW MOBILITIES AND METHODS OF EXCHANGE

Five, six, zero, zero, two, eight! Yes, yes, another five! Seven, four, two, four! Okay, okay; got it! Yes, I have ten numbers! Amount?! Amount?! Three-hundred-and-twenty-five-thousand. Okay, okay. Name?! Name?! Muhammed Hamdaan ... beepbeepbeep ...

Did you get it?

Yes, I got it. Libya.

— Based on video footage, N'Djaména, 26 February 2013

The excerpt above is an example of a phone conversation between a Walad Djifir in remote Libya and his relative in N'Djaména, Bachar.²⁶⁷ The numbers listed correspond to a Western Union transaction, one of the most common ways money is sent from Libya to Chad. We had been on our way to drop off a different sending of money at the *marché à mil* when Bachar received the call. He had parked the car, telling the person on the other end to give him two seconds, reaching for his agenda and pen to write down any details. In the time we got to know each other while living in the *ferīkh* in February–May 2012, it had never really registered that Bachar was being used as a middleman for the sending and receiving of money from family abroad. In hindsight, it explains the random shouted phone calls in which the main message being repeated over and over was, '*Ana barra. Barra!*' (I'm outside, not in N'Djaména). Try again later.' Sometimes he would tell them within which time period he would be back; other times the person would call back every other day, hoping he had returned to the capital. The two countries from which Bachar receives the most transactions are Libya and CAR. Of the two, Libya definitely has the highest frequency.

In the period February 2011 to February 2013, roughly 14,000,000 FCFA (approx. 21,374 euros) was sent from Libya through Bachar in N'Djaména and on to family members in the *ferīkh*. The same Bachar's records indicated that from February 2013 to February 2014, roughly 14,700,000 FCFA (approx. 22,443 euros) were received by him from Libya, sent via MoneyGram or Western Union.²⁶⁸ For the first set of transactions (2011–2013), 39 were documented, of which the average transaction amount was 358,886 FCFA (approx. 548 euros). The smallest amount sent was 54,000

²⁶⁷ The cases described in this chapter are based on observations and interviews carried out between February 2012 and March 2014 among various actors in the 'money chain'. The number of the Western Union transfer is fictional, as is the name and amount; however, it does represent how the conversation went. The sender in question actually had two money transfers to pass on to Bachar. If we understood correctly, the caller was sending money from a place called Al-Masrab.

²⁶⁸ The transaction documentation is based on MoneyGram and Western Union forms of cash received by Bachar. Fieldnotes 22 January 2013 and 28 February 2014.

FCFA (approx. 82 euros), with 535,518 FCFA (approx. 818 euros) being the largest. The second set of transactions documented (2013–2014) also coincidentally included exactly 39 transactions, with an average amount of 376,838 FCFA (approx. 575 euros). The smallest amount received was 59,362 FCFA (approx. 91 euros), the largest amount 578,616 FCFA (approx. 883 euros). An important fact to note here is that the names of the senders on the Western Union forms do not vary much. This does not mean there are only a few sending money back (and only a few households receiving). It is more likely that they are the men capable of putting a transaction through, whether because of ID-issues or proximity to a monetary transfer organization (MTO).²⁶⁹ In April 2012, for example, three men working in Libya sent CFA 3,285,000 (approx. 4,940 euros) through Western Union to Bachar, who was then to send it on to the Mongo area, where it would be distributed among their family.²⁷⁰

The sending of money, and more specifically the digital method of doing so, is a relatively new technology which has only recently reached Chad's interior. This process could be said to have brought all sorts of changes with it. In this chapter, we will question whether one can really speak about change or whether the technology seems to confirm existing practices, perhaps even making them more efficient. In Chad we see the effects of a lack of infrastructure, in combination with technological developments, on the present economic and financial systems. In terms of formal financial institutions, banks have a limited inland radius, while MTOs have been able to gain access in some town centres, and the telecom industry has been most successful in cornering the market in money transfers. In terms of informal or unregulated financial transactions, old systems of sending money through merchants and family members are still in place and often even preferred. Should their mixed methods²⁷¹ be seen as merely a reaction to ongoing insecurity in the region ('creativity in crisis', as per Appadurai 1986), as a strategy or tactic to navigate (Vigh 2009) duress, enhanced by the use of technological developments? Or should the 'unbanked' Walad Djifir's tactics be seen in light of interlacing 'displacement economies'²⁷²—whereby specific attention is paid to

²⁶⁹ The amounts mentioned also do not account for the handful of transactions which are conducted between merchants in Libya and merchants in Chad, with Bachar being asked to recuperate the money from the Chadian merchant and to send it on to the ferikh.

²⁷⁰ Fieldnotes, 2 April 2012

²⁷¹ On the meaningful use of 'informal' in specific economic/monetary transfer contexts, see Lindley (2010: 42). Lindley argues that formal/informal boundaries shift over time and space, as transactions cross national boundaries (jurisdictions) and as regulatory environments themselves also evolve (see De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017). At times states have chosen not to, or are not able to, regulate certain economic activities. For a discussion of terms—such as alternative economies, real economies, stateless economies, war economies, underground economies—related to 'economies shaped in one way or another by conditions of crisis, violence or uncertainty, including displacement', see Hammer (2014: 12–13). I have chosen to use the term 'mixed methods' here to describe the use of regulated and non-regulated monetary transactions systems by the Walad Djifir, as a way to include the different economic realities, or realms, involved in such transactions.

²⁷² On displacement economies, see Hammar & Rodgers 2008; Hammar et al. 2010; Hammar 2014. While those Walad Djifir opting for migrant work in Libya cannot be classified as (forcibly) 'displaced', their movements and the context in which they find themselves are part of intertwined displacement processes, creating interlinked displacement economies—economies affected by the fall of Qaddafi, the increased presence of Boko Haram in Nigeria making it a less safe destination, and the on-going conflicts in both Sudans.

what new forms of commodification and value are produced; how both old and new resource regimes [...] are reordered; in what ways patterns of access, ownership, labour, production, distribution, exchange, accumulation and differentiation change or persist; and how such conditions affect the dynamic articulation between official or so called ‘formal’ economies and alternative or ‘informal’ economies. (Hammar 2014: 11-12)

The one may not exclude the other.

The financial systems of a country, those regulated and unregulated by a governmental or financial institution, are a reflection of its socio-economic and political situation. Roitman (2001, 2005) goes as far as stating that, in Central Africa, both state and non-state practices of governing refer to a common ‘ethic of illegality’, an understanding of mutual needs and benefits. She describes how the exact unregulated networks that have established themselves within the gaps of a state’s system allow the same state to reconstruct its authority. In other words, ‘unregulated economic exchanges and financial relations’ function alongside the activities of road robbers and the state (Roitman 2005: 15), having become part of the political logics of this state (Roitman 2001: 253). This entanglement of the formal and informal has developed in specific ways in specific areas, whether along national borders or more inland,²⁷³ and comes with specific codes of conduct, rules, and norms. The informal or illegal is thus not synonymous with being chaotic, disorderly, or even unregulated. Instead, alternative forms of regulatory authority can be observed. Merchants, customs officers, robbers, soldiers, the local village chief—they all make use of specific logics of exchange, whereby at times an ‘ethic of illegality’ prevails. The point here is not to delve into the exact functioning of the Chadian political-economic system, nor to place an emphasis on the workings of the state or the various informal and formal regulators. Instead, it sketches a context in which the Walad Djifir too make decisions. Through a focus on money, this chapter examines the entanglement of networks involved in the movement of Walad Djifir remittances, attempting to understand the logics of exchange involved.

Further research needs to be conducted vis-à-vis the scope of remittances being sent to Chad. For now, this chapter will describe the way the sending of remittances²⁷⁴ by several Walad Djifir shine light on the role of trust.²⁷⁵ Through exploring the modern ways of transferring money, this chapter

²⁷³ In Cameroon, for example, the state has fixed the prices of the beef retail market, limiting free economy and ultimately encouraging cattle traders to move to the Nigerian cattle markets (Unusa 2012: 132). Along the Cameroonian border, Roitman (2001, 2005) focuses on such techniques of fiscal regulation such as ‘tax-price’, avoiding the legal–illegal / formal–informal dichotomies in examining the regional networks of accumulation. The state’s regulatory bodies often levy more than just taxes and are of course not the only ones with enough power to request payments. The actors may change over time, but the logics of power and accumulation do not seem to change as much, especially as long as officials remain underpaid and rely on other tactics to supplement their income.

²⁷⁴ Susan Johnson rightly states that mobile money transfers encompass a lot more than simple remittances or the ‘sending home’ of money. Instead, they often include ‘gifts, various forms of “assistance”, and borrowings for a range of purposes’ (2015: ii), as well as the payment of electricity and water bills or groceries in some countries (De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017). The cases described in this chapter, however, do relate solely to the sending of money home.

²⁷⁵ Like Stasik (2010: 143), quoting Jackson 2004, trust is approached ‘[...] via ethnographic observations of everyday life’—in this case, the everyday handling of remittances/money transfers. Carey & Pedersen 2017 provide an additional lens with which to interpret these daily handlings, namely by examining the ‘infrastructures’ underpinning or enabling certainty and doubt, as opposed to merely the ‘technologies’ (p. 22)—in the case of the Walad Djifir, for example, the underlying logic (infrastructure) involved in decisions as to how money should be sent.

explores new mobilities and the means of exchange that come with them. In the previous chapter, livestock were shown to play an important role in processes of economic exchange and social relating. As such, they function as a connecting technology. Money plays a similar role, yet it has the potential to create connections where livestock no longer can—it offers a way to connect in times of rupture, as well as a way of binding the *ferīkh* to the globalizing world of digital technologies. Money and its exchange incorporate a different type of mobility and flexibility than that of livestock, especially when it comes to remittances. Remittances involve a way of relating to one another, opening up opportunities which may not have been possible in the past but may be so in the future (Lindley 2010). At the same time, remittances seem to close off specific ways of doing things, such as a type of economy which is much more related to livestock.²⁷⁶ Focusing on remittances, this chapter explores (1) the technologies involved; (2) what they connect and whom, geographically, socially, economically; (3) which social processes are linked to remittances, such as migration over long distances and labour migration; and (4) whether these processes are different from those of the past, in relation to (mis)trust and the networks used.

Technologies, networks, and transactions

Within a context of historical intra-regional mobility, where currencies tend to differ per monetary region or country, how then does the everyday civilian Walad Djifir receive money from a family member living abroad? The transfer of money, or remittances to be exact, involves technologies—such as the mobile phone, but also people—for ‘moving’ money, both e-money and cash. These technologies in turn make use of networks: communication networks such as those provided by banks, Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), and MTOs, as well as familial and commercial (social) networks. Both technologies and networks, as trajectories of people themselves moving and needing to move money, have an historical aspect. In fact, the historical roots of monetary transactions are directly linked to the perceptions and experiences of financial institutions, as well as to the historical reliance on social networks.²⁷⁷ In the ways money-senders—including middlemen like Bachar—approach these networks, accessibility, affordability, and mistrust play an important role.²⁷⁸ They help explain why a Walad Djifir sending money from an often remote location in Libya to a remote location in Chad, namely the nomadic camp of their family, does so by using both formal and informal networks (mixed methods).

²⁷⁶ For references to nomadic studies related to commodification and the reliance on cash, see Chapter 3.

²⁷⁷ See De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017 for case studies describing these dynamics in Anglophone Cameroon, DRC, Senegal, and Zambia.

²⁷⁸ See Carey 2017 on using mistrust, instead of trust, as explanatory model of everyday social relations; more on this later.

Transactions in the past & continuing insecurities

How then was money sent in the past, one might ask? Money was sent through merchants or travellers, often though in the form of merchandise so as to avoid currency issues.²⁷⁹ This took a long time and involved a high risk, both for the one doing the transporting as well as for the sender.²⁸⁰ In the previous chapter, the cattle merchant Hadj Hamatta recounted how he would travel with large sums of money hidden away on his person. Like other merchants and even travellers he preferred to buy goods with the money he had made in Nigeria, selling them on in Chad. Doing so avoided the possible loss when exchanging naira for CFA and meant there was a chance of additional profit being made. In the time that Bachar was working with the Fulani in Cameroon, he would occasionally buy a cow, which, over time, he sent on to be reared by his brother south of Mongo. In both cases of merchandise and of livestock as investments of money earned across borders, the risks of being robbed were great.

A recent example here functions to sketch a picture of what it could have been like in the past. Early in 2013 a story circulated in Chad about a government official travelling from N'Djaména to a town in Central Chad, when he happened on a group of *coupeurs de route* (road robbers). The story goes that the robbers ended up going through all their victim's receipts with him until they were satisfied that he had indeed already spent the money they had been told he would be carrying. They even escorted him past the next *coupeurs de route* further up the road, saying they would be horrible and less likely to be able to read the receipts. This was one of the more 'humouristic' stories of *coupeurs de route* circulating in Chad in early 2013. Only a few weeks later, a more serious version would be added, involving the murder of a government official and his young family. The official had been travelling with the salaries of civil servants. No one understood why the children too had to die—fear of recognition? On top of that, why had the government not opted to send the money through Express Union? Perhaps this had not been an option?

Another example of how money was more recently sent to family members within Chad involves a group of Walad Djifir who had been arrested and imprisoned on their way to Libya, in mid-2012. Due to the political situation in Libya and Chad's suspicion of nationals moving toward Libya to enrol in mercenary activities, the Chad–Libya border was under strict control.²⁸¹ These men happened to be passing through the wrong checkpoint at the wrong time. They were on their way to Libya to take up a job in livestock herding. The road through northern Chad is rough, hot, and dry. People usually travel on large lorries. The men were arrested on suspicion of heading to Libya under false pretences. It is highly likely that none of them were carrying any form of national

²⁷⁹ See Roitman 2005 on Chad basin's most lucrative unregulated markets, and Lydon 2009's extensive work on trans-Saharan trade networks in the 19th century.

²⁸⁰ Djohy 2017 et al. describe similar dynamics among Fulani in northern Benin and the benefits of the mobile phone in providing security.

²⁸¹ On Libya's unchecked southern borders and people-smuggling as one of the only viable businesses left for the economically devastated south: <http://www.irinnews.org/special-report/2018/09/06/libya-s-unchecked-southern-borders-key-easing-migration-crisis>, accessed 7 September 2018. In this article (dated September 2018), smugglers estimate 4,800 migrants enter Libya through Niger each month. It remains a question what figures exist from across the Chadian border, and/or how many of those migrants may be of Chadian origin. During the time of fieldwork, it seemed that most Walad Djifir making their way into Libya did so directly by crossing the border with Chad and did not have the added intention of migrating onward to Europe.

identification and that this was the primary reason for their arrest. What is clear is that these men spent several days in prison, being robbed of the money they had been carrying. After a few days they were released. In Dutch we say, ‘You can’t pluck a bald chicken.’ They had been released as no one really knew what to do with them, and they obviously would not provide the prison staff with much of an income. After their release, they found a safe location in which to take apart the seams of their clothes. This point in the story is usually told with much gesture and laughter, imitating the men prying open each and every seam. With the money they recuperated in this way, they would be able to send one of them on to Libya. It was at this point that a family member in N’Djaména was called. He was requested to contact their family members in the *ferīkh*, asking them to send him a certain amount of CFA.²⁸² He was then to send this money to them through a call box. Amazingly enough, this is what happened. More amazingly, the call box operator in this small village in the middle of northern Chad had the correct amount in cash. The men were now able to continue their journey, running the same risks as before.

These examples show the way insecurity factors into the ‘simple’ practice of travelling overland. The second example also shows the impact of the mobile phone, through which the men travelling to Libya were able to contact and alert their family members. In addition, it allowed them to ask for help, which was given to them rather efficiently. Past experiences of having sent money through a far-off family member or merchant and having lost it has driven the choice to send it through call boxes or MTOs. How, though, is that different from what was being done before? The sender still needs to trust someone to pick it up on the other end? True, but this time there is the mobile phone with which one can stay connected and involved in the whole process from beginning to end. I cannot count the number of times a person, having sent money from Libya, would call to make sure everything was going well. Of course, there is always the option of not answering a phone, delaying the process as a whole.

The current remittance infrastructure: Availability and affordability

Throughout many African countries there is a lack of banking penetration, mostly in terms of personnel and sufficient cash flow. In addition to banks, there are less than one hundred MTOs in Africa, all of which together are responsible for 90 per cent of all remittance service providers (RSPs), according to an IFAD report brought out in November 2009 (IFAD 2009). Western Union and MoneyGram remain the two most dominant MTOs on the African market, having required banks and other remittance-paying agents to sign an exclusivity agreement.²⁸³ This means that banks

constitute over 50 per cent of the businesses paying money transfers. About 41 per cent of payments and 65 per cent of all pay-out locations are serviced by banks in partnership with Western Union and MoneyGram. (ibid. 6)

²⁸² It is unclear how this money was raised. It is very probable that, since the group members trying to get to Libya were not direct relatives, several families pulled together to come up with the sum.

²⁸³ It is interesting to note here that Western Union was originally a telegram-sending service, based in the US, which evolved into incorporating postal services and has more recently used its existing infrastructure to provide monetary transfers.

Some African countries ‘treat remittances as foreign exchange transactions, which are reserved for banks and foreign exchange bureaus (ibid. 10)’. This prohibits micro-finance institutions (MFIs) from paying out or, in the case of Uganda, from carrying out any kind of electronic commerce. In such countries, with a low percentage of banks or other financial institutions such as MTOs, and a high level of intra-regional migration, the demand for more informal means of sending/receiving money is created.²⁸⁴ The restrictions on outbound money transfers—namely, on the amount—have strengthened the role of the informal financial sector. There are also the often steep transaction fees to consider.

Chad itself hosts a mixture of national and commercial banks, of which most are located in the capital and several major cities and towns—namely, Abéché, Moundou, Sarh, and Doba (see Map 1.1 to get a sense of the spread). Both Moundou and Abéché have relatively large business and humanitarian activities, probably the reason one finds a higher percentage of commercial banks in such locations. Up to November 2013, no bank branches or Western Union facility existed in Mongo, the closest main town for the Walad Djifir. The MTO Express Union has been in town since 2009. Next to this a *Caisse Urbaine* exists, as well as a handful of community micro-finance programmes. As of 15 and 20 November 2013, both the Orabank and the Société General (SGTchad) respectively have set up a *dependence* in Mongo. With the opening of the branches in Mongo came a sensitizing campaign: both banks invested in educating the local community in terms of what it meant to open a bank account as well as lowering the restrictions and fees associated with opening an account. In March 2014, both banks had attracted primarily government employees and the larger cattle and gum arabic merchants.²⁸⁵ The SGTchad works together with Western Union, while the Orabank is in partnership with the MTOs Coinstar,²⁸⁶ Money Express, and Oryx.

The outreach of the mobile phone has seen much greater efficiency.²⁸⁷ It is thus only common sense that mobile phone companies and financial institutions have looked to combine the infrastructure of mobile networks, already in place, with financial transactions, within the scope of a country’s financial regulations.²⁸⁸ Of the three mobile network companies present in Chad—namely, MOOV, Airtel, and Tigo—the latter two now also provide mobile banking services and have offices in Mongo. Airtel Money was launched in partnership with the Ecobank from June 2012

²⁸⁴ For the diverse ways in which MFIs are allowed to operate and the impact of this on the digital financial services (DFS) provided, as well as uptake by potential users, see De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017. In these case studies, we also see the role for the historical roots of monetary transactions, coupled with the historical need for the movement of money and people, perceptions of risk, technological appropriation, and networks of belonging as influencing the methods by which money is currently being transferred.

²⁸⁵ Sources: Interview with bank manager Orabank, Mongo, 18 March 2014; interview with SGTchad bank manager in Mongo, 19 March 2014.

²⁸⁶ Coinstar is part of the Sigue money transfer network, which has its origins in Latin America and the US.

²⁸⁷ De Bruijn et al. 2009; Chéneau-Loquay 2012; De Bruijn 2013, 2015; Djohy et al. 2017.

²⁸⁸ On how a country’s financial regulations can impact the (digital) financial services in place, both the formal and informal, see De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017. Banks and MNOs can provide a host of DFS, ranging from mobile banking to the paying of bills.

onwards.²⁸⁹ In partnership with the Orabank²⁹⁰ and Millicom International Cellular (MIC), Tigo Chad has also set up mobile financial services, announcing this service in January 2013. Mobile banking refers to monetary transactions which are made from a mobile phone via a bank account. This differs from those transactions which are carried out through a mobile network provider only—that is, via the use of a call box. When using a call box, the client does not need to own a mobile bank account to send money. Instead, they give the mobile phone agent cash, which is then transferred to e-money and sent to another agent, where it is collected as cash by the end-recipient.

On a visit to N'Djaména in October 2017, both Airtel and Tigo could be seen advertising their mobile money services. In fact, on purchasing a sim-card, I was advised to open a TigoCash account, which would allow me to top up my own airtime from the credit deposited in it and, theoretically, allow me to pay at various shops. As we were only there for a week, I declined; but it was interesting to see how these types of products had developed. At the same time, the reactions of various colleagues also in N'Djaména that week to the prices of phone calls, text messages, and Internet use, compared with neighbouring African countries, were a good reminder of how expensive mobile phone use still is for the average Chadian.²⁹¹

Thus, aside from infrastructural availability, an important driver behind choosing through which means to send money is the cost involved. Apart from Bachar, the other intermediaries along the transaction chain stand to benefit, making it a potentially costly endeavour. In the sending of money via MTOs, fixed commissions and exchange rates are paid. Merchants have their own prices, which are not that transparent—more often than not basing their exchange rates on the black market and charging a fee for their services.²⁹²

Mixed methods: A chain of transactions

There are various ways in which money is sent from Libya to Chad, involving numerous middlemen (see Figure 4.1 for an example of two ways). In all cases, the mobile phone plays an important role. Over the past few years, Bachar has become one of the main actors in the transaction chain for his extended family. Based in N'Djaména and literate in the institutional ways

²⁸⁹ The Ecobank is a pan-African bank and the largest independent regional banking group in West and Central Africa, covering 30 African countries. It was founded in the 1980s to fill the vacuum of commercial banks in West Africa. In an article on the website of *Mobile Payments Today*, dated 18 June 2012, Airtel claims to be the first of its kind to offer such a service to its Chadian clientele. Tigo also claims to be the first, in an article published on the website of *Telegeography.com* on 14 January 2013. It is planned to be made available to agents in N'Djaména, Mao, Moundou, and Abéché.

²⁹⁰ The Orabank Chad is a private bank and has been doing business in Chad for the past 17 years, since 1992. It has branches in Gabon, Togo, Guinea, Mauritania, and Benin (Orabank website).

²⁹¹ The Ivorian blogger and conference participant Emmanuel wrote a blog on his astonishment about the costs of megabytes in Chad and how it makes social activism via social media tricky: <http://emmanueldabo.com/portrait-de-deuhib-zizou-cyberactiviste-blogueur-tchadien/>, accessed 18 December 2017. At the same time, we need to remark that Facebook and Tigo, for example, offer the Internet user the free use of Facebook Messenger and a version of Facebook without images on their mobile phone. For more on Internet-use prices in Chad, see <http://tchadinfos.com/societes/tchad-internet-luxe-majorite-de-population/>, accessed 14 May 2018.

²⁹² In N'Djaména, for example, changing euros for CFAs at a local MTO could be done at a rate of 665 CFA/euro, while the official exchange rate is 655 CFA/euro. The official exchange rate for Libya in November 2014 was 2.879 Libyan pounds (LBP)/CFA.

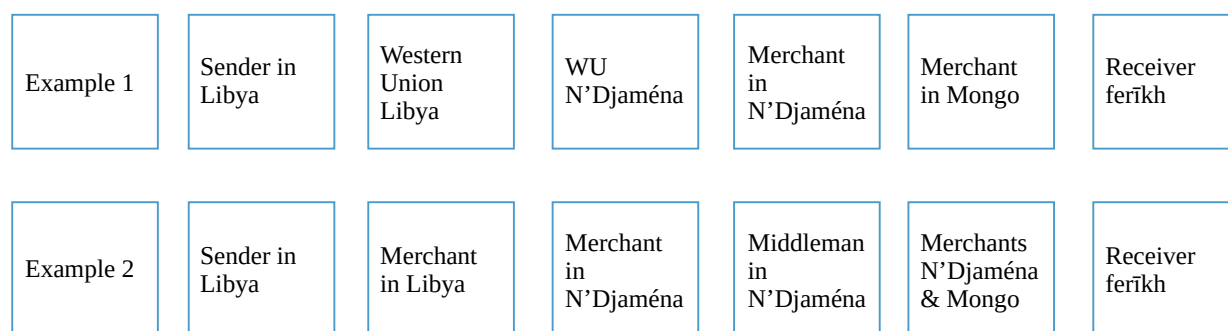
of the city, his trustworthy reputation has made him an ideal candidate. He continually receives phone calls from Libya.

Step one in the chain: Across national boundaries

Due to an often bad phone connection, or perhaps due to the caller's credit running out, these conversations are loud and held at a fast pace. They begin with a much shortened version of the extensive greeting ceremony and will launch right into transmitting the number of the Western Union transaction. Sometimes a call will come in at an inconvenient moment, when the caller will be asked to call back at a later time. Bachar will never call back—it is too expensive, he is not the one who wants something, and the phone numbers often come up as 'unknown' on his screen.

Once the Western Union number and amount have been taken down with pen and paper, Bachar is sure to pick up the cash as soon as possible, wishing to be rid of the responsibility. In some cases, the sender in Libya opts to transfer money via a merchant. This entails the sender giving cash to a merchant in Libya with commercial ties in Chad. In such a case, Bachar will receive a phone call indicating to which merchant he should go to retrieve the money. These merchants have varied from being importers of Libyan clothes or rugs to dealers in foreign currency. There are many cases in which such a middleman proves not to be so trustworthy, first investing the money into his own business and waiting for the return, before sending it on to Bachar. One can imagine the phone costs this leads to, not to mention the frustration on both the Libyan and Chadian side, since those on the *ferīkh* side have already been notified about the money transfer.

Figure 4.1 Typical money transfer schematics



Step two: National transactions

The next step in the chain is for the money to be sent on to the family member in the *ferīkh*. Sometimes this is done using Express Union. More often than not, the money is sent on through a merchant. In Bachar's case, he has developed a rapport with a Kanembu merchant in N'Djaména, who imports such goods as rice, tea, and sugar. This Hadj Ali²⁹³ has commercial ties to a relative in

²⁹³ Name has been changed. Similar processes of trader networks adapting to new technologies (mobile phone) and specializing as money transfer agencies can be found in a variety of countries. See Beuving 2006 for an example of Lebanese traders in Cotonou. In Chad it is the Kanembu who are well-known for their trade networks.

Mongo. When Bachar hands over his cash to Hadj Ali, the latter documents the sum in his notebook and makes a phone call to his counterpart in Mongo, informing him of the impending transaction and asking him whether he has the amount in cash available. Hadj Ali now owes his Mongo counterpart a certain amount in wares, cutting down on the transportation of cash between N'Djaména and Mongo. In a country like Chad, where *coupeurs de route* (road robbers) still make an appearance from time to time, this is one of the safest ways to do business. One of the consequences of money hardly ever circulating between cities is that the money found in Mongo is often impossibly old. With the coming of Express Union and the two banks, old notes have slowly started to be exchanged for newer versions. When the merchant in Mongo was asked whether he would consider opening a bank account now that both the Orabank and SGTchad were in town, he responded: 'With what? What should I put in the bank? This [these goods] is all I have. I buy and sell them, from which I can feed my family and children. What is left to put into a bank?'²⁹⁴ Hadj Ali in N'Djaména does make use of a bank account. According to the amount Bachar sends through Hadj Ali, a transaction fee is paid.

Step three: The local pickup

The transaction chain is a system with many checkpoints, a phone call being the method to ensure money has been correctly sent or received. Hadj Ali will have passed on the name of the Walad Djifir picking up the money, mentioning when he should expect him. This is usually on a Wednesday, Mongo's weekly market day and the day on which several Walad Djifir will come into town on business. Bachar in turn will phone the *ferīkh* relative responsible for collecting the money, stating the amount he is to receive, that he should not forget to go as soon as possible, and often giving instructions as to how the money should be divided among the Libyan sender's relatives. Bachar often decides whom to contact in the *ferīkh*, basing his decision on the person's relation to the one in Libya, the frequency with which he can be reached by mobile phone, and his general trustworthiness. Many younger men in the *ferīkh* possess a mobile phone; however, the two national networks available do not yet cover every inch of Chad, and charging batteries can be an issue.

As soon as the exchange has been made, Bachar will receive a phone call from Hadj Ali. Bachar will then call the *ferīkh* relative to confirm. The contact between Bachar and the *ferīkh* is often somewhat one-directional. Relatives in the *ferīkh* will *beep* his mobile phone or hold very short conversations, but in general Bachar is in the position to buy phone credit more readily. Depending on the one sending the money from Libya, Bachar will be allowed to keep 5,000–10,000 CFA (approx. 7–15 euros). This fee goes toward the costs of the many phone calls with actors in the chain and toward providing petrol for his motor with which he makes the trips to the various MTOs and merchants. It is a source of income, albeit not large.

Merchants are also used to send money transnationally, as another example of sending money from Libya to a *ferīkh* in Chad shows. In this case, Bachar was informed that a specific amount of money was to be picked up from the merchant Muhammed. Merchant Muhammed could be found among those buying and selling foreign currency at the capital's large market. On approaching the

²⁹⁴ Interview with merchant in Mongo, 18 March 2014, translated from Chadian Arabic.

place where foreign currency is bought and sold, Bachar asked a seemingly random merchant where this merchant Muhammed could be found. Said merchant Muhammed was at first a bit reluctant, but after Bachar mentioned the right names and amount, handed over the money. The next step was now to send the money on to the *ferīkh*, a process performed as described above, through a merchant with commercial ties in the closest large town (to the *ferīkh*). The money had been sent via a merchant in Libya with commercial, and probably familial, ties to Chad. The merchant Muhammed in N'Djaména, in turn, had thus provided credit to this merchant in Libya. Whether they would even out the score with another monetary transaction or goods was unclear but probable.

Reasons for remittance sending

The communications technology revolution has not only benefitted the more formal financial (transaction) system but also the older, traditional systems based on sending money via merchants. Apart from the technical improvements surrounding the sending of money, the various intermediaries use mobile phones to stay connected and involved. Nevertheless, such new technologies as the mobile phone, and products related to it, are used within a certain context—a specific context shaped in interaction with individuals and by the economic, political, and social environment which is Chad. This section will discuss the reasons for sending money—namely, (1) everyday economic life in the *ferīkh* and the need to supplement income; (2) the role of infrastructures available in relation to insecurity and mistrust; and (3) the place of technology in creating security and regulation.

Remittances and everyday economic life in the *ferīkh*

For the Walad Djifir, as for many nomadic populations, their livestock function like a bank (Unusa 2012: 86). Their cattle are their main source of credit and insurance. Once the credit runs low and there are no obvious ways of replenishing the stock, many men turn to forms of labour migration, whether within the country or regionally. In terms of a means of saving, investment in more livestock and the buying of land play this role. Through the natural reproduction of livestock and by selling and buying them at the right times, wealth is accumulated. Typically, cattle will be bought during dry season, fattened up, and then sold after the wet season. Asking about livestock numbers among nomads is as taboo as asking about their number of children; they will hardly ever give you an exact figure. Unlike other nationals who deal with mortgages half of their lives, the average urban Chadian invests in land and housing for their children throughout his/her life, saving up to buy a plot of land and then slowly building on it as money trickles in. There are not many Walad Djifir who have bought land, but those family members who are more urban-oriented and carry out large-scale commercial activities have done so—often with money earned abroad. For those in the *ferīkh*, remittances go a long way toward replenishing livestock and providing a source of wealth in other areas of daily life.

Take the case of Adoum Judah, who, as a young, unmarried man in the early 1970s, set out for Sudan. The herd of his father and uncles was not large enough to be divided among his brothers, and so he went in search of work in order to earn enough money to enlarge the herd. He describes Chad as being poor at that time; there was little work to be found and no security due to an ongoing civil war. In comparison, the situation in Sudan provided more opportunities for employment, and the added benefit of a shared language in the north (Arabic) made it an appealing place to go. Adoum Judah did not know anyone on leaving Chad, but he says Chadians and Sudanese are '*ahl wahid bass*' (all one family). He was able to find work guarding sheep and goats. In those days, money (or news for that matter) was not sent back regularly; instead, on return to the family, Adoum Judah brought back money and a horse. The horse he sold in exchange for three or four cows.

The story of Adoum Judah is not unique; and come the early 2000s, members of his extended family are active as second- or third-generation merchants in CAR; as seasonal factory workers, guards, and goat herders in Libya; and as long-term cattle merchants travelling to Nigeria and Cameroon. The context of economic exchange in each of these countries is a different one—Chad, Cameroon, and CAR are part of the Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC), a monetary union officially facilitating the movement of people, goods, and money across national borders. In contrast, Libya and Chad do not share such an economic unity; and with the fall of Qaddafi in 2011, politico-economic relations have also changed.

Infrastructures, insecurity, and mistrust

Within Libya and Chad's political context, using the infrastructure in place, the Walad Djifir have formed a transaction network. Insecurity has an ambiguous position as push and pull factor in the movement of people. Throughout the fieldwork period in 2011–2013, Walad Djifir could be seen fleeing Libya as a result of the revolution and the consequent persecution of Chadians, accused of being mercenaries in Qaddafi's forces. At the same time, the continuous stress of life in the *ferikh* and the availability of herders' jobs in remote Libya have resulted in various Walad Djifir leaving for Libya.²⁹⁵ Apart from the explicit violence, a more implicit insecurity exists. As mentioned earlier, those Walad Djifir working in Libya are frequently harassed, news of which is passed on in their phone conversations with Bachar and other family members. Their Libyan employer is often asked to accompany them to the Western Union branch. Apart from this, the clandestine nature of their presence in Libya implies that they may not have the necessary credentials to send money through official channels. The choices they are then faced with are to entrust the transaction to someone who can make use of an MTO, or to entrust it to a merchant with ties in Chad. The fees asked by the different money operators (MTO or merchant) also factor into this calculation.

²⁹⁵ In a conversation with Bachar, he explained how young men from the *ferikh* leave for Libya with trucks from the town of Moussoro. 'The *khalifa* [representative of a specific sub-tribe] will get information about whether the merchant has space to transport people. They will pay up to 300,000 CFA per person. The truck will leave without much merchandise or with camels. With the camels, the Chadians and merchant can pretend they have been hired to take care of them, but they will still usually avoid the big roads (*c'est la fraude*). The same when traveling without a lot of merchandise and several Chadians. On the way down from Libya, the trucks are heavily charged [with merchandise] and they can't risk taking the fraud routes. There is less problem for Chadians leaving Libya.' Fieldnotes, 28 February 2014.

Lately, Bachar has been receiving requests from non-relatives to act as a middleman. This is a development he is not pleased with. ‘It invites trouble. I have told them to stop giving my number to people whose families we don’t know.’ He is worried that if something happens to the money, or if one of the relatives of the sender is not honest, issues will arise that cannot be resolved within the tribe, as usually happens among the Walad Djifir.

There is, then, a role for trust when it comes to making decisions about sending money.²⁹⁶ Infrastructures have to be available but also trusted. Social networks need to be accessible and trustworthy. Observations and conversations indicate that the focus of decisions on whether or not to make use of a certain network or infrastructure is based on *mistrust*. Bachar does not trust that the non-relatives will not take advantage of the situation and create some kind of problem for him and his family. When dealing with a misbehaving relative, even if a distant one, his family members can be called upon to put things right. Carey (2017) suggests using mistrust as an explanatory model of everyday social relations,²⁹⁷ a framework within which actions and decisions of Walad Djifir are formed. Carey posits that trust is (a) not merely a matter of choice but also a way of viewing the world; and (b) that ‘this way of viewing the world is one that relies on familiarity as a basis for simplification’ (ibid. 5-6). Trust helps us to foresee future consequences of choices made. Bachar’s reluctance to receive money from a non-family member is because he cannot oversee the risks. He would rather not give up the control he would otherwise have and risk becoming dependent on the good-will of those involved in the money chain. These reservations are based on experience: In 2013 Bachar had received money from the friend of a family member working with him in Libya. This friend had sent money to a merchant in N’Djaména, from whom Bachar was supposed to collect before sending it on via Express Union to the friend’s family elsewhere. The merchant had decided to invest the money into his business before passing it on. It took Bachar many phone calls and trips on motorbike, meanwhile dealing with both the sender and end-recipients’ anxiety about where the money had gone, before it was in his hands and he could send it on. If it had been someone from his own *tribu*, it would have been easier for him to manage the different parties.

The place of technology in creating security and regulation

One may argue that future use of only formally institutionalized means (e.g. MTOs, mobile banking, banks) will contribute to creating a feeling of security around the sending of money. Apart from providing security, formalization and technological developments may also go toward cutting down the costs of sending money. Presently, due to the remoteness of sender and receiver’s geographical locations, often multiple ‘handlers’ have to be used, making transfers a costly process. An MTO or merchant is needed for money to cross Chadian–Libyan national boundaries, while

²⁹⁶ For an analysis of trust in relation to money transfer infrastructures and networks used in Cameroon, CAR, DRC, and Senegal, see De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017.

²⁹⁷ ‘Simmel describes trust as “a hypothesis regarding future behavior, a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct” and suggests that people, eras, and societies differ by the particular admixture of knowledge and ignorance that suffices to generate trust (1950: 318–19). In other words, the morphology of the trust hypothesis shapes and produces particular social forms. I [Carey] argue that just the same is true of mistrust. It is an alternative hypothesis and one that gives rise to social forms of its own. These are not merely the photographic negative of those produced by trust, but interesting and occasionally admirable constructs in their own right.’ (Carey 2017: 3)

merchants and mobile networks can be used for intra-national transfers. Throughout these transactions, the trust placed in whatever system is chosen is intricately linked to the trust placed in the individuals involved.

Recent developments, such as Express Union's alliance with MoneyGram, opens up the possibility to bypass the capital when making transactions from remote Libya (via MoneyGram) to remote Chad (via Express Union), also eliminating several middlemen. Western Union has partnered with mobile operators to offer a mobile money-sending product, enabling international money transfers with the MTO through mobile phones. In 2015, Chad was not yet a country with which they had partnered. Since November 2013, the setting up of a bank account in Mongo and the possibility to transfer money internationally through it are now possible. Whether or not these banks are partnered with banks located in Libya is another question. I am unsure of the situation on the ground in remote Libya and the feasibility of sending money through a bank branch, also considering the often illegal status of Chadians working in Libya. While mobile banking can grow to become a viable alternative, in Chad it currently functions only within the country—more specifically, within one mobile network, making the sending of money between two providers impossible.

Insecurity, in its many forms,²⁹⁸ presents itself as one of the main reasons for the movement of Walad Djifir and their money. The current reasons for, and means of, remittance sending are being kept in place by a combination of economic necessity, resulting in the need and demand for labour migration, and the availability of infrastructure. While the Walad Djifir need to supplement their income, Libyans need their livestock tended. The available transport routes for merchandise provide the Walad Djifir with a means of getting across the border. The infrastructure in place, in terms of money-sending opportunities and mobile phone networks, informs part of the connections maintained with their family in the *ferīkh*. While families in the past would not hear from those abroad for years at a time, not reaping the benefits of income made, in recent years the transfer of money and news has become more frequent. Of course, there are always cases of family abroad 'disappearing' and not 'checking in', for whatever reasons.

What then is the result of these developments? The up-and-coming opportunities for the sending of money mentioned above may alter the scene again. In an interview with a large-scale cattle merchant based in Mongo, Al-Hadj Hamatta Asheen, he explained how Chadian merchants trading with Nigeria, for example, use both the older system of exchanging goods and only occasionally the sending of money.²⁹⁹ For the cattle Al-Hadj Hamatta sells in Nigeria, a Nigerian merchant sends him products which he then sells in Chad. He does own a bank account in which he deposits money, but the bulk of his trading activities are still conducted in kind.

Based on my stays with the Walad Djifir and on talks with representatives of the local community and bank branches, it might be quite a while before the majority of the semi-sedentary Walad Djifir start opening bank accounts. Chadians in general, especially those in remote areas, are

²⁹⁸ Insecurity here refers to income insecurity and the insecurity that comes with not being able to provide for a family, or the need to build up a stock of animals so as to be able to marry or otherwise provide.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Al-Hadj Hamatta Asheen, together with colleague Souleymane, 19 March 2014, Mongo.

concerned about what will happen to their hard-earned money when another wave of rebels loot the city. Those already involved in trade, local and international, or with official positions in the local market—that is, those owning national IDs and handling large amounts of cash—may be among the first to make the switch. Although remittances are not yet widely used to invest in the buying of land, this change from cattle-as-capital to land-as-capital could in the future be followed by the keeping-of-capital in a bank account³⁰⁰—assuming there is enough capital to be put away.

New mobilities, new exchanges, and old mistrusts?

Chad has an extensive history of internal and external political unrest in combination with ecological strains.³⁰¹ The politico-military history of Chad, Libya, Sudan, and CAR especially are intricately intertwined.³⁰² Since 2011, Chad has taken up an active military role in Mali as well as an official and unofficial role in CAR. Among the other recent political events taking place in the region are Libya's ongoing post-revolutionary scene, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and northern Cameroon, and West Darfur's continued unrest. In relation to Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) alone has helped 150,000 Chadian migrants fleeing Libya to reintegrate since July 2011 (IOM 2013). Within this setting, there were always people who left the Walad Djafir community to go out and work, earning cash to supplement their dwindling livestock numbers.³⁰³ This movement has not changed. It is the world around this movement that seems to have changed, as one Walad Djafir put it,³⁰⁴ thus also affecting, in different ways from before, those moving out and staying. So what changes, if any, do we see in terms of the social processes linked to remittance sending?

Various nomadic studies show a common trend in pastoral modernization with individuals moving out of their communities, permanently in search of economic alternatives. In the case of the Walad Djafir leaving for Libya, there is a certain temporariness to this opting out of pastoral life,

³⁰⁰ Something to consider may be Islam's stance toward the earning of interest: it is forbidden. Whether the Walad Djafir make the comparison between the keeping of capital as livestock or land, which can potentially make a return, and the keeping of capital in a bank account with no interest is a question I have yet to ask. Both methods have pros and cons.

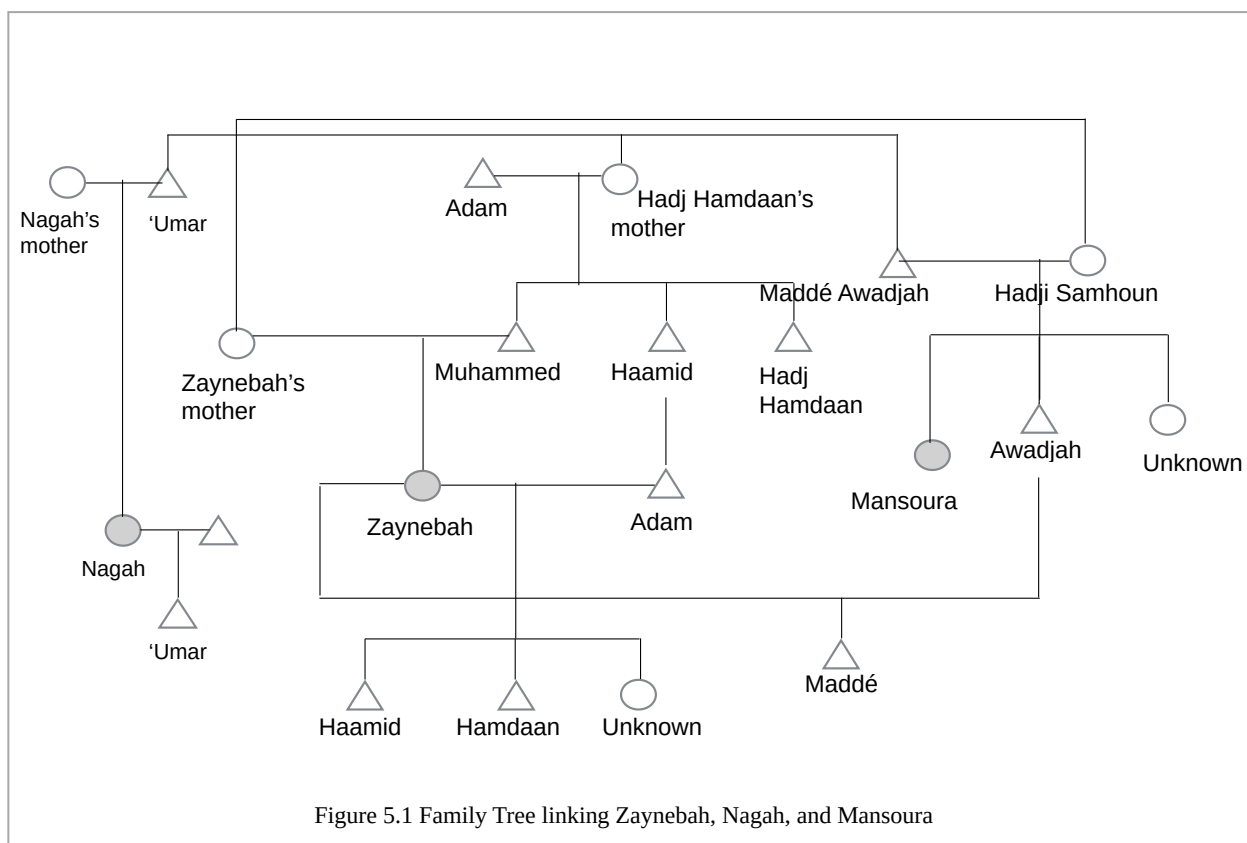
³⁰¹ Civil wars took place in 1965–1979, 1979–1982, 1998–2002, and 2005–2010. See also the Introduction and Chapter 1.

³⁰² See Debos 2008 on the cross-border activities of Chadian fighters in CAR, which seem to have become a structural pattern since the 1970s and should be seen in relation to regional migrations; see Azevedo 2004 [1998] on Qaddafi's long-term meddling in Chadian politics; Boggero 2009 on the complex causes and implications of the crisis in Darfur and Chad. See Berg 2008 for an overview of the interconnectedness of the conflicts in Chad, Sudan, and CAR.

³⁰³ See Chapter 3. In relation to livelihood strategies in general, see Unusa 2012, who distinguishes between individual, household managerial strategies and mutual, community-based strategies. 'Individual, household managerial strategies include mobility and migration, various aspects of herd entrustments and management, supplementation of grazing with other feeds, cattle fattening and trade, changes in herding strategies owing to conflicts and stress intensification, and management of diseases. Mutual, community-based strategies include sharing, loaning and livestock transfers, and harmonization of community rules to adjudicate the use of rangeland resources such as pastures and water shared by groups or individuals with conflicting and varied interests.' (p. 72)

³⁰⁴ Conversation with Bachar during the course of fieldwork 2012.

with most returning home eventually. Where in the past an uncle or nephew would leave the *ferikh* to spend years in Sudan, ideally returning with a horse and some nice extras—money for clothes, sheep, or cattle—nowadays remittances are sent back home throughout the stay. The main reasons



for this are not only technological and infrastructural developments in relation to the sending of money (e.g. Western Union and MoneyGram); it is also safer to send money back in parts, enabling family members to buy livestock which will keep until their return. Travelling overland with large sums of money between Libya and Chad still carries a high risk.³⁰⁵ As the case studies have shown, many Walad Djafir working in Libya report being harassed and require the assistance of their Libyan employer when sending money. A related issue is not being in possession of an ID card, which most agencies require.

There is a much more immediate effect, and benefit, to people working abroad now than in the past. People even complain when they have not heard from a family member abroad, worrying about their safety or health, or merely expectantly awaiting a sum of money.³⁰⁶ Most of the money is invested in livestock, while small amounts are used for the more luxurious needs of direct family. Here one should think of tea, sugar, and clothing. Some will refer to family members as *voleurs* or robbers, claiming they do not spend the money as the sender in Libya has requested, instead

³⁰⁵ In the past, partly to circumvent the difference in valuta between Libya and Chad, returnees would import Libyan goods to be sold in Chad. A contemporary alternative would be to open a bank account, relying less on the help of family—yet general illiteracy, financial illiteracy, ID-issues, and the lack of banks in remote regions still impede this development.

³⁰⁶ See Lindley 2010 for similar stories from among the Somalian diaspora residing in the UK, explaining the difficult situation this sometimes puts them in. Similar dynamics were encountered in Senegal (De Bruijn, Butter & Fall 2017).

‘drinking’ more than their share through numerous cups of sugared tea, or buying themselves a new radio, watch, or mobile phone. Remittances from Libya are also used to pay for weddings of a direct family member (i.e. brother or uncle).³⁰⁷ Women, such as Marnéh’s daughter Zaynebah, showed me the carpets and pillowcases her husband had brought back for her on his last trip to Libya.

At this point it is uncertain (to me) how long the Walad Djifir have been going away to work in Libya.³⁰⁸ Their transhumance routes did not go that far north—travels to northern Chad were usually to buy salt for the cattle and camels—and Sudan and CAR are named more commonly when speaking of labour migration or commerce in the past. During the first fieldwork period (October 2011), family members who had clearly been living in Libya for several years were now returning, fleeing the violence. Those returning consisted of complete families, with children born and raised in Libya, as well as single men. The men in these families had often worked as guards in Libyan cities. In three cases, returned single men had been soldiers in Qaddafi’s national army, bearing passport-sized photographs of themselves in uniform as proof. They all struggled to find their place again in Chadian society and within their family. One man in particular was extremely dissatisfied with the lack of support he felt he was receiving from family members, complaining loudly and emotionally during evening talks in the *ferīkh*.³⁰⁹ He had worked as a guard, proudly proclaiming he used to cook for himself. Back in the *ferīkh* setting he had no cattle of his own and accused his family of not helping him. On another occasion, on 7 March 2014, Souleymane, James, and I interviewed a retired *solider*³¹⁰ who had spent some time in Libya in the late 1980s and early 1990s—the time of the battle around the Aouzou strip under Habré—and returned to live in the sedentary village of Tchoufiou. His leg was injured as a *gendarme* under Déby, but he was able to get around on a motorcycle. He receives a pension from the state, although it is not particularly regular. His family had helped him build a *kouzi*, a round mud-house with dried grass roof. He was thankful and looking for ways to make himself a living. In N’Djaména, Bachar and I also met several Libyan returnees, one or two of them camped out at the house of Bachar’s cousin, the ex-minister. One hoped to be integrated into the Chadian army, but Bachar was sceptical of the possibility, as the man’s past in the Libyan army might come up and not be in his favour.

³⁰⁷ The marriage of Djibrine, a member of the *ferīkh*’s advisory body, is an example of this; Mirjam de Bruijn and I were witnesses to the celebration of his marriage to a second wife in March 2013.

³⁰⁸ Cordell (1985: 321) writes on the close ties that existed historically between Libya and Chad’s societies and states: commercially, in terms of religious ties, the configuration of the Central Sudanic state of Kanem and Bornu, and in terms of the environment of the Sahara itself. Within this historical context, nomadic peoples are known to have moved within and among the various empires and states. He goes on to describe how the 19th century’s ‘expanding economy impinged on local societies’, referring to European penetration into the Sahara and the Ottomans’ domination of Libya in the 16th century (p. 322). The extent to which the Walad Djifir (or Misseria Rouges, rather) had contact with these societies and Libya itself is difficult to tell and requires further research.

³⁰⁹ Fieldnotes, on a visit to the *ferīkh* of Kolokos at Fané, 17 March 2012.

³¹⁰ At the time his friend and he joined the army, neither of them knew anything other than the tending of cattle. They went to Mongo to join the army during the period of problems between Goukouni and Habré (ca. 1979). During the interview, he mentioned being in Faya (northern Chad) in 1983 and in Abéché, Oum Hadjer, and Am Timam in 1984. In 1992 he returned to N’Djaména with Déby’s MPS. Fieldnotes and interview (film & voice recording), at the village of Tchoufiou II Arabe, 7 March 2014.

During the course of the fieldwork in 2012, many men were leaving to go to Libya again. In most cases, family members in the *ferīkh* said they were going to work as herders for Libyans. There is seemingly a great demand for livestock herding in Libya, and it is popular due to how well it pays.³¹¹ These men often leave with the intention of returning after a few months—ideally after ‘enough’ money has been made. In February 2014 I met several younger and older men who had already returned from Libya. Having left Libya voluntarily, as opposed to those who fled post-2011, their return to *ferīkh* life was relatively smooth. One man in his early twenties had worked in a plastics factory in Tripoli. He now helped out running a *souq* in the *ferīkh*, laying out their wares wherever there were gatherings.

So what can we ascertain from all these stories about social processes in general and the mobilities in which the Walad Djifir are involved? We have seen that the sending of money, namely remittances, connects family members but also geographical regions, cities, and villages. In addition, it seems to connect the formal/regulated and informal/unregulated networks of money transfer. There is a certain continuity in the way the newer methods have been appropriated by the Walad Djifir: the process of moving away for whatever reasons are ongoing, but the means of staying in touch and thus also the sending back of money have become easier, safer. Not everyone makes use of this, however, and there are other issues as the cases show. They do not necessarily seem to have a different meaning within the present-day contexts of, for example, a departed Qaddafi, a disrupted CAR, or even within the context of Chad’s modernizing economy.

How is it that the Walad Djifir seem to embrace such a technology as the digital transfer of money fairly easily? Can this embracing be seen as creating a new social fabric, or is it merely a continuation of earlier patterns but in a new guise, so to speak?³¹² The answer lies somewhere in the way the Walad Djifir deal with risk in general. They live in an environment strongly informed by an insecurity fed by the general, frequent occurrence of crises and the oppressive character of the Chadian state.³¹³ Such an environment, coupled with a certain type of behaviour when making decisions, reveals the importance of trust and mistrust—namely, a trust which is based on the evaluation of risk and which is closely demarcated along familial and tribal lines.³¹⁴

As the *ferīkh* politics chapter (Chapter 2) has shown, the politics in which the majority of the tribe are involved are more often than not of the more immediate and local kind, involving leadership rivalries on the level of the familial and tribal *chefferie*. However, in making adaptations

³¹¹ Livestock here refers to goats, sheep, and camels. Although this remains to be researched, one might suggest that the increase in jobs (and pay) for herders in Libya is directly related to the post-Qaddafi disorder.

³¹² See De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh & Angwafo 2010 on the directions of social change linked to the appropriation of the mobile phone in Cameroon’s Bamenda Grassfields—power relations were affected while at the same time people were shaped by and shaping the mobile phone; Elliot 2010 on social ties not being lost but changed and adapted in the context of camel milk commodification in Eastleigh, Kenya among the Somali diaspora.

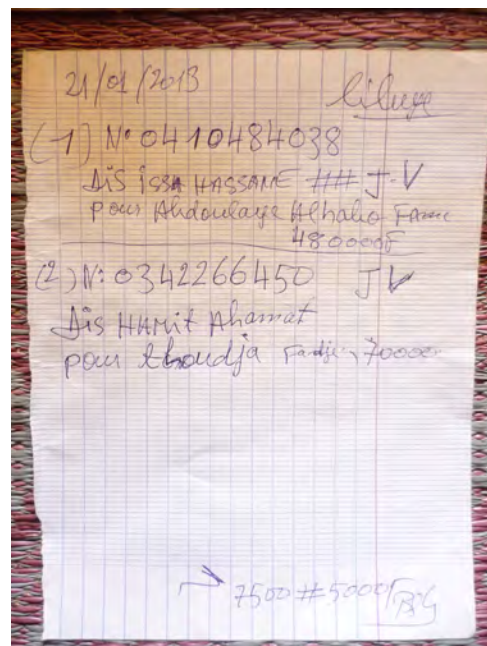
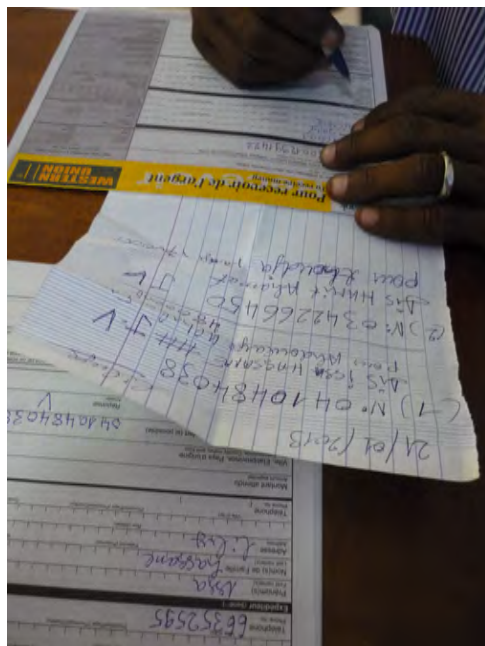
³¹³ See Roitman 2005; Seli 2012.

³¹⁴ See Debos 2016 on the ethnicization of men under arms during colonial rule and the general hardening of formerly fluid ethnic and religious identities, including the polarization of the north–south divide. The reinvention and fixing of identities was continued during the civil war (1979–1982) and continues up until today.

to their livelihood, Walad Djifir seem to have a certain knack for finding economic niches in otherwise dangerously insecure environments, such as the one in Libya—thus taking part, however indirectly, in resulting displacement economies. Their approach to sending money may be seen as an extension of these strategies, making use of the technologies and networks at hand while basing decisions on experiences and perceptions of mistrust. The Walad Djifir are flexible in their adaptation to changes such as those brought on by technological developments, which in turn is a continuity of former ways of doing and being.

These factors combined mean that the technology of sending money digitally, over distances and in contexts of insecurity, has been adopted relatively easily by the Walad Djifir. It fits within their nomadic pastoral ‘walk of life’ (Chapter 3), building on networks of (mis)trust and an inherent need to be flexible. They have adopted the technology, however, in their own specific way, incorporating aspects such as the use of merchants and family members—revealing again the centrality of (mis)trust which, in Chad, often translates into the use of one’s own networks. Remittances as connector thus seem to strengthen relations, and ensuing actions, of trust and mistrust—and in so doing, also strengthen that which the *ferīkh* embodies. One could argue that a certain groundedness in a way of dealing with the ‘outside’ world, based on both trust and mistrust, is key.

This chapter discussed the appropriation of a new technology within an existing system of sending money. In a roundabout way, it has explored whether such new methods as provided by the mobile phone and MTOs have impacted or changed decisions people make in relation to which networks to use. It seems that they have, in fact, strengthened the existing preferences, ones based on trust in direct family or trusted associates.



4.1 Bachar filling out a Western Union reception form at a bank branch in N'Djaména, January 2013. The larger monetary transfer operators such as Western Union and Express Union have both independent offices and counters within the premises of some banks.

4.2 Notes after a phone call from Libya, January 2013. Bachar was very meticulous in noting down details of transactions and would also retain these documents.

4.3 Map of Express Union locations within Chad, February 2014.

4.4 Bachar handing over cash to a merchant in N'Djaména, February 2014. This money had been sent to Bachar from Libya and needed to be sent on to someone in a ferikh near Mongo. The merchant kept a record of the transactions he carried out. This paper money (cash) would stay with the merchant, acting as credit for a trade partner in Mongo. The trade partner / shopkeeper in Mongo would then distribute cash to the person who came to collect it.





4.5 Hadj Hamatta Mongo, March 2014. Hadj Hamatta is a cattle merchant with a large network inside and outside of Chad. He hires nomads to herd his own cattle. The cattle he buys up at local markets are transported on foot to Nigeria. In return for the cattle Hadj Hamatta sells, a Nigerian merchant sends him products which Hadj Hamatta then sells in Chad. He does own a bank account in which he deposits money, but the bulk of his trading activities are still conducted in kind.

4.6 Souleymane, James, and I joint-interviewing an ex-soldier in the sedentary village of Tchoufiou Deux, March 2014. This man had spent some time in Libya, and he then returned to the village of Tchoufiou after his pension. He was still adjusting to life in the rural village but was fairly positively minded. He received a pension from the Chadian state and helped with his family's agricultural fields insofar as his injured leg would permit. Having been away from the Guéra and his family for many years, he noticed a number of positive changes to their 'mentality' [his words]—though there were certain areas which could do with improving. His focus for the future of the Walad Djifir was education, not only of the children but also in relation to adult literacy.

4.7 Kouzi of a man returned to the village after having finished his military service, March 2014. His family members had pulled together to help him build this home in Tchoufiou Deux.

FIVE ON FAMILY & BELONGING (IN TIMES OF CRISIS)³¹⁵

My first encounter with Zaynebah was a somewhat casual one in October 2011. On our arrival in the *ferīkh* toward the late afternoon, I had accompanied Bachar in giving our best wishes to a sick woman. She had been lying in the shade of a tent, covered by a heavy blanket. Later in the evening, it was this same woman that accompanied me to empty my bladder *en brousse*. It was only when I came to live in Zaynebah's tent in February 2012 that I was able to connect the dots and realize those women had been one and the same—namely, Zaynebah. At the first encounter in 2011, she had been with the family in the *ferīkh* for about a year, and she was often feeling poorly. On my return in February 2012, she was doing a lot better, taking a more active part in the household duties while at times still suffering from bad days. She would often recount the types of food one could eat in CAR, laughing aloud at the questions asked by the other women. She would exclaim, 'Uh! There is so much choice every day. Fresh fruit like papaya, corn....' In private conversation, when I asked her what she found difficult or different about living in the *ferīkh*, she explained that in the beginning she had tried to change the mentality of the women she lived with in terms of hygiene and methods of cooking. Her attempts had been unsuccessful, as the women's responses were, more often than not, to listen, shrug their shoulders, and continue as they always had. 'I might have been able to "teach" them a few things,' she said, 'but not much.' The best way to try and change this, according to Zaynebah, is to talk to the young men. Even if it is just to one or two of them, it might change things slowly.³¹⁶

Zaynebah Muhammed was born and raised in urban Bangui to a Chadian mother and father. Upon the death of her father,³¹⁷ which followed the passing of her mother two years previously, she was sent to live with her father's family in a *ferīkh* just north of Mongo. She arrived in this rural Chadian setting in September 2010, with two young sons in tow, children from her second marriage to a first cousin. In the *ferīkh* she would stay with her husband's father and paternal uncle Hamid (see Chapter 3), her paternal uncle Hadj Hamdaan, and their wives Marnéh and Hassineh

³¹⁵ Parts of this chapter have been adapted from a piece written for the 'Connecting in Times of Duress' website, published in the form of a web dossier on CAR on 14 January 2015 and comprising pieces by myself and colleagues Catherina Wilson and Adamou Amadou; <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/wd-car-unexpected-forces-that-shape-chadian-citizenship-from-fluid-to-fixed-belonging/>, accessed 12 January 2018.

³¹⁶ From fieldnotes, 3 March 2012

³¹⁷ It is her father's inheritance which this ethnography's Introduction and Chapter 3 refer to.

respectively (see Family Tree in Figure 1.1). Her husband, Adam, stayed behind in a village in south-eastern CAR, running the business her father had left behind. In the course of 2012, Zaynebah would return to the village in CAR, only to flee again in the spring of 2013. Zaynebah's story is one with many layers and involves various factors but is somehow always linked to the solidarity with—and perhaps more so, adherence to—family. Despite initially finding the women's *ferīkh*-ways unlike her own, being in the *ferīkh* with her father's family helped her get through what seems to have been a depression following the death of her father. Unfortunately, she was to encounter more personal hardship in the years to follow. This chapter is an attempt to unravel what lies behind a certain groundedness people like Zaynebah seem to possess despite and amid periods of disruption. Where do connectivity, family, and belonging play a role? And what does the framing of these situations, as crisis, bring us?

Mobility, disruption, and family

In the previous chapters, aspects of the Walad Djifir's socio-economic network have been described, revealing patterns of change and continuity within the connectors through which it spreads and is made use of. Building on the idea of the *ferīkh* as embodying such networks and thus personifying space within a transnational setting, through the various connectors, this chapter both takes us away from and returns us to the physical setting of the *ferīkh* and Chad in general, through the narratives of three Chadian women born and raised in CAR: Zaynebah, Nagah, and Mansoura. Choosing to focus on the stories of three women in this chapter is the result of 'just writing 1,000 words a day' (see Introduction). On refining the initial text, it became clear that, due to the many similarities and differences in their stories, they provide an ideal analytical entrance into dynamics related to family, belonging, and crisis. The stories of the men in Zaynebah's life—Hadj Hamdaan, Adam, Bachar, Hamid—have to a large extent been told in the previous chapters. It is now 'her turn', as my four-year-old would say. At the same time, this chapter questions what could be a fairly linear way of thinking by comparing Zaynebah's story with that of two other female family members born and raised in Bangui: Nagah and Mansoura (see the Family Tree in Figure 5.1). Setting her story next to those of these two other women provides context and reflective insights related to the role of family and wealth, vis-à-vis gendered flexibility.

Crisis narratives?

In their introduction, Graw and Schielke (2012) suggest turning toward the personal and existential dimensions—that is, the expectations and experiences of migration—in order to understand 'what makes migration such a compelling path'. They explain how

[...] more existentially sensitive ways of researching and analysing migratory processes may be crucial to perceiving and understanding what is most central about migration to the individuals and societies involved. In our view, such a more existentially sensitive perspective is helpful in understanding that houses (and the family ties they represent) may be more central to migration than boats, people more

central than money, expectations more, or at least equally, important than regulations and border regimes. (p. 9)

Recognizing that these propositions are made within a context of primarily ‘voluntary’ migration—even if determining to what extent we can speak of there really being a choice is complicated—I wonder if they may be extended to other forms of mobility, such as not only to the forced migration observed after the CAR coup of 2013, but also to the idea of groundedness, whereby ‘houses’, people, and expectations play a crucial role. The search for what may be central to forms of mobility can also be applied to other explanatory narratives of contemporary situations: narratives of disruption and also narratives describing the nature of social relations. Examining these three womens’ daily life choices/decisions/expectations in the context of the CAR coup’s aftermath—vis-à-vis mobility, disruption, and social relations—ultimately raises questions related to the position of agency and structure.

Social relations are shaped by external factors, while also shaping the interpretations of these same factors. This chapter’s connector of focus is ‘family’, approaching it in its function as both technology of connecting various people over distances and in terms of the networks it embodies (Strathern 1996). To Walad Djifir, family is kin—that is, the blood relatives and their intricate family trees which exist through a preference for cross-cousin marriages.³¹⁸ Analytically, family is interpreted as a social construct that enforces/strengthens the bond among and within kin (on cohesion through fission and fusion, see Chapter 4; on wealth, see Chapter 2).

For each of the three women, the diverse natures of the relations with their kin have had different implications in terms of the degree to which they are ‘bounded’ by family, as a source of support and constraint. ‘Family’ as a resource thus seems to create and recreate forms of compartmentalization in society,³¹⁹ informed by gender hierarchies and wealth. But when can such compartmentalization be interpreted as entailing ‘constraint’, or perhaps even ‘duress’, for those individuals undergoing it? One of the underlying queries of this chapter is the wish to understand to what extent narratives of mobility, disruption, and family—within a context of the CAR coup’s aftermath—can be framed/interpreted in reference to ‘crisis’? In choosing such a framework, what lines of enquiry are assumed, and which lines then become discarded or overlooked (Roitman 2013)? In reflecting on this, we touch upon debates about the family as a violent institution (Scheper-Hughes 1993, 2008); enduring forms of constrained agency (duress, De Bruijn & Both 2018; conflict mobiles, Wilson Janssens 2019); social relations, security, intentional action, and crisis (von Benda-Beckmann & von Benda-Beckmann 1994; De Bruijn 1994; Johnson-Hanks 2005; Both 2017); and ordinary/everyday violence (Bouju & de Bruijn 2014, Das 2007).

³¹⁸ See Holy (1974: 49-70) on the distinction between different social groups among the Berti of Darfur, i.e. of kinship and territorial groups, with membership of one or the other entailing different rights and duties vis-à-vis social reproduction and economic production, as well as within political and ritual spheres. Holy distinguishes further between different groups of relatives, a distinction which I did not explore in the context of the Walad Djifir. Such further study would be interesting, adding a level of detail to the analysis of this chapter. At the same time, such specificity would most probably not alter its main argument.

³¹⁹ See De Bruijn & van Dijk 2012 on connectors as resource, creating new and recreating old forms of compartmentalization in society.

This chapter sketches how three women have navigated through changing and continuous insecurities, within the context of the CAR coup's aftermath, and the role of family as a possible factor of disruption and solidarity—ultimately acting as both a connector and disconnecter to their Chadian origins. By narrating the stories of three extended family members born and raised in CAR—namely those of Zaynebah, Mansoura, and Nagah—this chapter addresses whether particular situations of distress work as a type of amplifier of the way social relations are structured and thus also as an amplifier of the duress (or solidarity) they can create?

This chapter does not delve too deeply into the violence and disruption itself which emerged following the coup, with all of its intricacies. Other authors have done that far more extensively and comprehensively. Instead, the angle with which this period in history is approached is from the perspective of the Walad Djifir and myself. Nevertheless, some context is necessary to understand the nature of Chadian presence in CAR, before delving into the stories of the three women. Who are these people that have become both victims and perpetrators in an immensely complicated conflict—what are their stories of belonging, in relation to nationality, citizenship, and familial roots? This chapter should be read as an attempt to bring some nuance into the understanding of those that were living in CAR at the time the conflict broke out, and as a reflection on their futures.

The nature of Chadian presence in CAR

Chad and CAR are linked not only through various forms of conflict and political support; between the two territories there is a long relationship of exchange in the form of cross-border family ties, trade networks, and resource exploitation. In pre-colonial times, different empires united or divided the region, with slave raids greatly impacting the demographic make-up of current-day CAR (Marchal 2015). Under the reign of the French as *Afrique Equatoriale Francaise* (AEF), established in 1910, the territory was governed as one military region. The division between Chad and CAR in 1958³²⁰ started a period in which questions of nationality gained meaning, and categories of strangers and migrants were increasingly part of the social landscape. Nevertheless, when colleague Souleymane and I visited Bangui in 2012, the capital city came across as a cosmopolitan town housing people of various roots and nationalities.³²¹

The information presented here is based on interviews and conversations with Chadians living in Bangui in October/November 2012. An open questionnaire was also carried out among ninety men and women of Chadian origin. The oldest woman who answered the questions was in her nineties and had come to CAR around 1940, having been adopted by her aunt at the time. She later moved to Bangui upon her marriage. The youngest were students in their early twenties who had moved to Bangui for their studies at the University of Bangui. The survey was carried out by myself, my

³²⁰ The Oubangui-Chari (Central African Republic) as independent from France came into being under Boganda in December 1958.

³²¹ Chauvin 2009 describes this cosmopolitanism as existing prior to the inter-ethnic tensions which erupted in 1996. He also mentions how, under this cosmopolitan appearance, imbalances between ethnic groups could be perceived in terms of the distribution of staff at the neighbourhood and city levels.

colleague Souleymane, and several other students of Bangui University (such as a linguist, sociologist, anthropologist, and medical student). As they had been born and raised in Bangui, they had connections with Chadians of various generations within their neighbourhoods, family networks, and at the university. Souleymane and I targeted specific people we had heard about or

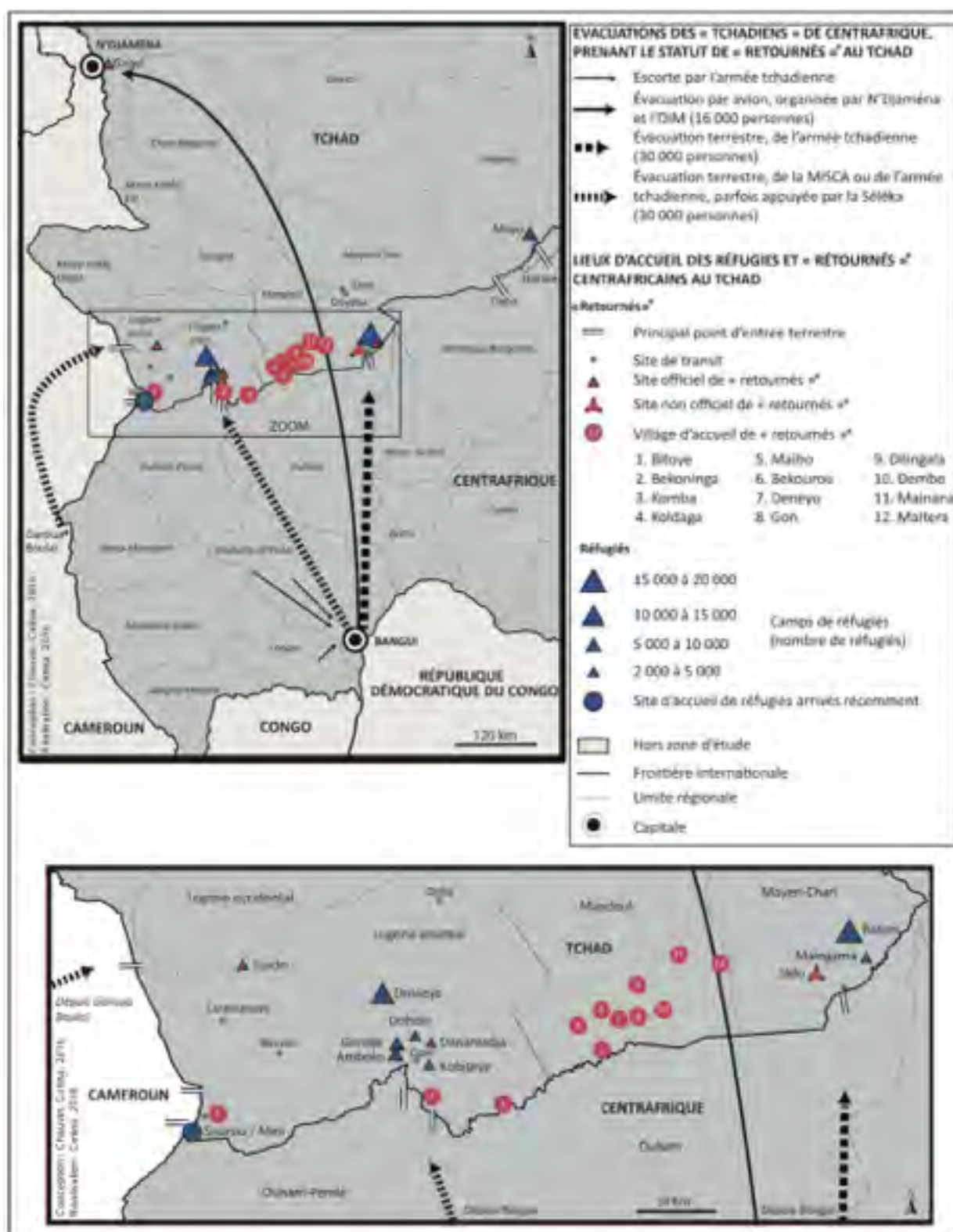


Figure 5.2: Evacuation routes of Chadians classified as returnees / Location of refugee and returnee camps in CAR and Chad

met through others, as well as in areas known to host Chadians, such as specific groups of *forgerons* (metalworkers) in the Sara neighbourhood. Souleymane was also able to approach elderly men, many of them ex-soldiers, frequenting a mosque close to where he was lodged in Miskeen. (See Appendix 3 for questionnaire).

Past and recent reasons for migrating to CAR

In the case of those of Chadian origin, we met people with ties to various regions—Sara, Kanembu, Salamat, Oudaiian—and whose travel histories had begun in the 20th century. Some Chadians came as soldiers, forced labourers, or merchants in the time of the AEF. Men came looking to set up trade in the time of Bokassa, while one woman remembers coming into CAR, following her new husband, on the day Habré became president (1982).³²² In the more recent context of CEMAC, travel and commerce are (officially) made easier over national boundaries. In practice, it is still considered an expensive challenge to travel overland between Chad, Cameroon, and CAR, and many we spoke to in Bangui mentioned the discrimination toward those of Chadian origin and the large number of roadblocks (*formalités*) where one always has to pay a certain amount to get through.³²³ Nevertheless, and over time, the relative openness and permeability of the border have helped people to make a living and to feel both Chadian and Centrafricain. What, then, happened to these ‘cosmopolites’ when in 2013 the Séléka alliance descended on the capital³²⁴ and when, in the following months, national origins and boundaries seemed to become more pertinent?

When I was visiting in 2012,³²⁵ Chadian merchants from all walks of life seemed to have found a niche importing all sorts of wares in bulk. In a corner shop in the neighbourhood Cinq Kilo, also known as Kilometre Cinq (KM5), you would find a former Chadian rebel soldier selling hardware—screws, bolts, any sort of iron, paints; another ‘common’ man selling jerrycans of cooking oils and construction materials; young men outside their stalls filled with medicines; individual entrepreneurs importing jewellery from as far away as Nigeria; and both men and women selling spices and produce such as onions and garlic. The latter are grown in Chad itself. In a special side section of Cinq Kilo, one could find the Souq Soudanais, which is in fact run predominantly by Chadian women and some men. Here you would find colourful scarves, the perfumes which Chadian women love, a large array of spices such as cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon, and coffee,

³²² Conversation with an elderly woman, of Misseriya origins, working as a merchant at the Souq Soudanais in Bangui, 30 November 2012.

³²³ For a recent IPIS study on the presence of roadblocks in DRC and CAR, see: <http://ipisresearch.be/2017/12/roadblock-rebels-ipis-maps-important-mechanism-conflict-funding-central-africa/>, accessed 16 January 2018. ‘IPIS puts roadblocks on the map as key mechanism of conflict funding besides natural resources, revealing its devastating scope in funding armed actors in Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic’.

³²⁴ For an overview and background of CAR political history leading up to the coup and its aftermath, see Lombard 2014; Carayannis & Lombard 2015; Lombard 2016; Chauvin 2018.

³²⁵ From conversations with colleague Catherina Wilson, who visited Bangui as recently as spring 2018, I understand that since 2014 it has become impossible, as a foreigner, to arrive in Cinq Kilo. Many Muslims and Chadians left, especially at the beginning of 2014 after Djotodia left his post and the Chadian contingent of the MISCA (Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine) was sent away (Chauvin 2018: 37; more on the MISCA later). In fact, even the Chadian embassy in Bangui was closed for a couple of years; during Catherina’s last trip (2018) she heard it had re-opened its doors.

dates, and other dried goods.³²⁶ Some women sell honey, a typical Centrafricain product. The area seemed to thrive and bustle with sellers and buyers milling around each other. However, Chadian merchants and vendors complained that it had become more difficult to get by, saying that over the years competition had grown and there were now more locals taking up commercial activities.³²⁷

Apart from reasons of economic migration (see Chapter 3), many young Chadians came to Bangui to continue their higher education.³²⁸ The reasons given were several: the level of education is higher than in Chad; the cost of living is relatively cheap; there is less corruption at the level of the university; and there are more possibilities for students to succeed.³²⁹ Among the students who answered the questionnaire, a number of them stated that they were grateful for the opportunity the University of Bangui offered to them in terms of furthering their studies and receiving a diploma. They hoped it would increase their chances of finding work. Several would like to become integrated in Chad so as to secure a position as a civil servant. Others were hoping to work as either teachers or in the profession they were studying—ranging from geography, to modern languages, history, sociology, anthropology, and medicine. Students mentioned it being difficult to be away from family, with some not receiving much financial support. They also referred to the harassment of mostly those of Chadian origin by police, who ask them to pay ‘fines’ even when they possess the correct papers for staying in CAR.

Mixed sentiments: The duality of national identity and belonging

In a conversation with Nagah’s little brother, a student in computer science at the time, he spoke of the discrimination toward Chadian students at the university. According to him, Chadians always get graded down. His Centrafricain friend said he was exaggerating, while another Chadian friend said, ‘We Chadians all know it’s true.’ These young men are second-generation Chadians in CAR and feel they are often being harassed. Following my questions, a discussion on adopting the CAR national identity ensued. Their parents had chosen to keep their Chadian ID papers. They themselves now had the choice of what to do. Nagah’s little brother had not applied for CAR ID papers and his friends wondered why. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I’m a Chadian.’ ‘Yes,’ said the others, ‘but you have a right to them because you were born here.’ He did not agree with this logic, saying that even

³²⁶ At the time, I did not notice the specific selling of peanuts; perhaps it was not the season? I mention this because groundnuts (*karako* in Sango) are associated with people coming from the north of CAR (i.e. southern Chad). During Patassé’s time, one of his militias was called the Karako. — From a conversation with Catherina Wilson, 13 June 2018.

³²⁷ Based on separate conversations with Espérance, Ahmed, and Nagah (fieldnotes, 29 October 2012 and 9 November 2012). For an historical view of the evolution of commercial practices in the Oubangui and Bangui between 1930 and 1945 specifically, see the Master’s thesis by Michel Azouzou (1999), in which he asks why CAR has neither purely Centrafricain commercial companies/enterprises nor large local merchants but instead relies heavily on foreigners. It seems this tendency has shifted over recent years.

³²⁸ See Chauvin 2018 for a recent study of economic, political, and social relations between Chad and CAR and the escalation into outright violence. Chapter 3 of his report discusses the contemporary migration of Chadians into CAR.

³²⁹ A distinction must be made between male and female students. Espérance, a woman in her forties who had first come to Bangui to study sociology and who has since stayed and made her life there, recounted the sexual intimidation by professors in return for good grades.

though he may officially have a right to these papers, he did not want them. ‘I am Chadian. At birth, my father went to register me at the Chadian Embassy [here in Bangui].’³³⁰

During these and other conversations held in Bangui in October and November 2012, and based on the questionnaire data (see Appendix 3), a few themes surfaced which touch upon belonging, (national) identity, and being strangers. Those of Chadian origin, who had spent most of their adulthood in CAR, complained about the recent waves of Chadians coming in. ‘They don’t respect the Centrafricain ways; they act like they are still in Chad and that this is okay. They should adapt; they need to adapt to their guest/host country.’ Most Chadians who have spent a considerable amount of their life in CAR, many being born and raised there, have a double nationality and speak fluent Sango. ‘Things are a bit better now than before. Before we would get harassed and stopped on the street all the time [by the authorities]. If you don’t speak Sango, it is very hard. And even with a Centrafricain identity [card], if they see your name is Muhammed or Mahammed—you know, a Muslim name—they will make it more difficult for you.’³³¹ This I also heard from those travelling through CAR from Chad when they encountered the many roadblocks. Despite these sentiments, most did also have strong feelings of Bangui/CAR being their home. As Espérance, who came to Bangui in 1994 from southern Chad put it, ‘I have lived through a lot in CAR and given it a lot. The country owes me.’ She will not leave, not after everything she has invested and lost in CAR. Espérance is referring here to the times she was caught under French fire when still studying to become a nun in 1996; to the numerous times her possessions were looted when she took up a study in sociology after quitting the nunnery, her schoolbooks being burnt following the harassments during another wave of attacks on Chadian university students in the late 1990s (Chauvin 2018); and to the other harassments against those of Sara origin (a group found primarily in southern Chad) at the time that Patassé (president of CAR between 1993–2003) had to ask the Congolese rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba for help in 2002.³³²

It was rumoured that Patassé had Sara origins, speaking the same language and belonging to the same ethnic group. This made it dangerous for Sara to be living in Bangui at the time.³³³ Around this time (the early 2000s), Chadians predominantly working in the cattle industry were being violently targeted by Abdoulaye Miskine’s militias, on behalf of Patassé. These Chadian merchants and pastoralists were accused of helping road robbers (*coupeurs de route*) and of supporting Bozizé’s rebellion (Chauvin 2018: 58). Over time, Chadians of mixed backgrounds—whether Christian, Muslim, from the south, or from the north of Chad—have been targeted from various angles, depending on the current political alliances (Marchal 2015). In 2003 Bozizé was helped to

³³⁰ Conversations recorded in fieldnotes, 15 November 2012.

³³¹ Conversations with Chadian students and shop owners born and raised in Bangui (fieldnotes, 9 and 15 November 2012).

³³² Based on numerous conversations with Espérance (fieldnotes, 14 November 2012). See Carayannis (2008: 9) and Chauvin (2018: 34) for more on Patassé and Bemba’s alliance. In the summer of 2018, Bemba was liberated. Colleague Catherina Wilson wrote a blog on this surprise liberation on 8 June 2018, <http://rumoursontheubangui.tumblr.com/post/175025198512/the-bemba-surprise-version-20>, accessed 19 June 2018.

³³³ Sara-Kaba, according to Chauvin 2009. Chauvin further mentions the Karako as one of the four militias Patassé armed and which were all located in Bangui’s northern neighbourhoods. These groups were often a mixture of civilians and military and belonged to ethnic groups close to the president.

power by Chadian president Déby, probably contributing to the more recent experiences of Chadians—like those students above—finding CAR authorities a little easier to deal with. Nevertheless, the stories of people such as Espérance and others we spoke to reveal how many long-time Chadians in CAR continue to feel some form of belonging with the country and its people.

This duality of belonging and identifying with both CAR and Chad was put to the test in an extreme way following the ousting of Bozizé in March 2013. It is said that a few months before the coup—while Souleymane and I were still in Bangui, in fact (October 2012)—numerous jeeps and trucks containing Chadian forces had been seen leaving the city, forces that had been put in place by Déby to protect and maintain Bozizé in power. Their departure paved the way for rebel advancement on and ultimately capture of Bangui. The coup itself was relatively non-violent. Its aftermath, unfortunately, was not, with waves of violence escalating between several different parties.³³⁴ In the media, this was often attributed to the anti-Balaka (*'les fils du pays'*) protecting the population from the Séléka forces responsible for the coup.³³⁵ It did not help that among the Séléka were many of Chadian origin. Nor did it help that the Chadian government had played, and probably still does play, such an ambiguous role in CAR (Marchal 2015; Chauvin 2018). Déby had helped Bozizé into power in March 2003 and subsequently let him fall upon removing his security forces stationed in Bangui in late 2012.³³⁶ Déby then sent in Chadian troops as part of the MISCA³³⁷ to help stabilize the country, together with Rwandan and Burundi forces. After much understandable protest from within CAR and the international community, the Chadian peacekeepers were withdrawn at the beginning of 2014 (Chauvin 2018). Aside from the complicated political role Chadians have played in CAR, the economic positions of civilians of Chadian origin may also have aggravated the population (see Chapter 3, 'Politics and economic changes: Chadian Walad Djifir in CAR').

The lives of Nagah, Mansoura, and Zaynebah have evolved within the contexts described above. Nagah's primary address was in Miskeen, and she worked in the middle of Cinq Kilo—which would later become an almost impregnable space within Bangui. Mansoura lived along one of the main roads leading up to Cinq Kilo, her business and relative wealth giving her access to certain levels of political protection while at the same time making her very vulnerable. The murder of her

³³⁴ For context on the violence that evolved between Séléka, anti-Balaka, and peace forces, see Käihkö & Utas 2014; Mayneri 2014; Weyns et al. 2014; de Vries & Glawion 2015; Chauvin 2018. See also the chapter by Kilembe (2015) on 'Local dynamics in the PK5 district of Bangui'.

³³⁵ See Wilson Janssens (2019: 86) for more on possible origins of other such movements historically.

³³⁶ Marchal (2015: 184) writes that it was Bozizé himself who sent home 'the few dozens of Chadian soldiers who were his personal guards to prove that whoever was to be blamed, they were Chadian'. From about 2006, political relations between CAR and Chad had started unwinding, partly as a result of Sudanese and Chadian insurgencies. See Marchal 2015 for a more detailed analysis.

³³⁷ MISCA: Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine. 'MISCA is a Mission set up by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union with the full support of the United Nation[s]. It was established on 5 December 2013 by a resolution of the United Nations Security Council (Resolution 2127) to stabilise conflict in the country following a coup d'état in March 2013. The Mission, led by the African Union and backed by the UN, was deployed on 19 December 2013.' Source: MISCA, <http://misca.peaceau.org/en/page/110-about-misca>, accessed 19 June 2018.

father (described in Chapter 3) was said to have been done on Habré's orders. Like Mansoura, Zaynebah's life had been crafted by her father's economic endeavours in CAR. At the same time, her socio-economic position was different from that of her cousin, not having the political connections or relative freedom of possessing her own wealth. The stories below show how a variety of mundane and extraordinary aspects of the contexts sketched above surfaced in the everyday lives of the three women, requiring actions and reactions. How these actions and reactions to disruptive events were shaped or anchored³³⁸ to the more mundane parts of life is something this chapter explores.

Three women, three stories

These are the stories of three Chadian women who have spent the largest part of their lives in CAR. Mansoura, Zaynebah, and Nagah are in their twenties to forties and consider 'Centrafrique' as their home. Mansoura and Zaynebah are second-generation immigrants, while Nagah belongs to the third generation of her family living and working in Bangui. All three women are of Chadian Arab origin, hailing from various nomadic tribes in central and eastern Chad, though also having familial ties to the Misseria Rouge and its Walad Djifir sub-tribe. The ways in which they have lived in CAR vary, as do their ties with their country of origin and the way they have navigated familial, local, and regional politics during the ongoing conflict. Their experiences (and futures) are entangled with those of friends and family on both sides of the national border. In this conflict, there is no clear 'good' or 'bad' side, and all members of the Centrafrican population have suffered its consequences. Due to the nature of my fieldwork among predominantly Arabic-speaking, Muslim Chadians, it is only their stories I can relate in detail.

Zaynebah was born as the first and only child of her father and mother. Her mother would go on to have more children in her second marriage—four daughters and one son. Her father would never marry again. While Zaynebah was born and raised in Bangui in the late 1980s, her father Muhammed had grown up living as many Walad Djifir do, amidst *ferīkh* life. Muhammed Adoum was one of many siblings, and after having tried his hand at a Qur'ānic school in the town of Ati—and having been denied a girl's acceptance in marriage—he decided to follow in the footsteps of a maternal uncle and try his luck in CAR.³³⁹ This uncle, Maddé Awadjah, had left for CAR in the 1960s and had by now set up a relatively successful business as a merchant. Maddé had travelled to Bangui with cattle, first setting up as a livestock trader before moving on to other goods. This Maddé Awadjah is the father of the second woman whose story we tell: Mansoura.³⁴⁰ Nagah, in

³³⁸ See Das 2007 on extraordinary life events having 'tentacles' anchoring them to the more mundane aspects of life.

³³⁹ It is unclear when Zaynebah's father made the move to CAR, but it was probably some time in the 1970s. Maddé Awadjah went to CAR in the 1960s and was assassinated in the early 1980s. From the stories I heard, it seems that Zaynebah's father worked with Hadj Awadjah for some time before the latter's death.

³⁴⁰ Madde Awadjah belonged to the Sulmani tribe and was a brother of Hadj Hamdaan's mother. In that sense Mansoura is not a blood-related cousin of Bachar, except through marriage into the family. Bachar's mother and Hadj Hamdaan's father were brother and sister. And Mansoura's aunt, her mother's youngest sister, married Zaynebah's father, with Zaynebah marrying Mansoura's brother during her first marriage. See Family Tree in Figures 5.1 and 3.2.

turn, is related to Mansoura through their fathers' side—their fathers were brothers (Family Tree Fig. 5.1).

Zaynebah

Zaynebah was raised in urban Bangui in relative luxury when compared with life in a *ferīkh*, living in a house and surrounded by both close and extended family members. She grew up speaking Sango and Chadian Arabic, as most Arab Chadians in CAR do. Her father had married the younger sister of Hadji Samhoun, the wife of Maddé Awadjah. This younger sister had been a mere child when she had begged to accompany Hadji Samhoun from Chad to CAR. For Hadji Samhoun, Maddé Awadjah was her second husband. The marriage between Zaynebah's father, Muhammed, and her mother did not last; and even while they were married, Zaynebah lived with her mother in Bangui. She recounted how the first time she met her father she was ten years old. When she speaks of him, it is with great fondness. Her father always told her he would look after her and never denied her anything. Her father conducted business between Bangui and Berberati, only occasionally making the trip into the capital to see his daughter. After her parents divorced, her mother remarried and had several more children, allowing Zaynebah to grow up with four half-sisters and one half-brother, the Benjamin of the family.

At a fairly young age she was married to Maddé Awadjah's son, Awadjah. It must have seemed like an ideal way to strengthen family ties, and Zaynebah and Awadjah had practically grown up together. She bore a son to him who was named after his grandfather, Maddé. The marriage did not prove to be a happy match, however. When asked about the marriage, Zaynebah made an ugly face. There was a lot of fighting and arguing, and 'he is not a good man' was the most I could get out of her.³⁴¹ Currently, Zaynebah is married to her first cousin, Adam Hamid. He is the son of her father's younger brother Hamid (see Chapter 3) and was born and raised in a Chadian *ferīkh* lifestyle. By 2014, they had had three children: Hamid (7), Hamdaan (5), and a girl named after her mother, born in 2013. Upon marrying Adam, she moved to the village of Sassilleh, a full day's drive west of Bangui where Adam was being taught her father's business. Zaynebah's father Muhammed had started out working for his maternal uncle Maddé Awadjah and had, over the years, acquired businesses ranging from 'boutiques' selling an array of goods in several CAR villages to owning and renting out houses. He also owned land in Berberati, CAR and in Moundou, Chad. Unfortunately, only two years after her mother's death, Zaynebah's father became ill. When it became clear his illness was a serious one, he was brought to Chad, where he passed away not long afterward in 2009.³⁴² He lies buried in the common burial grounds next to the village of Tchoufiou II Arabe.

³⁴¹ One cannot help but ask, however, what life Zaynebah would have had if she had stayed with her first husband, the well-to-do son of her father's maternal uncle? How different would her life have been? What decisions would she have faced and from what position?

³⁴² It is difficult to put an exact time-line on events as such, but the reasoning for 2009 is as follows: Her father was alive when she married Adam, as it was he who forced her: 'either you marry him or you are no longer my daughter', as she recounted to me in one of our many conversations. Assuming they must have had Hamid not too long afterward and he was five in 2012, he would have been born some time in 2008. In 2012 she said her mother had died five years before (2007) and her father three years before, meaning that it would have been some time in 2009. Zaynebah was supposedly about 23 when we met in 2011, although later I had the feeling she may have been older.

With Muhammed's passing, his brother Hady Hamdaan became responsible for the distribution of the inheritance (Introduction and Chapter 3), with Zaynebah, as a woman under Islamic law, receiving one-third. Hady Hamdaan is a younger brother of both Muhammed and Hamid, an uncle to Zaynebah and Adam, and had been working alongside Muhammed for some years. Over the past few years, Hady Hamdaan has been managing the investments Muhammed had made in CAR, selling the majority and keeping others. Apart from shops, land, and property, their capital is in the form of livestock herded by a Mbororo tribe. In order not to incur the wrath of these herdsmen by selling all the cattle at once—people believe strongly in witchcraft, especially in relation to the Mbororo—he has been selling a few at a time.³⁴³ In 2010, Zaynebah came to stay with her father's family in the ferikh, together with her two youngest children.

Family disruptions

Over the many afternoons and evenings that followed my stay in the ferikh between February and June 2012, I was slowly able to piece together the story of Zaynebah and to recognize the moments in which she was feeling down. I sometimes felt bad asking her about her past, as I noticed that the next day she would often have one of her bad days, sleeping away most of the day and complaining of a bad headache. It was on one of these bad days that I asked her what was wrong. For weeks we had been talking about when she would return back to CAR. She desperately wanted to but refused to ask Hady Hamdaan about it, preferring to keep silent. Zaynebah felt it was up to him to take the lead and allow her to go home. She had not seen her half-siblings³⁴⁴ and those she had grown up with for at least three years and missed them dearly, even if she had grown close to her ferikh family. On this particular day, the conversation once again turned to her departure. It emerged that the family wanted her to leave one of her sons with his grandmother. She was to take only the youngest child back to his father, back to CAR. It was plain that she found this very difficult; nevertheless, once again, she refused to assert her own wishes. If this is what Hady Hamdaan and her mother-in-law (Marnéh) wanted for her and Hamid, the child, then it was what she would do.³⁴⁵

Her mother-in-law—who is simultaneously her aunt (see Figure 5.3), as the woman is married to her father's younger brother (Hamid)—is a strong and sincere woman. Marnéh wished to keep the child, as her own children had left the nest. The only one that remained was the youngest son, about 12 years of age, for whom she would cook meals. As he was taking care of the cattle, however, he was hardly ever at home, sleeping *en brousse* with the herd. She desperately wanted a young child to care for and keep her company—one who could stay and look after the goats. Zaynebah worried

³⁴³ The reference to witchcraft and the Mbororo was made during a conversation with Mansoura and Bachar in N'Djaména, fieldnotes, 26 February 2013. Bachar claimed the Mbororo had put a spell on Zaynebah's father, making him ill. Why they would do so I did not discover. From other conversations it seemed that Zaynebah's father had a good relationship with those herding his cattle, often providing them with shoes and clothes. Bachar said the family had been afraid that they would put a spell on Hady Hamdaan once they discovered he was pulling out of business with them.

³⁴⁴ Zaynebah's mother had remarried upon divorcing her father, going on to have three more daughters and one son (Khalid Rahama). Nagah and I visited two of Zaynebah's half-sisters while we were in Bangui in October/November 2012. Both were married, one to a businessman/merchant of Chadian origin.

³⁴⁵ From fieldnotes, 17 April 2012

because whenever she had left Hamid with his grandmother Marnéh before, he had always fallen sick. She believed in the goodness of her intentions but knew that Marnéh would not care for him as she would. Zaynebah had always made sure both her sons were scrubbed clean with water and soap at least once a day. She made sure they ate and drank well. Marnéh would surely do the same but in a different fashion; she would raise him as she herself had been raised, a much harder way although not with any less love.³⁴⁶

In this situation of finally being able to return to the country and family she had longed for, yet being asked to leave a child behind, she was torn. This manifested itself in days of lethargy, sleeping late and spending most of the day in a horizontal position. She hardly participated in any of the household chores, complaining of headaches and heartburn while taking numerous doses of paracetamol. In the past seven years, she had lost both her father and mother and been made to give up her first-born child. By now leaving another child behind, not knowing when she would see him again, she was reliving and adding to old sorrows. After the death of her father in 2009 had left her orphaned, she had fallen into what one can only assume was a deep depression—she and others referred to her as being tired (*ta'bān*) and sick (*malade*)—and took to her bed. In this period it was Gallami Moussa who had stayed by her side and grieved his old friend with her. At the time of her father's death, she was already living in Sassileh with her second husband Adam. She had not seen the son she had borne to her first husband for several years,³⁴⁷ as he was being raised in Bangui by her ex-husband's elder sister, Mansoura. It is the custom for children to stay with their fathers upon a divorce.

The discussions on Zaynebah's return to CAR seemingly went on between Hadj Hamdaan, Bachar, and Marnéh, with Zaynebah herself being called over to be told what was to happen and at times consulted for her opinion. She never made clear what she herself wanted. She did not want to leave Hamid behind, and yet she also did not want to upset his grandmother. She felt obliged to adhere to this custom.³⁴⁸ It was clear it was taking an effect on her physically. Hamid would have so many more opportunities while going with his mother than if he were to stay in the ferīkh. Even though their nearest sedentary village, Tchoufiou II Arabe (Map 1.3), had opened a school in early 2012 and his uncle was on the 'board', he had never gone a single day. As a child in Sassileh, he

³⁴⁶ From observations during my time in the ferīkh, I noticed that, as babies and toddlers, children are coveted, hugged, and played with. From the age of five, when they take up responsibilities such as taking care of the goats and sheep, a more distant relationship between them and adults begins. At times, they will still be taken onto someone's lap, but more often than not they are treated as young adults, expected to behave accordingly. Another thing that factors into this is that a mother only has so much room in her lap—siblings who cannot walk and need to hang near the breast most of the day end up taking precedence.

³⁴⁷ My notes are unclear here; it may have been five years or eight. When I met her son in Bangui at Mansoura's house in 2012, he seemed close to 12 years old. It may be that she did not return to Bangui after her re-marriage in Sassileh in 2007/8, so then it would be closer to five years, with her son being eight at the time. This would make him 13 in 2012 and 15 when we met in 2014, which seems to fit.

³⁴⁸ I have to admit that I had heated discussions with Bachar at this stage. Throughout my stay I never tried to interfere in ferīkh politics, even though I am under no illusion that Bachar's and my mere presence did not cause things to happen in other ways than if we had not been there! I mainly tried to understand why they would make her go through such a difficult emotion once again. We argued, and he agreed with my interpretation that a child belongs with his mother. He in turn tried to make me see Marnéh's perspective. In hindsight, the practicality of traveling to CAR overland with two young children, neither of whom probably had any official paperwork, would have been challenging (and expensive!).

had attended a type of kindergarten; and this is what Zaynebah wanted for her sons—for them to be able to go to school to learn and play, and not for her five-year-old to spend half his day herding goats. I also spent a lot of time with Zaynebah, trying to discover what *she* was planning to do about the situation. During the duration of her stay in the *ferīkh*, she was always kept in the dark about when exactly she could return. This was a decision Hadj Hamdaan would make. Of course, there were many things involved, and women may often be the last to find out about decisions made. In the case of Hadj Hamdaan, whom one member of the *ferīkh conseil* said is like the weather—always changing—the gender aspect here might have been irrelevant. As the *chef de ferīkh*, members of the community rely on Hadj Hamdaan's presence and opinions. He too had been away from home in CAR on numerous occasions, sometimes even for years at a time and, on finally returning, was not left to depart without any reluctance expressed by the others. Aside from this, there was the financial aspect of the trip. Hadj Hamdaan kept arguing that now was not the right time. Why exactly this was the case was difficult to determine, though it was probably linked to the care of the livestock (the many camels mentioned in Chapter 2) and to the time of year. He had also just resettled his wife and children in a remote region where they had little community support at hand when he was away. It may have been that he was waiting for more of the inheritance to be transferred through from CAR before making the move.

Whatever the reasons, in May 2012 Zaynebah left for CAR with her three-year-old son Hamdaan, leaving her five-year-old Hamid in the care of his grandparents. She was accompanied by Hadj Hamdaan. She told me that on her departure Hamid had said, 'Don't cry, mother. This is for the best. Grandmother needs me and I will be fine here.' She could not believe he had been so wise.

The first leg of the journey, from the *ferīkh* to N'Djaména, we travelled together. Their departure to CAR coincided with the finishing of my fieldwork period and thus with my return to the capital. We left the *ferīkh* to spend a night in Mongo, before continuing on to N'Djaména and arriving at Bachar's home.

In N'Djaména

Over the next few days, Hadj Hamdaan and Zaynebah were to prepare for the next part of their trip. They initially stayed with Bachar and his family, but Zaynebah was able to spend a few nights with some of her half-sisters and half-brother, her mother's children. They had been anxious to see her, having had little news about her well-being. In an earlier conversation with Khalid, her half-brother, he had asked me to show him a few photographs of what Hamid looked like now. He was shocked by the physical marks *ferīkh* life had left on his half-sister. She had already had white spots on her neck and darker ones around her eye sockets where she had had a reaction to a perfume. She now also had a burn mark on her leg and calluses on her ankles from sitting on floor mats. When they met, he asked Zaynebah why she had not been living in Mongo where her father had built a house. She explained she had only been 'in transit' in Mongo. Yes, there is a house there but it has not been completed yet. She had really only transited in Mongo and gone straight through to Fadjé, the local name for the area the *ferīkh* is in (Map 1.3). While looking at the photographs of Hamid and Hamdaan in the *ferīkh*, he seemed taken aback by the living conditions. He agreed, although not

wholeheartedly, that the *barsh* (tent) was a large one. Khalid wished she could spend more time with her half-siblings in N'Djaména and felt frustrated at not having a say in her well-being.³⁴⁹

Among those visited in N'Djaména was also Gallami Moussa. Gallami and Zaynebah's father had met the very first time both were travelling to CAR. They had bonded on the journey, and many years later they remained close friends. The meeting at a large compound near Rue Quarante was clearly emotional for both her and Gallami. Usually living in south-eastern CAR, he was visiting family in Chad and so the house held a gathering of men, women, and young girls who had known Zaynebah and her father. I accompanied Zaynebah on this visit, and in my fieldnotes I wrote the following:

Two evenings ago we went to visit a good friend of Z's father. Z tells me they were always together, her father and him. They had met on their way to CAR and were in the same line of work as merchants: cattle trade and boutiques. When her father passed away three years ago it was Gallami that spent four months by her side. When he heard the news of her father's death he says he lost two hours—he can't remember anything. — Fieldnotes, 16 May 2012

Zaynebah spent the evening chatting with the women while I listened to their conversations, frustrated at their mixed use of Sango and Arabic and not wanting to disturb too much of the reunion by asking for interpretations. Luckily, some of the younger girls spoke French and were patient enough to help when needed. At times they were jubilant and happy; at others the conversations turned to more serious happenings. Zaynebah had brought little Hamdaan with her, and so all the women were constantly asking her where Hamid was and why she had left him behind. She explained that he was with his grandparents, that it was Hadj Hamdaan's decision, following with a mumbled phrase about Allah and it all being for the best. They had many questions about where she had lived, as most had origins in the *ferikh* but had never grown up in one or even visited. She replied somewhat jokingly yet with a certain pride as well, quick to defend the perceived backward practices of *ferikh* women. She told them of how sick she had been in the beginning and how the first few months she had been unable to go to the bathroom. It had turned out to be the traditional *boule*,³⁵⁰ to which her stomach was not accustomed, and so when occasion permitted she preferred *boule de riz* (rice). Cow milk was another product she learned to avoid.

During her stay in N'Djaména, Zaynebah had been promised she would be able to visit a doctor for her heart, an ailment she had had since she was a child and one of the reasons she claims she cannot walk for very long. For a young woman, she is worryingly out of shape and fairly large. In

³⁴⁹ At the time, Khalid had been in Chad for ten months and was about to finish his schooling. Like Zaynebah he was raised in urban Bangui and not accustomed to the way of life *en brousse*. Being the Benjamin of four older sisters, he admits to being spoiled at home and being allowed to do as he likes. He had decided for himself that this was no longer good for him, as it was not helping him achieve all he could in school. Khalid therefore chose to come to N'Djaména to acquire his *bac*, with which he then hoped to study architecture abroad. We have maintained contact via Facebook, and toward the end of 2013 he took up a course in architecture in Guinea Conakry. By 2015 he had returned to Chad; his family could no longer afford his stay in Conakry. Due to the continued troubles in Bangui and CAR in general, his family had lost their business. In 2017, he was studying spatial planning at the university of Ati. He is currently carrying out an internship for an NGO, having decided to specialize in environmental planning and biodiversity.

³⁵⁰ *Boule* is cooked like porridge and then rolled into a ball, accompanying different sauces. In this case it was most probably made of a type of sorghum. *Boule* can also be made from maize, millet, rice, cassava, or peanuts, depending on which crop is in season locally.

the *ferīkh*, she often complained of heartburn and palpitations. She had been wanting a check-up because she was worried and wanted to know what was wrong. They had done tests when she was younger in Bangui, but nothing conclusive had been found. She hoped that the medical attention in N'Djaména might be more developed. We dropped them at the hospital early one morning only to be called back a few hours later. They would have to wait nine days before they could be seen. This was time that Hadj Hamdaan did not want to waste, and so it was decided they would get on with their journey and that Zaynebah would get herself examined in Bangui after Ramadan.

Before returning to CAR, Zaynebah wanted to purchase gifts for friends and family. As she did not possess any money of her own, she asked Hadj Hamdaan for 100,000 CFA of her father's inheritance. He refused but eventually conceded by giving her 65,000 CFA. Bachar, with whom they were still staying, was upset at the way Hadj Hamdaan was treating their niece and gave her an extra 24,000 CFA, which she initially refused. Bachar later told me, 'It is her father's money, the work of *her* father's cattle and boutique. Normally these earnings would be shared among family members. He [Hadj Hamdaan] did this before he left Fadjé, but he refused to give Zaynebah her share—even after I had spoken to him.'³⁵¹ Bachar had spoken to Zaynebah the morning before she went to the market, accompanied by his eldest daughter. He had told her he did not agree with Hadj Hamdaan but that she needed to keep her patience and stay calm. She would soon be reunited with her husband and able to take care of these kinds of businesses together. The business her father left now belonged to her and her husband, and it should not be the case that Hadj Hamdaan had a say over everything. Privately, he told me he used to respect Hadj Hamdaan as a good friend among the *parents*, but now... '*Ça ne va pas.*' It is not normal. Zaynebah returned from the market completely exhausted and with bags of presents. Among other things (jewellery and clothes), she had bought a thermos can and a stuffed black panther animal for Hamdaan. Hamdaan did not take to the animal immediately and regarded it with much suspicion. I do not think he had ever really seen a fake animal before.

Sassileh

In early December 2012, after having spent several weeks in Bangui, I travelled to Zaynebah's home in Sassileh, together with colleagues Souleymane and Mirjam while on our way to Cameroon. Due to a flat tyre and a wrong turn, the planned two nights had turned into one, allowing us only an afternoon and evening there. This was a shame, as we ended up missing Hadj Hamdaan by one day. He left Sassileh for Chad on the same morning we left Boda for Sassileh. I had tried to call him from Bangui and again from Boda, to let him know we were coming, but Sassileh does not have any mobile reception and I had been unable to reach him. The closest place with mobile phone reception is 50 km away.

The village of Sassileh itself is situated several hours' drive west from Boda, along the road to Gadzi (Map 1.2). It is spread out along both sides of the road running through it, and along another leading off to the south. A roundabout decorated the main road, with a drawing of a peace dove and

³⁵¹ Fieldnotes, 15 May 2012.

the words '*rond-point de la paix*'. The village seemed to be made up of a mixture of inhabitants, with people of Chadian origin like Zaynebah and her family, as well as Central Africans.

Not long after our arrival we were asked by the village mayor, whom we went to greet, whether we wanted to see a diamond mine. Our curiosity got the better of us and not long afterward we were off. The two armed men who had been chosen to escort us became one, as both could not fit in the car. This escort directed us to a typical alluvial diamond mine, the car at times having trouble getting past the natural roadblocks, and we ended up walking part of the way. We were allowed to film and take pictures while there, which we did. There were many men and some women working at the site, alongside a handful of women and children to cook meals. The extraction process is labour-intensive, with a generator used to pump out water one of the only motorized tools. After having cleared the land of its many high trees, the miners dig until they reach a light-coloured layer of sand, all the while pumping out the ground water. This sandy layer is where the diamonds can be found. The sand is brought up and sieved in order to reveal any diamonds.

When we returned to Sassileh and asked Zaynebah a bit about the mining process, she admitted that, yes, Adam too sometimes did a bit of trade as a *collecteur* (middleman),³⁵² though not much. Hadj Hamdaan, however, had not. She laughed at my surprise, as diamonds had never been mentioned before during our times together. This indicates that the diamond business may either be such a common practice in the area—not special enough to mention, especially to those lower down in the production chain—and/or that those a part of it do not scream it from the rooftops. Diamonds have different super-natural properties associated with them in different areas of CAR (Dalby 2015: 128). While Zaynebah was keen to share what she knew about the business, she also said, 'The diamond is like the devil. If you find one—ooof!—you can buy all the things in the world. But the money doesn't last. And if you find nothing even to eat [making a gesture of picking a tooth with her index finger and thumb], you won't find one thing.'³⁵³

According to Dalby (ibid. 129), most of the diggers are of local origin, while the middlemen and those in the buying offices are primarily Arabic-speaking Muslims who have immigrated 'from Chad, West African countries such as Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, and Guinea, and also Lebanon'. On our way to visit Sassileh, we were pulled across a river at the same time as one such Mauritanian *collecteur*, a young man who proudly showed us his wares. Upon visiting the mine close to Sassileh, however, we met several young men of Chadian origin working as diggers. They had come to the region as labour migrants, earning 2000 CFA a day (approx. 3 euros). When they find diamonds, the diggers are given a finder's fee. Depending on the relationship with the head miner, they are sometimes allowed to keep and sell some of the diamonds.³⁵⁴ It is possible that the dynamics Dalby (2015) describes, of primarily Arab Muslim outsiders being higher up the

³⁵² Dalby (2015: 126-27) describes the general production chain in CAR as consisting of an *exploitant artisan*—a head miner—who employs a team of *ouvriers miniers* (diggers). Middlemen, such as Adam, in turn buy up diamonds from these head miners—who have a right to sell what their diggers find—and sell them on to *bureaux d'achat* (buying offices). The walls of compounds in the town of Boda, where we had spent the first night, were covered with the logos of various buying offices.

³⁵³ Filmed interview with Zaynebah, 4 December 2012, Sassileh.

³⁵⁴ From conversations with a young Chadian miner, 4 December 2012

production chain, contributed in some way to the violence directed at them from December 2013 onwards. At the time of our visit, relations seemed amical enough.

In hindsight, the driver (Sylvestre) had been ill at ease and anxious for us to leave quickly the following morning, perhaps picking up on tensions we did not perceive.³⁵⁵ Zaynebah, on the other hand, seemed very relaxed and at ease during our presence. She was living in the compound her father had built and which Hadj Hamdaan had added to in earlier years. She looked well, rested and healthy,³⁵⁶ the climate obviously agreeing with her more than that of the hot and arid *ferīkh* setting. She described, however, how it was difficult to find food in Sassileh and that water was expensive to buy.³⁵⁷ Her cousin Nagah had given us perfume to pass on to Zaynebah to sell. I had bought corn flour from Nagah's grandmother in Bangui, for Zaynebah to use. While showing us around the neighbourhood behind their compound, she was happy to let us film and take photographs, pointing out the variety of mushrooms and other edible vegetation one could not find in Chad. She introduced us to many friends and neighbours, Mbororo and Chadians. They mostly spoke Sango together. On one occasion we met a man whom she referred to as *deuxième mon père*, 'my second father'. This Chadian man had come to CAR in the 1960s, from Am Timam, finding work in different places before settling down in Sassileh.

Adam's shop was across the road from their home. We were new to each other, Adam and I, even if he had heard about my presence in the *ferīkh* from Hadj Hamdaan and Zaynebah. Adam was not as outgoing or at ease as Zaynebah was, perhaps not really understanding what we were doing there. In his shop he sold a range of wares, such as fuel for the motorbikes and cars passing through, clothes, and beauty products. He explained how he bought the clothes from a large second-hand market in Cameroon, with the other merchandise also coming mainly from that direction.³⁵⁸ When we asked him where he thought life was better, here or in the *ferīkh*, he replied, 'Here.' Later he nuanced this statement by saying that life was better in the *ferīkh* because of the presence of family there; but that in terms of making a living and the quality of life, it was better here in Sassileh. He would like to go and visit his family in Chad, but he preferred to live in Sassileh. Zaynebah replied that she did not know. She liked life here and wished to visit her half-sisters in Bangui. If they moved back to Chad, she would want to live in a house in Mongo, as this would allow her children to go to school and not herd the livestock all day.

I could not discover why Zaynebah's father had chosen Sassileh as a home for Adam and his daughter. Could it have been its location along one of the main roads in a mining region? He had

³⁵⁵ He and Souleymane had been hosted across the road from Zaynebah's compound, in what was described as the restaurant—an open hangar. As in Chad, men and women were to have their meals separately. Mirjam de Bruijn and I were invited into the compound. Souleymane and Sylvester did join us for a while later, when Adam returned from his shop and in between meals.

³⁵⁶ Despite Hadj Hamdaan promising to take her to a doctor in Bangui, they had not passed through the capital, instead going straight to Sassileh. She hoped she could make the visit to Bangui after Ramadan.

³⁵⁷ At the time, the cost of one jerry-can (*bidon*) of water was 250 CFA, while in Mongo a similar amount cost 75 CFA. Surprisingly, the fairly lush surroundings of Sassileh, compared with the aridity of Mongo, did not mean that water was available close by. Those collecting water had to walk relatively far, while around Mongo it could be found at the surface (*ferīkh*) or at one of the deep wells.

³⁵⁸ From a filmed interview with Adam, 5 December 2012, Sassileh.

started his business in Berberati, known to be a hub of buying offices, owning a house there. At one point, he had opened up a shop in Sassileh and, over time, bought up land in the village on which he built houses to rent out. After his death, Hadj Hamdaan had started selling these, as is the custom when dealing with an inheritance.

Violent disruption

Fast-forward to almost a year later, February 2014, and the situation in CAR had only become worse. I was scheduled to carry out one last ‘follow-up’ field visit to Chad in February and March. Due to Chad’s numerous roles and interests in CAR, the media was full of news about what was happening and the many donations that were being made by all sorts of actors. One local Chadian newspaper, for example, featured an announcement by Airtel of a donation of 10 million CFA, and staff were pictured on the front-page, standing alongside the donated goods. One of the repercussions of the CAR violence had been a great influx of people of Chadian descent, whether recently migrated or having lived in CAR for several generations, into Chad.

In January 2014, amidst the bits and pieces of news that were being gathered together about loved ones in CAR, I learned that Gallami Moussa³⁵⁹ had been among the 11 people killed in Geng.³⁶⁰ Zaynebah had passed through Geng when she fled from Sassileh. They left because they had been warned, by whom is unclear, that it was getting ‘hot’. She and her husband, with their two young children, had stayed with Gallami for a few days. It is here that Adam, Zaynebah’s husband, decided he would stay with their cattle, together with several other men. Zaynebah and her children, were sent on to Cameroon, arriving in a refugee camp in Kentzouh. The morning after Adam left Geng, the town was attacked. Gallami had stayed behind with his other guests. He could or did not want to leave them. The news reached family members in N’Djaména by way of a Malian neighbour and friend of Gallami. He had been left unharmed; and as he had been a figure in the life of Gallami, he knew whom to contact in Chad (or perhaps it again went via Bangui first—I do not know). Of the 11 people killed, they were unable to identify six.³⁶¹

When the news reached the *ferīkh*, it was feared that Adam was among the unidentified bodies. As *chef de ferīkh*, Hadj Hamdaan decided it would be best to hold a *dowtt*, a ceremony held for the deceased. The *dowtt* was carried out as planned, costing the family a lot in capital (cash and livestock). The morning after the ceremony, a phone call came in: Adam had been spotted *derrière son bétail*. There was no further explanation of how this had happened and what his status was. Before leaving, Adam had said they were planning to head south toward Congo–Zaire, as they call it, before turning and heading north along the Cameroonian border, up toward Chad. Family in

³⁵⁹ In December 2012, after having spent a night in the village of Sassileh, we (Souleymane, Mirjam, Sylvestre, and I) made a very brief stop in the middle of the road in the town of Geng to say hello to Gallami Moussa, the old friend of Zaynebah’s father. He was a jovial man, huge smiles, a right arm already outstretched in greeting—a tall man with an equally long and skinny face.

³⁶⁰ Geng is one of the villages one passes when traveling along the RN6 between Boda, Gadzi, and Carnot. On a fateful morning in January 2014, the village was attacked and 11 people were killed. It is not clear who the attackers were, and I am hesitant to refer to them as anti-Balaka. What we do know is that they specifically targeted the Chadians living there. A (Muslim) Malian neighbour was spared.

³⁶¹ Phone conversation with Bachar from London, January 2014.

Chad worried; they knew Adam was not carrying any weapons. They had discussed this over the phone when he was still debating whether or not to leave. The group that left were carrying sticks and the knives all Chadians own. Nothing automatic.

The return to Chad and family reunions

In March 2014, less than two years after her departure to CAR, Zaynebah arrived in N'Djaména. The Chadian state had arranged for transportation to pick up their 'repatriates' and bring them back to their country of origin (see Figure 5.2). The buses left Kentzou in Cameroon and travelled via Garou-Boulai to Moundou in Chad and eventually on to N'Djaména. On arrival in N'Djaména, the passengers were dropped at a large petrol station not far from where the buses heading east leave. At 11 p.m. Zaynebah called her paternal uncle Bachar, who resides in the city. He knew she was on her way, as someone she was with in the refugee camp in Kentzouh had called. For the next few weeks, Zaynebah and her children spent time recovering from the long journey, dealing with the stress of not knowing how her husband was faring. She alternated between living with Bachar and his family and with her cousin Mansoura, who had also arrived in N'Djaména. Since Zaynebah's marriage to Adoum, Mansoura had been taking care of her nephew, and Zaynebah had not seen her first-born son (Maddé) since he was eight years old. By now he had grown into a boy of 15 years. Between Mansoura and Bachar, decisions were made as to what would be best for Zaynebah. They both felt she should stay in the capital for a good few months before heading to the ferīkh. Family in the ferīkh were desperate to have her and her children back.

Discussions were cut short when on Sunday evening, 23 March 2014, Bachar received a phone call from Adam to say he had arrived in the south of Chad, without the cattle. He and those he had been travelling with had lost everything. It was arranged that Hadj Hamdaan would send money so that Adam and his friend could take a bus to N'Djaména. On Wednesday at four in the afternoon, Bachar and I drove to the Express Sud Voyage in Dembé to collect the pair. It was an emotional reunion. Both men were noticeably relieved. They looked tired and thin, each carrying nothing more than the standard *sac* in which groceries are carried. That evening, after a bottle of Coca-Cola and some food, Adam and his friend recounted their story.

The morning after Adam and the herd left Geng, the town was attacked. Zaynebah and her children had already left for Cameroon a few days earlier. With the herd they travelled south, as was the plan, before heading north along the Cameroonian border. Most of the journey went through dense forest. They never met anyone else, only heard people in the distance. It was a tiring walk of several weeks, and by the time they reached northern CAR the cattle were exhausted. Close to the border, bandits attacked them, firing in all directions and scattering the livestock.³⁶² Adam and the others fled for the bushes where they could. Some were successful and the rest were rounded up. Adam and his friend were let free for some reason, and they did not think twice before getting out

³⁶² Knowing that people were trying to make their way back to Chad with their possessions, bandits had taken up strategic positions along the border region.

of there. This is how they came to enter Chad with not much more than the clothes on their backs.³⁶³

Now that Adam had returned, Zaynebah could no longer stay on in N'Djaména as planned. She and her children belonged with her husband and, in turn, he belonged with his parents. Adam was allowed to recover for a few days while logistics were discussed. Zaynebah's father had bought land in Mongo and built five rooms on it. All were being rented out by Hadj Hamdaan. The idea was that two of the renters would be given notice so that Zaynebah and Adam could occupy these rooms. The other three rooms would remain rentals, at least for the time being. Getting the renters out could not be done in one day, and the rooms would need some work before they were considered suitable. First off, the young couple would stay in the *ferīkh* until after Ramadan, before moving into the rooms in Mongo. This was not as Zaynebah had envisioned it, nor what Mansoura and Bachar wanted for her. She had come to terms with life in the *ferīkh* before, yet was understandably reluctant to do it again for a longer period of time. Now that her husband was present, there was no real reason to not move into the rooms in Mongo—except for what the family thought best. By September 2014, the young family was still living with their *parents* in the *ferīkh*. As expected, the youngest two children had been sick. They ended up staying in the *ferīkh* for quite some time, but by 2016 they were living in Mongo and the children were going to a Qur'ānic school while Adam worked the boutique.

Reflection

Throughout Zaynebah and Adam's stories, various themes surface which can help us understand the role of family amidst dynamics of disruption, mobility, and separation. Adam's move to CAR could be seen as a continuity of Chadian linkages with the country. The specific nature of his move was family-related, with his marrying his direct cousin, who had been born and raised there. It is unclear how he had reacted to the proposition of moving to a new country and life. Meeting him in Sassileh several years later, he had clearly adapted to his new future. Zaynebah, in turn, had gone through an opposite process of belonging. Having been brought up with her mother and half-siblings in Bangui, this is where her initial orientation lay—with urban life, Sango, and Chadian roots. With time, upon marrying Adam under her father's will and with the death of her mother, she became more familiar with her father's side of the family. Hadj Hamdaan had come to work alongside his brother by then, and his eldest sister, Hadji Ghaali, joined him when he took too long to return home to his wife.³⁶⁴ After the death of her father and subsequent stay with his and her husband's family in the *ferīkh*, her circle of belonging shifted to include them and their rural nomadic life. At several points throughout her life, her circles of belonging were challenged—whether through the death of a parent or by the aftermath of a violent coup. It is not possible to compare such various levels of disruption and separation (forced mobility), yet we can examine the role of family at such

³⁶³ Based on the time we spent together at Bachar's house on the evening of their arrival in N'Djaména, 23 March 2014. Parts of the conversation about how they fled were recorded on video.

³⁶⁴ When both were in Sassileh, Zaynebah's father paid for them to go on pilgrimage to Mecca together. When Zaynebah came to live in the camp of her husband's mother and father, it was Hadji Ghaali with whom she shared a tent, each having their own bed. I, in turn, slept just outside their tent.

‘extraordinary’ moments in time, questioning its role at anchoring one, during disruption, into the ‘everyday’.

Nagah

Nagah and Zaynebah know each other from Bangui (see Family Tree in Figure 5.1)³⁶⁵ as well as from the *ferīkh*. Nagah had moved to Mongo for a period of time while Zaynebah was also there. Nagah would come to visit often, bringing her young son Umar along with her. They would chat in Sango, and it was obvious they got along well.³⁶⁶ Nagah had married a Walad Djifir and followed him back to Chad, only for him to leave for Libya. By April 2012 she was fed up waiting and made her way back to Bangui with son Umar not long afterward. This is where I encountered her in October and November 2012, visiting her at the Souq Soudanais or at her mother’s house in Miskeen.

Life in Bangui and Mongo

Nagah herself was married as a second wife to a Chadian *collecteur*. He would collect diamonds from the different mining sites around Berberati and sell them on to larger companies (the buying offices described earlier). His business was never very successful, and he was not the best in managing his affairs when it did turn lucrative (according to Nagah). In 2010 he decided to try his luck in Libya by engaging in wage labour. He travelled via Chad, leaving his new wife with young child, and his four other children from a first marriage, in the care of his family members in and around Mongo. His eldest son, Muhammed, was lodged with the same *marabout* as the one with whom Nagah came to live. Muhammad was able to attend school in Mongo. His siblings—two sisters and a younger brother—were sent to the *ferīkh*. It must have been quite a shock for them, adjusting from life in the border town of Berbarti to one in a rural nomadic setting. Some family members found especially one of the sisters too outgoing. She definitely did have a lot of energy and a different temperament from most other girls in the *ferīkh*: less reserved and more outspoken.

Nagah had refused to live in the nomadic *ferīkh* and instead rented a room from Issa Hissein, selling perfumes and other beauty products at the local market. She complained that making a living in Mongo from the market was more difficult than in Bangui. In Mongo it was hard to live off the 2500 CFA one might make, while in Bangui this could buy you a lot more, since food is cheaper there: 1000–1500 CFA being sufficient.³⁶⁷ Retail prices in Chad were already steep, not leaving much margin to make a profit. When, after a year-and-a-half, Nagah’s husband had still not returned or sent any money, she decided to head back to Bangui. In total, she had paid 95,000 CFA (approx. 145 euros) for the four-day journey from N’Djaména to Bangui: 10,000 CFA on each bus ride from N’Djaména to Moundou, and Moundou to Goré, and from Goré she had paid 75,000 CFA (approx.

³⁶⁵ Nagah’s father was a brother to Zaynebah’s grandmother (her father’s mother).

³⁶⁶ Fieldnotes and observations, February–April 2012.

³⁶⁷ Conversation with Nagah at her home in Miskeen, Bangui, 30 November 2012. CFA 2500 is not quite 4 euros (3.81 according to the exchange rate in November 2018). CFA 1000 is about 1.5 euros.

114 euros) for a place in the cabin of a truck. She disliked taking the large buses, especially when travelling with a small child. They drove very fast and did not stop often, only for prayer. She had not had to pay at the many roadblocks in CAR, saying that they only asked money from travelling Chadian men. The police had asked her for her ID papers but not for any money. In the past, the journey had been more difficult, with much more harassment by the CAR authorities. Nagah appreciated that things had calmed down now.

When we met again in October 2012, she had picked up her old life in Bangui, selling Chadian products at the Souq Soudanais in Cinq Kilo. Since her return to Bangui, she had not received a dime from her husband, even after Ramadan, and was so angry at this that she had declared a divorce. She wanted her son to grow up in Bangui and was planning on working hard so that she would be able to provide him with an education.³⁶⁸ Alongside other Chadian and Sudanese women, Nagah was selling perfume in bottles, incense known as *dokhaan* in Chadian Arabic, dates, henna, bed-linens, scarves, and a variety of typically 'northern' spices such as cloves and cardamom.³⁶⁹ Like the other women, she rented her stall from a Chadian merchant who also owned the storage spaces behind them. He would come round at the end of the month to collect their rent. Her colleagues ranged from young women like herself to more elderly women who owned their own boutiques as merchants and made frequent trips to Chad to visit family there.

In reality, life in Bangui for Nagah and her family had not been ideal. It was tough. Nagah and her two brothers lived with their mother, aunt, and grandmother in two badly built rooms on a relatively small plot of land. Nagah's mother was born and raised in Bangui, with Nagah's grandmother being the one who had accompanied her husband to CAR from Melfi (Chad). Unlike some of the other houses in the neighbourhood, theirs was built in the old-fashioned way, with mud and straw (cob). There was no gate around the compound and the latrine had caved in on itself a while earlier. An improvised latrine had come about right next to it. Nagah's grandmother processed corn into flour, drying the kernels before grinding them and then selling the flour.

In 2013, the husband Nagah had divorced had decided to return from Libya. In February 2013, the wife (Ma'azala) of the *marabout* (Issa Hissein) in Mongo with whom Nagah used to stay recounted a phone conversation she had recently had with Nagah. The plan was for Nagah's husband to return from Libya in March. Nagah would then also leave CAR and move to Mongo permanently. Her husband's son Muhammad would move in with her.³⁷⁰ Speaking to this son a few days later, it sounded like things had not yet been decided. Once his father returned, plans would be made for them to either stay in Mongo or for Nagah to join them here, or for his father and him to move back to Berberati where they still had a house. Personally, he would prefer to live in CAR.³⁷¹ These conversations were going on in the month before Bozizé was overthrown and everything changed, although it was not until the end of 2013 that Nagah and her family actually fled the country.

³⁶⁸ Conversation with Nagah at the Souq Soudanais, Bangui, 9 November 2012.

³⁶⁹ Observations in fieldnotes, 27 October 2012.

³⁷⁰ Conversation with Ma'azala, Mongo, 7 February 2013.

³⁷¹ Conversation with Muhammed, Mongo, 19 February 2013.

Flight to Chad

Nagah and her family were among those that were airlifted out of Bangui on 29 December 2013.³⁷² They had initially taken cover with relatives in Bangui's neighbourhood Cinq Kilo, having left their own unsafe housing in Miskeen. In Cinq Kilo they were eventually rounded up by Burundian MISCA troops and brought to Bangui's international airport refugee camp, where they waited for several days without enough drinking water. Humanitarian agencies were having trouble catering to the needs of the hundreds of people fleeing their *quartiers*. The Chadian government sent several airplanes to pick up its nationals, women and children receiving priority. Even though Nagah and her family had CAR identity, they did not claim this nationality but instead chose to assert themselves as Chadians.³⁷³ It is unclear to me at which stage Nagah and her family claimed Chadian nationality. Was it the moment the Burundian MISCA troops rescued them from Cinq Kilo; was it when they arrived in the camp by the airport, thus getting them onto a plane to Chad; or was it not until they reached Chad itself? It may not even have been a conscious decision they made themselves. It would be interesting to discover more about the way this process went, to understand more about under whose influence and at what stage the allocation of national identities became important. A direct consequence for Nagah and her family was that they became 'repatriates' instead of 'refugees'—which, in the eyes of the UNHCR, meant a different process. Instead of being taken into the care of the UNHCR, they were brought under the responsibility of the Chadian government and settled in a camp set up a few kilometres to the south-east of N'Djaména, near the neighbourhood formerly known as Gawwi and now as Diguel Dingessouh. This is where Bachar and I went to visit Nagah in February 2014. At that time, they had been living in the camp for two months. The day of our visit, Nagah had gone to visit her cousin Mansoura, who had suggested she stay with her, but Nagah had been reluctant to leave her mother, aunts, and other family members behind.³⁷⁴

The camp had been laid out in an orderly fashion, with occupants knowing to which block and tent they belonged. The tents had been provided by the UNHCR, as well as the water supply system.³⁷⁵ The terrain itself was provided by a private company, which seemed to be in the process of almost completing their own offices. The terrain had a wall around it and military and police guarding the gates. Occupants and visitors, however, were free to come and go as they wished. Visitors were asked to leave their ID at the gate, but, as we found out for ourselves, after our second visit this no longer seemed necessary. In February the weather was just heating up and still pleasant enough, but toward the end of March the sun had become unbearable, and the UNICEF tarpaulin

³⁷² Fieldnotes based on conversation recorded with Nagah and another Chadian woman who had fled and were now living in Camp Gawwi, N'Djaména, 26 February 2014. Nagah and her family totalled 28 people, housed in three tents.

³⁷³ Wilson Janssens 2018 describes similar dynamics in her article on CAR refugees in Kinshasa, who sometimes assert their CAR identity while at other times presenting themselves as Kinis.

³⁷⁴ Conversation with Mansoura and her mother, Hadji Samhoun, N'Djaména, 24 February 2014. At that time, the family consisting of 28 members were housed in three tents. Many tents held an average of ten people.

³⁷⁵ There was no pump but a large rectangular structure made up of a flexible water-holding material. Attached to it was a faucet from which camp inhabitants could draw water.

tents provided little relief. With the sun at its highest peak there was no shade, and people were almost forced to sit inside. Over the weeks in which temperatures were rising, occupants had started cutting holes in the tents to allow for some air circulation. Nagah's family were hesitant to do so, thinking they would get in trouble as the tent was not theirs. But when I returned in mid-March in the middle of the day to find the women and children sweating profusely inside the tent, they were quick to be convinced and a knife soon sliced two small windows. The effect was instant.

Those living in the camp in Gawwi had been provided with floor mats (*birsh*), rice, water, and oil. One of the main things lacking, however, was firewood to cook with. Being an already expensive item to get hold of in N'Djaména, this proved to be an issue for many families. Those who had fled with money were able to buy certain goods or use the money to set up a small business. Others were forced to sell the *birsh* they had been donated in order to buy other much-needed products, such as certain food items. Nagah, being the businesswoman she is, had been quick to set up a little commerce of her own and was selling perfumes as well as tea and coffee from her tent. She would go to the main market in N'Djaména several times a week to buy goods. She would take either one of the mini-buses that passed by the camp or a shared taxi. It would not surprise me if she had the phone number of someone who could take her into town, like a motorcycle taxi (*clando*). It is unclear with what she started the business: with money she had brought with her from Bangui, or with a little start-up capital help from others? It may well have been a mixture of both. Suffice to say that she seemed to have a knack for making the most of a little. Her brother arrived by road in late February, and by March he was selling cigarettes just outside the camp terrain, along with many other vendors of various products (vegetables, wood, soaps).

Nagah's brother had stayed on in Bangui, not wanting to give in to the anti-Balaka aggressors. He had first stayed in Cinq Kilo, bunkering down with other, mostly Muslim, Chadians. After a few weeks, he took the opportunity to leave, claiming that those who had decided to stay had no way of leaving nor a way of receiving water or food once their provisions ran out. Even the MISCA was having trouble reaching those that did want to be rescued. Cinq Kilo had been surrounded. Nagah's brother had left all this before it became too bad, staying instead in an old colonial *quartier* close to the Oubangui River. When he was attacked one evening by neighbours he had always been friendly with, he decided it was not worth the risk and made his way to Chad overland. It must have been a tough journey. He came across as being exhausted, very pensive and without energy. It was good to see him somewhat recovered in March, helping out the rest of the family. In Bangui he had been selling tea in the neighbourhood Miskeen. Unfortunately, he used most of the profit to support his drinking habit.

By March 2014, Nagah and her mainly female relatives and children had been living in the refugee camp for three months. The outlook was unknown. People expected the Chadian state to act like they had when Chadians fled Libya after the fall of Qaddafi and provide repatriates with cash handouts, land, or jobs. In N'Djaména it was said that these repatriates should find a way to return to their origins—the families from which they had come. For some this was an option, but for many more—especially those second- and third-generation Chadians in CAR—this was an impossibility.

Take Nagah and her family, who in total consisted of twenty people. Which family member would be able to house them all? Even if they were to provide for their own food, the sheer lack of sleeping space would be an issue. Nagah's grandmother knew the name of her village but not its exact location. Visitors had told her to go back with her daughters and grandchildren. 'Your family in the village will help you build somewhere to live with the grasses, mud, and sticks the land provides.' Even if she could discover where exactly she had grown up, who could say they would be waiting for them with open arms? It had been 40 years since she had last set foot in Chad, and she was now an old woman. What would they live off? They had outgrown life *en brousse* and were too well acquainted with urban living, fresh foodstuffs, and more humid temperatures.

Postscript

Nagah's story has many more side-stories and layers, showing the complexity of familial relations. In a conversation with her husband on 7 March 2014 in the *ferīkh*, he described how in the 22 years that he had been in CAR, he had never even sent home 500 CFA (not even 1 euro), while in the one year in Libya he had sent home 1 million CFA (approx. 1,524 euors).³⁷⁶ His plan was to buy land in Mongo and work his field. With the Libyan money he bought cows, which were being kept by his father's children and brothers. At the time, he had no plans to go anywhere else, though he said with a smile, 'Maybe only within Chad.'

In the time that Nagah's husband had been away, his first-born son Muhammed had made the journey to the far south of Chad to tell his Centrafricaine mother she needed to come live in Mongo and be there for her daughters. She followed her son, bringing children from later relationships with her. Speaking to one of Muhammed's sisters who had been placed in the *ferīkh* and who had now rejoined their mother in Mongo, she clarified that she, her sister, and younger brother had spent the first year with a paternal aunt in Mongo. When her father (Nagah's husband) left for Libya, they moved to the *ferīkh* of their grandfather, known as the *grand marabout* Issa. Muhammed was allowed to stay in Mongo with the *fakīr* (another name for *marabout*) Issa Hissein for his studies. According to the eldest daughter, she had spent four years in the *ferīkh*. Her mother said it had only been three.³⁷⁷

While the family of her husband's first wife seemed to have found a place and means to settle in Mongo, Nagah returned to Bangui fairly soon after I last saw her in 2014, and she was still there in 2017. Her mother, grandmother, and their children were said to have returned as well. It is not clear to me where in Bangui they are living, as Cinq Kilo is still said to be an impregnable enclave, and the neighbourhood where they used to live, Miskeen, saw a lot of destruction. It was Zaynebah's half-brother, Khalid, who told me in a conversation through Facebook that they had returned. When we met each other in October 2017 in N'Djaména, he confirmed that they were still there.

Reflection

³⁷⁶ Souleymane, James, Bachar, and I had a conversation with him on 7 March 2014 at his father's *ferīkh* in Fadjé (north of Mongo, Chad). Fieldnotes, Fadjé, 7 March 2014. Video recordings by James Chama.

³⁷⁷ Conversation with Khadidje, Mongo, 13 March 2014.

Nagah's story reveals a different groundedness and perhaps also belonging from those which we find in Zaynebah's story. The nature of Nagah's mobility has gone hand-in-hand with personal affairs such as following her husband and the ability to earn a living wherever she goes. While Zaynebah's mobility is closely linked to (and relies on) family, Nagah's family seem to have been 'disconnected' from the start, in the sense that its members are relatively free to choose their own paths. Nagah has a prominent caring and providing role, although her own mother and aunts do also contribute. Even her elderly grandmother was bringing in income in Bangui by preparing corn into flour.

Is it possible that this relative independence (as a form of disconnectivity within a family) has resulted in less of a shifting between circles of belonging than in Zaynebah's case? Despite violence uprooting them from their lives, and then living in a camp setting for several months, Nagah and her family members continued their entrepreneurial approach to life—a life which definitely included hunger, an unvaried diet, and the general hardship associated with living in a camp. Is 'groundedness' in Nagah's case then related more to Jackson's (2013) 'wherewithal of life'? Groundedness here refers to the more personal characteristics of coping with a crisis—giving the impression of a person being relatively 'grounded'. Here again, the role of family, amidst various encounters with the '*extraordinaire*' (disruptions to daily life), provides an analytical angle with which to understand how people like both Zaynebah and Nagah find a way to continue amidst so much change.

Before developing this thought further, the story of Mansoura will be told. The story of Mansoura introduces a third woman's experiences and the role of family relations (or lack thereof) in times of disruption/crisis.

Mansoura

Another relative of both Nagah and Zaynebah had also made the move to N'Djaména from Bangui. Her father belonged to the Sulmani tribe and was a brother of Hadj Hamdaan's mother (see Family Tree in Figure 5.1). As the eldest daughter of Maddé Awadjah and Hadji Samhoun, Mansoura is in her late thirties / early forties and was born and raised in Bangui along with her two siblings, a sister and brother. Their prosperous father was murdered when she was five years old and her brother Awadjah only a few months. As a popular businessman, Maddé Awadjah received many Chadian visitors at his home. In the 1980s, former Chadian president Hisséine Habré, in his mission to suppress any form of dissent, targeted those within Chad and also in the wider region.³⁷⁸ Mansoura claims her father did not have any political motivations, and it was merely his harbouring of those who did which sealed his fate.

Upon reaching adulthood, Mansoura was able to take over some of her father's remaining businesses, which an uncle had guarded for her. All this time, and still, her mother Hadji Samhoun ran her own business, selling products from her boutique in the markets of Cinq Kilo. Mansoura's

³⁷⁸ During Habré's reign, many Chadians had fled to CAR and became small traders or shopkeepers. Among them were not only southerners, whose ethnic homeland often crossed the national Chadian–CAR border, but also Arabs. Marchal (2015: 173) describes these Arabs as mostly being from the Salamat region and belonging to a faction opposed to Habré. It is not unlikely that other Arabic groups may also have joined this opposition group. Maddé Awadjah belonged to the Sulmani tribe.

husband had been a well-to-do businessman, who died at a young age leaving her with several young children to steer the family business. Despite her lack of a proper secondary education, she is a successful businesswoman with a lot at stake. She owns land in Bangui³⁷⁹ and N'Djaména and is continuously occupied with where she should raise her children.

We met for the first time in Bangui in October 2012 when Nagah took me to her house. It was Hadj Hamdaan who had given me instructions on how to ask around for the house, but it was with Nagah that I ended up going. Nagah would occasionally spend the night at Mansoura's, and although socio-economically the two women live very different lives, they seemed very concerned with each other's well-being—emphasizing their familial ties (their fathers were brothers). Mansoura lived in a large, high-walled compound encompassing two buildings. In the one she lived with her family, and the other she rented out as office space to a well-known aid organization. The income this provided was enough for her and her extended household to live off. Whatever her various businesses³⁸⁰ (and that of her mother) were bringing in was extra.

In February 2014 Mansoura had been living in N'Djaména for less than a year. She had made the move in July 2013 after returning from a medical operation in Khartoum and finding Bangui too 'hot'. As a wealthy businesswoman, she belongs to the elite and has 'friends' with close ties to Bozizé's former government. She admitted once that she kept these acquaintances as a form of protection. She felt insecure driving in Bangui at night and preferred to be accompanied by such an acquaintance. It helped when harassed by police checks and added an extra layer of safety.

She had kept her familial ties to Chad alive, visiting on occasion with and without the children. Upon the death of her husband, his family had given her the choice: his business selling veterinarian pharmaceuticals, or the land he owned in N'Djaména. Her husband's children from an earlier marriage had been eager to take over a business which produced a ready flow of capital. His brother, however, was reluctant to give Mansoura and her children the plots of land. In the end, her *parents* came to talk to the brother and he quickly agreed. She and Bachar laughed over this; apparently the Misseriya have quite a reputation for being strong-willed and able to get what they want. She is still grateful for her decision to fight for the plots of land. The business is hard work, but the land just sits there and rises in value. Land prices in N'Djaména have gone up considerably in the past years. Mansoura owns three such plots of land. When Bachar and I met up with her in N'Djaména toward the end of February 2013, she was planning to build on the first two smaller plots—one for her children to live on and the other for herself. The third and largest plot, worth at least 150 million CFA (almost 230,000 euros), she planned to sell. She calculated that she could get the construction work done for about 60 million CFA (approx. 92,000 euros), and with the

³⁷⁹ On updating this chapter in 2018, I was no longer sure whether she has been able to keep hold of the land in Bangui—whether she had sold it or whether it was confiscated. Further below, I describe how she had tried to protect these assets by renting them out to international organizations involved in the peace-keeping mission.

³⁸⁰ While living in Bangui she had dabbled in the gold industry, though on a small scale and at random. In a conversation with her in N'Djaména, she described how she would travel to the gold mines around Mbaïki where she would witness the washing of the gold. She would never tell anyone she was headed that way, preferring to be back in town before anyone even knew she had left. The gold she bought would be sold onward, with her preferring Dubai and France as end destinations. Fieldnotes, N'Djaména, 26 February 2013. Mansoura is not the only businesswoman I have met who interacted with the gold or diamond industries.

remaining money she would buy a new plot a little outside of the centre, investing whatever was left into her business. On leaving Bangui, she had decided to rent out her own house as well, which is situated in the same compound as the other building she was already renting out. A smart move as it turned out. Besides bringing in a large sum of income, it would secure the compound against looting, as the international organizations renting there are part of the peace-keeping missions. In terms of daily expenses while in Chad, she and her children could live off the 4 million CFA (approx. 6,000 euros) in rent she was receiving each month.

In February 2013 Mansoura had not yet decided where she would let her children grow up. We visited her in the home of her half-sister, a woman married to the imam of the large mosque in N'Djaména at the time. Mansoura did not like the mentality found in N'Djaména. She said it was one of mistrust, intrigue, and corruption.³⁸¹ In Bangui the educational system had been sliding backward for some time, and in N'Djaména she had found a Turkish-backed school in which it would be easy to enrol the children. This school would teach them Turkish, French, and English—languages she thought would be useful for them in the future. She was also considering moving to Cameroon. The climate is easier there and she preferred the Cameroonian mentality. It would teach her children proper French. In Bangui she had run a strict household. The children were not allowed to '*promenade*' around the city. They would leave for school in the morning, come home, go to Qur'ān lessons in the afternoon, and come straight home again. Some children had tutors who would come to the house to provide extra lessons. Mansoura herself never made it past the first few classes of secondary school, and she has worked hard to get to where she is now. Her plan is to take some kind of adult education classes which will provide her with a diploma and open new doors for her. She is a businesswoman at heart, always looking for opportunities and willing to work hard for them.

When we met again in February 2014, she was renting a concession for herself, the children, and the others in her household for whom she provides (mostly young women and children). The concession was well built, consisting of *deux salons*, *deux chambers*, an annex, and outhouse, with a lovely green garden and bougainvillea. It reminded me of the concession she had lived in in Bangui. She explained that she was looking to start up something in N'Djaména, something she could invest in or build up, but she was not sure what. She knew about veterinarian products, so that could be an option. She had looked into furniture, curtains, and so on, but said it was *haram*—sellers were tripling prices for customers and she did not want to be involved in that, earning *haram* money.³⁸² Bachar suggested she look into building a petrol station in Ati or Mongo. Mongo is practically connected by asphalt, and once it gets to Ati, well... it could be a wise move. Mansoura asked Bachar's advice on getting into the cattle trade; but he said no, there was a lot of fraud going on and it was not a sector you could trust people in.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Conversation with Mansoura, N'Djaména, 26 February 2013.

³⁸² Recorded conversation with Mansoura, her mother, and Bachar, N'Djaména, 24 February 2014.

³⁸³ Chad has many businesses and sectors which are extensively monopolized by a small number of people. Cf. Debos 2016 on the monopoly of power and favouritism within the politico-military context.

In March 2014 Mansoura showed us the plot of land she had started constructing on. It lay past Farsha in a very newly built-up area, including a freshly tarmacked road complete with electricity poles along it. The plot is actually 25 x 45 m, but she had divided it in two and had now started building on one half. Once complete, it will provide housing for her and her children. The other plot she will also construct and rent out. Her plot has a *forage* (deep well), and the water tank has already been connected to a generator. This will provide water for both plots, hers and the rental. Up until now, she has invested 30 million CFA (approx. 45,735 euros), saying that N'Djaména was proving expensive in terms of construction. One bag of cement alone costs 12,000 CFA (approx. 18 euros). Initially, she had planned to construct on both plots at the same time; but after having thought it over, she decided to first build a home for her and her children to live in. This way they would no longer have to pay a monthly rent and could *rester tranquilles* while she constructed the second plot and two little shops along the road adjacent to the property. This should provide her with a healthy monthly income to live off, allowing her to follow a course to acquire the diploma she desired. The lack of a diploma was making it harder to find work; on paper she did not have the right qualifications for an office job. Setting up a trading business (import, export) like she had had in Bangui was almost impossible. This she had learned in the past year. She owns another plot of land on which she wants to build and had had an appointment at the bank the day before to get the money for this. She did not need a loan, as her deceased husband's money had been held frozen at the bank. She was planning to use a part of it and hold the rest for their children.³⁸⁴

Reflection

Just like those of Zaynebah and Nagah, Mansoura's story reflects various levels of disruption throughout her life. She had lost her father as a child and became responsible for a sizeable business emporium when she came of age, ultimately providing her with a certain level of inclusion among Bangui's elite circles. Before and after the coup, her connections helped her get her affairs in order, securing her family's assets and businesses as best she could before violence broke out. While Mansoura has the benefit of being financially well endowed, this also makes her vulnerable and cautious in terms of investments made for her future. In contrast, Nagah's lack of wealth and loose family ties give her a certain freedom—a freedom that Zaynebah misses while being well looked after by her father's family.

Where can we then place Mansoura's story, in relation to those of Nagah and Zaynebah? To what extent has she been confronted with shifting circles of belonging, due to personal and external crises? And what are the elements which contribute to a certain level-headedness (groundedness) which she possesses while faced with such extraordinary circumstances? Over the years, she has taken an almost patriarchal role in the family, being responsible for the welfare of both assets and family members. Has she, in so doing, become a connecting factor within her family, someone who provides a certain groundedness to her direct relations?

³⁸⁴ Based on fieldnotes, N'Djaména, 22 March 2014.

The next section analyses the place of family and belonging, reflecting on whether and how family—based on the stories of Zaynebah, Mansoura, and Nagah—can simultaneously be supportive and constrictive.

The place of family and belonging amidst disruption

When family members of the Walad Djifir, living as third-generation immigrants in CAR, were confronted with violence in the months following the March 2013 coup, the consequences could not yet be foreseen. In the coup's aftermath, patterns emerged, shining light on the duality of family, gender, and access to wealth in daily life. Throughout my fieldwork visits, I came to realize that—alongside the massive impact of external factors such as drought, cattle loss, and outright political violence in the specific case of what happened in CAR—the impact of a family on an individual should not be underestimated. Familial relationships form the context in which experiences are navigated and lived. In acting as a connector, these relationships simultaneously create disconnections: familial expectations, obligations, and feelings of loyalty can create conflicting feelings within an individual. Family can thus simultaneously function as safe haven and *creator* of disruption. As in all relationships, the importance of family and loyalty are paired with complicatedness and inconsistency (Bouman 2003). Through a specific focus on these familial relations, within a situation of disruption—namely the 2013 coup in CAR—we see several layers of connectivity become prominent, ultimately forming a certain groundedness for each of the women in the way they provide feelings of belonging and offer practical solutions for the future.

One would expect a level of uprootedness after the CAR coup, a feeling of being 'betwixt and between' (Haour 2013). While this was certainly the case for many of Chadian origin, the extent to which this took shape varied per individual. What elements contributed to that are what this chapter has explored. In a context where mobility is the norm, with people, goods, and political intentions moving in and between the two countries, family obligations and expectations are one of the tentacles that anchor the extraordinary into the everyday (Das 2007; Grabska 2014).

Disruption and belonging

From the stories told by Chadians born and raised in CAR, which I collected before the coup, their position was not ideal, but it had become better than it was in the 1990s. Men still felt harassed by the authorities at times, even if they possessed Centrafricain nationality—people with a Muslim name, they said, were often targeted—yet some said that this was partly due to the wave of new migrants who were ruining their rapport and to the current political developments. These sentiments were further put to the test and eventually acted upon when, in the aftermath of the coup, waves of violence escalated between several different parties. The three case studies do not provide specific answers to why the Chadian population in CAR was among those targeted. The stories of those in the camp in Gawwi do show how, like so many other Chadians who fled CAR to 'return', people found themselves 'betwixt and between'—even if only for a short period. In most cases there was

no real 'return', as many had never set foot in Chad to begin with. The sense of belonging they had previously felt as Chadians in CAR was uprooted. Even if only for a brief period (as in the case of Nagah), people no longer felt welcome in CAR. At the same time, through their status as 'repatriates', being physically housed in a camp away from the city centre and with very little support from the Chadian state, they also did not feel welcomed in their country of origin. So what elements contributed to the way people coped in these situations?

People rely on the networks and assets they have to help them create new futures. So too was the case with the Walad Djifir who migrated to CAR and then found themselves returning. In understanding what role these networks and assets have and what they are made up of, Giuffrida's (2010: 30) description of mobility, stasis, and networks is helpful:

[...] the existence of networks depends on both moving and staying in one place. Nuclei of kin residing in one locality are points, knots or nodes in the web to which movers can return if they so wish. Their presence ensures claiming rights over land and territories that represent, in the mind of those who stay and go, an imaginary homeland or territory.

For each of the three women, their feelings toward such an imaginary homeland have been tested. For Nagah, this 'homeland' seems to be in Bangui; that is where she feels most 'at home' and where she has the best chances of making a living for herself and her family—despite her 'nuclei of kin' being dispersed. For Mansoura, I am unsure where her 'heart' lies. From our conversations, I had the feeling that Bangui still feels like the home she has left. At the same time, she is keen on finding somewhere safe and stable to raise her children. For Zaynebah, the shift of 'belonging' to both Bangui/Sassileh and the *ferīkh* setting has happened more gradually. It was a process that was started through the familial visits (aunt and uncle coming to CAR) and mainly through her own longer stay in Chad after the death of her father. Does her family ultimately have a connecting role, providing a focus for creating stability amidst disruption? The place of family plays out differently for each of the three women owing to the extent to which they can make individual decisions and access wealth with which to support these decisions. Such a line of thinking brings us back to the notion of flexibility discussed in Chapter 3. Here, flexibility is informed by the differing levels of access the three women have to economic and social (familial) resources³⁸⁵—but also by being able to 'belong' to and thus access various communities: both Chadian and Centrafricain societies, as well as the communities from which their families originated, such as the Misseria Rouges. At the same time, it is precisely this belonging which defines some of the disruption in their lives. Despite having been born and raised in CAR, all three women have had to flee due to the violence and general disruption, but also due to their own Chadian backgrounds. Once in Chad, they face a different level of not quite belonging.

³⁸⁵ See De Bruijn 1995 on how various social categories, with different access to natural, economic, and social resources, are related to rules of behaviour, norms, and values in Fulani society. In a way, Nagah's case resonates with the intentional actions in times of uncertainty and crisis of the Cameroonian women Johnson-Hanks (2005) describes. Nagah knows how to play the rules of the game, even if the future of where this game will lead her are unknown.

Family as two sides of the same coin?

'Family' as a resource seems to go hand in hand with both the restrictions and freedoms gender hierarchies and wealth can provide. For each of the three women, the diverse natures of the relations with their kin have had different implications in terms of the degree to which they are 'bounded' by family (as a source of support and constraint). When can such a connection or binding be interpreted as entailing 'constraint', or perhaps even 'duress', for those individuals taking part in it?

While I hesitate to link the concept of violence to the analysis of the place of family in moments of crisis (within the context of these case studies), ideas surrounding 'ordinary violence' as 'silent violence' do provide some useful insights. Using the term violence would not do justice to the genuine feelings of concern family members have for those in trouble / disrupted by CAR's political events. Yes, their expectations can be demanding, but the intentions are not malicious. Why then do I still end up making use of literature speaking of silent and ordinary violence? It is the emphasis on the ordinary and the silent, and perhaps even the mundane elements of everyday tensions, which I find useful. While the violence and disruption which ensued after the coup was very much a physically observable one, there were other more nuanced and less visible disruptions which require reflecting upon. The angle that studies in ordinary violence provide can help us make sense of such phenomena. In describing why and how ordinary violence is silent in the context of Africa, Bouju and De Bruijn (2014) point to a vulnerability informed by status and inequality:

In Africa, ordinary violence is silent because it is not 'loud' (i.e. not 'public'). It is private and takes place in intimate settings between individuals in face-to-face social interactions that are often undermined by poverty, jealousy, exploitation or injustice. Vulnerable persons (such as widows, unmarried mothers, childless women, unemployed young men/husbands, dishonoured family heads) may be subordinated and even subjugated by powerful persons of authority. [...] Actually, vulnerability to ordinary violence would seem to depend on the unpredictable combination of a structurally weak social and economic status together with certain external circumstances. To change something in what they consider to be an alienating relationship, they try to distance themselves from the conventional values and conservative meanings of norms. But as they lack the appropriate resources to cope with their situation, they often engage in a transgression of the norms. (Bouju & De Bruijn 2014: 7)

The emphasis of studies on structural violence³⁸⁶ thus often lies on individual resilience, and at times the lack thereof, within the context of ordinary violence. Ayimpam (2014) analyses this further when examining kinship solidarity and violence within a Congolese family, in relation to economic wealth. She argues that dominating situations are reversible: 'Indeed, whatever a family member's initial status, one's dominant position will be related to one's economic situation' (p. 102). Such attention to one's economic situation is useful when analysing the place of family amidst disruption.

One may expect women like Zaynebah, Nagah, and Mansoura to be more vulnerable when faced with such uprootedness as that caused by political and communal disruption. It is true that both

³⁸⁶ See Scheper-Hughes 1993, 2008; Das 2007; Bouju & De Bruijn 2014.

Zaynebah and Nagah are somewhat dependent on their husbands for support. Even if Nagah makes her own way, it is partly out of need that she does so, due to her husband not providing as expected. At the same time, this need to be provided for, and his absence, give her a certain freedom (even if it is hard work). Zaynebah has the familial support, while not being in charge really of her own destiny. I have to note here that I do not know in how far she and Adam discuss and plan their own futures. A feeling says that they are caught between ‘doing the right thing’, vis-à-vis expectations of family in the *ferikh*, and having their own vision/wishes for the future.

This brings us to the notion of a ‘constrained agency’, rather than ordinary violence. The need to provide for herself and her family constrains Nagah’s choices while also giving her a certain agency (freedom). What could be dominating situations of vulnerability have, in her case, indeed become reversible, if not assets. Mansoura’s agency lies in her widowed status³⁸⁷ and access to wealth. The latter also constrains her somewhat, as it makes her cautious and feel vulnerable.

People, then, and all that they embody, are as much connectors as they are providers of a framework of both support and constraint, whether for others or for themselves. It is perhaps a little like the idea of trust and mistrust discussed in the previous chapter—trust itself is linked to a certain dependency and the evaluation of risks (Carey 2017). So too, interactions with family can entail both dependency and possibilities, both unbridled caring and expectations which restrict. The more dependency a woman feels she has in relation to her family—whether it is she being dependent on a husband or other extended family, or whether she has family dependent on her as in the case of children or less well-off individuals—the stronger both levels of constraint and support can become.

What role, therefore, do familial relationships play in providing (in)security and possibilities for (new) futures within a context of political and non-political disruption and mobility? This chapter has explored the relationship between three women’s socio-economic environments, constituted simultaneously of vulnerability and normalcy, and those moments in life when panic, political violence, sadness, and insecurity reign. Their stories have provided a more nuanced insight into what life was like for those of Chadian origin after the coup in CAR in 2013. Layers of national and familial connectivity shifted, some of such processes having already started before the violence broke out and providing a form of security and support. At the same time, a certain ‘mundane’ continuity can be discerned amidst so much potential change. This continuity is linked to the role of family in the way it can provide support, as well as a motivation for seeking economic stability and security. It is this that provides a certain groundedness to the ability of Zaynebah, Nagah, and Mansoura to cope with disruption, with their social and economic situations ultimately determining the level of independency in which decisions can be made.

³⁸⁷ See Casciarri (1995: 111) on the relative freedom of those (pastoral Ahamda) women with a widowed, divorced, or very poor economic status to work ‘outside’ their nomadic camps and thus provide for themselves.



Zaynebah

5.1 Zaynebah washing little Hamdaan, March 2012. She was one of the only women I observed washing her children once a day, with soap.

5.2 Trip from Mongo to N'Djaména with Zaynebah, Hadj Hamdaan, and little Hamdaan, May 2012. Fedellelah hitched a ride on the back of the pick-up, travelling on from N'Djaména to Sarh to visit one of his sons herding cattle in the area. One of Hadj Hamdaan's older brothers is pictured to the left of Bachar (middle). He had been visiting Hadj Hamdaan and we returned him to Bitkine, from where he would find transport to his own ferīkh. From N'Djaména, Zaynebah, her son, and Hadj Hamdaan would travel on to Sassileh in CAR. Here we were waiting for a motorbike to come and bring Hadj Hamdaan's ID documents to us. He had left them behind at Issa Hissein's home in Mongo. Luckily, Issa Hissein realized this and called us. We were about half an hour out of Mongo at this point.

5.3 Hadj Hamdaan and little Hamdaan in N'Djaména at Bachar's before the trip to CAR, May 2012. Zaynebah had gone out to the market that morning, accompanied by Bachar's eldest daughter. Bachar's eldest son is keeping both Hamdaans company.





5.4 A young Zaynebah posing for the photograph, Bangui, unknown year.

5.5 Zaynebah's children, little Hamdaan and Haamid seated in their courtyard in Sasslieh, CAR. Photograph printed in July 2010. In Sassileh, Haamid had been attending nursery school. In the ferīkh he mostly spent his time helping his grandmother.



5.6 Zaynebah posing with neighbouring friends in her compound in Sassileh, December 2012. On our visit it was clear that she was at ease being home and had good ties with many of her neighbours.

5.7 Zaynebah in the morning, Fadjé, April 2012.

5.8 Haamid and Hamdaan with Hadji Ghali on the mat below them, Fadjé, March 2012.

5.9 Zaynebah posing with Ashaam (right) and another neighbour in the ferīkh in Fadjé, March 2012. They had been feeding the donkeys and she had been joking about her being pictured in the act, laughing at the idea. In the ferīkh too, she got along well with many of the men and women.





5.10 The compound in Sassileh, December 2012. Zaynebah's father built the first few buildings and Hadj Hamdaan later added to them. She was now living here with her husband and their youngest son. The building on the right housed the kitchen. The one in the middle was where Hadj Hamdaan stayed when he was there, and the one on the left was used for storage. She and Adam occupied the room from which this photograph was taken.

5.11 Adam's shop in Sassileh, December 2012. His shop was positioned along the main road going through Sassileh, and opposite their compound. Zaynebah's father had also owned some land and houses which he had rented out. Adam bought most of his wares across the border in Cameroon.

5.12 Adam, pictured here outside his shop in Sassileh, December 2012. This was the first time we met each other and he seemed a little wary at first. I had heard his name mentioned so often by his mother Marnéh and told him so. I think he was unsure of what I wanted from him and found it bizarre that I had spent time with Zaynebah and his close family in the ferīkh and was now there, in Sassileh.



5.13 Haamid and Sassileh warming up around the cooking fire, March 2014. At this point in time Adam had been sighted in CAR, ‘behind his cattle’, but they had not had any other news since. Haamid was clearly worried and would hang around during our conversations, something he did not usually do as much.



5.14 Haamid coming back from herding the goats, March 2014. Zaynebah worried about Haamid, wishing he could go to school instead of spend a large part of the day tending the goats.

5.16 Marneh, recounting how they had heard about the attack on the village in CAR, thinking Adam had been among those killed, and discovering Adam had left the night before the attack on the day they were holding a ceremony for him. Early March 2014.

5.17 Adam and friend on pick-up at the bus station in Dembé, 24 March 2014. They were visibly tired, emotional, and relieved upon seeing Bachar. It had been a long journey, having walked southwards from Geng, then up and over along the Cameroonian border towards Chad. Just before reaching the Chadian border they had been robbed and tied up. All their cattle were dispersed and rounded up by the robbers. Managing to escape into the bush, they had made their way into southern Chad, where they were able to contact Hadj Hamdaan. He sold a goat and wired the money to them so that they could board a bus to N’Djaména.



Nagah

5.18 Nagah and a Sudanese merchant friend passing time among their wares, Marché Soudanais, Cinq Kilo, November 2012.

5.19 Marché Soudanais with Nagah posing behind her wares, November 2012.

5.20 Goods at the Marché Soudanais, with a view of the street towards one of Cinq Kilo's main avenues, November 2012. Hadji Samhoun's shop was just up the road.

5.21 Some of the young men helping Nagah and the other merchants at the Marché Soudanais, November 2012.



5.22 A view of the camp at Gawwi before entering, with the water platform on the right, February 2014.

5.23 View into the camp at Gawwi from Nagah and family's tent, March 2014. A few tents down we bumped into one of the ladies I had interviewed at the Marché Soudanais in Bangui.

5.24 Nagah's brother just arrived at Gawwi, April 2014. Some of Nagah's market wares are visible in front of him.

5.25 Nagah and Umar at Gawwi, April 2014.



5.26 Nagah's mother with their possessions visible in the background, March 2014. The little girl belongs to one of Nagah's sisters, who was in hospital in N'Djaména expecting a baby.

5.27 Nagah's grandmother and aunt in Gawwi, March 2014. It was hot inside the tents and the ground itself would flood as soon as the rainy season started. At this time, they were waiting for a solution to come along. Going back to where the grandmother had come from in central Chad, all those years ago, was not an option. She no longer knew anyone there, and there was nothing to go back to.

**Mansoura**

5.28 Hadji Samhoun in her shop at Marché Soudanais, Bangui November 2012. Hadji Samhoun is Mansoura's mother and came to Bangui as a young girl, together with her older sister.

5.29 Mansoura with some of her children on a visit from Souleymane and me in Bangui, November 2012. The small child on the left is 'Umar, Nagah's son. You can see the shadow of Nagah taking our picture. Zaynebah's son Maddé is standing next to me.



CONCLUSION

GROUNDED IN CONNECTIVITY

A focus on the everyday has produced this ethnography, which hopes to give a nuanced voice to an extended family living at the centre of a country and region known for its political turmoil, ecological insecurities, and socio-economic hardship. The everyday of these Chadian Walad Djifir is one in which the mundane and the *extraordinaire* go hand-in-hand. The *ferīkh* (nomadic camp) has been developed in this thesis as a basic concept, one which has helped me understand how the Walad Djifir's everyday can be understood in light of general globalizing developments and trends in the region—an 'everyday' wilderness which continues to exist, despite the hurdles it throws up and perhaps even because of the disruption faced. Over time, the Walad Djifir have developed ways of coping and dealing with both continuous and changing insecurities, and they have developed means of appropriating specific infrastructural and technological developments. These ways are in no way fixed or static; rather, they are flexible, mobile, adaptable, at times inconsistent, and possibly completely dependent on the individual. Nevertheless, an understanding of these ways is useful in positioning the Walad Djifir within the globalizing world which is their wilderness.

The chapters of this ethnography thus offer insights into a selection of post-globalization insecurities, changes, and developments which the Walad Djifir, a specific group of nomadic pastoralists based in Central Chad, encounter. Through a connectivity approach, I contribute to anthropological debates on place and space amidst global processes and the movement of people and ideas, and I relate the lives of the Walad Djifir to nomadic/pastoralist studies in northern Africa, as well as situating them within studies on people in post-conflict settings of insecurity and crisis. The anthropology of connectivity and a focus on the 'everyday' opens up avenues of empirical research exploring people's reactions to insecurity and change in relation to socio-politics, wealth, and technologies. Firstly, situating these reactions within the everyday setting of the nomadic camp and its extended family provides a methodological and analytical point of departure for the research—a way to locally ground developments in the region while also showing connectivity and mobility. Secondly, it reveals a symbolic 'space' for safeguarding wealth and family.

What then, is the nature of connectivity in a regionally insecure context such as Chad and CAR, and how better to understand it? What are the reactions of Walad Djifir to, and in, the socio-political environment of which they are a part—including developing means of communication—and how do the networks and connections to which they belong play a role? In answering these questions, I have looked at the internalization of the *ferīkh* in the lives of individuals and also within the spaces various connectors occupy. What place does the *ferīkh* hold in these entangled and connected

regional dynamics, and what is the resulting impact on people's lives? In answering these questions, I have divided this concluding chapter into three sections: (1) The *ferīkh* and the 'everyday' wilderness; (2) The nature of connectivity; and (3) Groundedness amidst wilderness.

The *ferīkh* and the 'everyday' wilderness

The 'wilderness' in which these Walad Djifir move and live is a transnational³⁸⁸ one in which various networks play a role and in which disorder does not necessarily imply chaos. Using the example of Hadj Hamdaan, we see that life in the *ferīkh* is connected to and influenced by multiple affairs: the very personal dealings concerning an inheritance, the commercial and strategic aspects of re-investing this inheritance, and the means of communication used for making decisions, money transfers, and the spreading of news. The appropriation of these 'happenings' outside of the physical *ferīkh* are simultaneously influenced by precisely that which the '*ferīkh*' stands for.

The *ferīkh*

Methodologically, the *ferīkh* was approached as both a concept and as a physical place to carry out research within the globalizing wilderness of 21st-century Chad. The unavoidable 'entering the field' moment took place within a nomadic setting characterized by small glasses of tea under shade-giving trees while waiting for the sun to move down, with the slaughter of a sheep near the camp grounds, followed by dinner in an open space surrounded by the tents of my hosts. At first the *ferīkh* was thus very much a physical place: the nomadic camp—a camp which moved around only a few times a year, depending on the needs of its livestock and people regarding access to pastures, water, and agricultural land. Soon, through focusing on the daily lives of those living in the *ferīkh*, the ways in which the camp itself was connected to goings-on outside of its physical space became apparent. These connections to the 'outside' included not only the more obvious interactions with local markets (for livestock and daily needs), but also the staying in touch with family members working in N'Djaména or even further afield, in CAR and Libya. From a 'mere' physical place, the role of the *ferīkh* grew to one representing a space which embodies all these different networks of Walad Djifir connectivity.

A focus on the everyday determined which networks of connectivity were currently most prevalent and around which 'connectors' they were centred. On a daily basis, conversations and actions revolved around such things as the caring for livestock (camels, cattle, sheep, and goats), the phone calls received from a brother or husband engaged in wage labour elsewhere, phone calls with these same or other family members when money was being sent, and physical meetings to discuss how to handle a land issue. These daily issues all had interlinked themes running through them which were identified as connectors—namely, Leaders, Cattle, Remittances, and Family.

³⁸⁸ For nomadic peoples such as the Walad Djifir, national borders have been of little importance historically, with people and herds moving around and across them in both formal and illicit fashions. Even nowadays, national borders are still crossed in similar fashion, though the need for a national ID and more secure means of transferring currencies has become greater. Nations seem more present and nationalities, especially in times of conflict, accentuated.

‘Following’ the stories surrounding these specific connectors revealed an interchange between local interpretations and appropriations, as well as external post-globalization factors.

The *ferīkh* is thus not only a local space in which the everyday lives of an extended family play out. It is also a space which reflects the post-globalization dynamics of the region they live in, dynamics involving various insecurities (e.g. ecological, economic, socio-political) and changes (e.g. infrastructural and technological developments, increased literacy and knowledge of rights, shifting alliances, family moving away or returning). In using such an approach as the one described here, this study contributes to ethnographies within pastoralist studies as well as to ethnographies of the ‘everyday’ in contexts of insecurity.

Insecurity and disruption amidst the everyday wilderness

In contributing to ethnographies of the ‘everyday’ in contexts of insecurity, I have identified expected and continuous insecurities, alongside those that change. Sometimes pre-existing insecurities may become more intense (socio-political relations for Chadians in CAR and the subsequent migration away from one’s home), while others continue to recur on a regular basis (the finding of pasture or changing of herd compositions). An historical perspective on the Walad Djifir reveals that, apart from the usual nomadic/pastoral-related mobility, periods of conflict and drought in particular have been important triggers for leaving the region or for shifting allegiances. Past triggers for avoiding certain areas or leaving them altogether are related to tax obligations and/or extortion, depending on whom you talk to.

It is the reactions of Walad Djifir to these varying insecurities and changes which have influenced their perception of the world around them and vice versa. And it is this positionality—linked not only to methods of making a living and surviving, but also in terms of how they see themselves and how they are perceived by others (perspectives of belonging)—which comes to the fore in extraordinary moments. Extraordinary moments, however, are not only those of violence and crisis, but also situations where Walad Djifir encounter other forms of change, such as technological developments related to monetary transfers and the diversification of a ‘nomadic way of life’. In dealing with such changes, Walad Djifir are seen to fall back on pre-existing ‘ways of doing’, negotiating between security and insecurity to alter or improve the situation and thus appropriating post-globalization trends in a local fashion.

These negotiations take place among family members, between the self and the group, the group and the state, order and disorder, the known (predictable) and the unknown (unpredictable, and therefore crisis?), the drive to escape while nurturing the safety of familiar ways. The voluntary and involuntary choices people make within these negotiations often reflect a flexibility linked to older processes of action–reaction. The various chapters have looked at what these processes of action–reaction entail per connector and show that while norms and values are often upheld, the contexts in which they are carried out are changing. The way this was researched was by analysing how everyday stories and happenings relate to each connector. Conversations and actions linked to livestock, for example, revealed norms and values related to making a living and wealth (Chapter 3). While practices surrounding livestock are becoming increasingly commodified, and the contexts in which economic diversification takes place are changing, it seems that working with cattle and

the earning of a living outside of working with cattle continue to be approached in the same way. Analysing the process linked to the sending of money (Chapter 4) showed what people find important when making decisions about what social and technological networks to use.

It is by concentrating on the practices surrounding moments of negotiation, opposition, decisions—that is, concentrating on *what does work*—that this ethnography contributes to the debates on insecurity and connectedness. In settings of potential uprootedness/disruption—due to the loss of a family member or land (Chapter 2), shifting economic trends (Chapter 3), developing technologies of communication (Chapter 4), and outright physical violence (Chapter 5)—this study reveals a certain groundedness (elements of the normal within the everyday) which helps Walad Djifir to cope.

Connectivity and the ‘everyday’ in the globalizing wilderness

Methodologically approaching this nomadic group through the variety of ways in which their daily lives in the nomadic camp are linked (connected) to the world outside their camp, this ethnography departs from the nomadic studies that focus on the more classical aspects of pastoral-nomadic life (e.g. livestock issues, such as diseases; market dynamics; public health; ecological issues, such as drought and scarcity; access to resources; sedentary–nomadic conflicts; sedentarization, whether forced or not; marginalization in relation to the state). Instead the ethnography situates the Walad Djifir in their contemporary world, touching upon various aspects of pastoral-nomadic life—cattle, socio-political organization, mobility—in addition to other dynamics, such as remittances and the infrastructures involved, and family and belonging in times of crisis. These are, of course, phenomena which can be found in most societies. In this ethnography they are brought together and analysed through a connectivity lens.

Connectivity, however, is relative and comes in gradations (Strathern 1991). So too, individual encounters with, and navigations of, the globalizing world vary. Not every Walad Djifir has travelled and lived in N’Djaména or Bangui. Many children grow up knowing and seeing little more than the *ferīkh*, the livestock, and perhaps the village school. Some have been to a local clinic or the hospital in Mongo. All of them, however, know their geographical/physical surroundings very well. And all of them know, or at some point spend time with, someone who has travelled, who *does* own a mobile phone or radio, who *has* experienced more than the nomadic life. The decision to up and leave one’s family and way of life, like Bachar did in his adolescence, is rooted in the loss of livestock due to bovine epidemics and drought, leaving less of a herd for him and his brothers to share, but is also rooted in his idea of there being ‘more’ to life than rearing animals. The decision of the neighbouring *ferīkh* to begin following an *opposante chef de ferīkh* is fuelled by a disagreement over money related to Islamic custom after the death of someone within the tribe. The uprootedness of so many Chadians in CAR is linked to underlying tensions over economic monopolies and political support. The traumatic reason for the return of Adam and Zaynebah to the *ferīkh* of their families is tied in with mundane customs and familial expectations.

This mixture of the ordinary/mundane and the *extraordinaire* is a theme that runs throughout the lives of Walad Djifir. Both come in gradations of intensity and in a variety of forms, yet—as Veena Das (2007) argues—all extraordinary life events are anchored in some way or other to the more

mundane parts of life. It is exactly such an approach which I feel will further help us understand ‘lives as lived’ in such post-globalization settings as we find in Chad. Extraordinary situations such as those born out of outright violence and other (socio)political disruptions become a part of people’s daily lives. They are, in fact, interpreted and appropriated in ways which are informed by specific frameworks already in place, even when these frameworks are no longer accessible or feasible. The failure to fall back on what used to be in place is often described as contributing to the disruption and distress.

Then again, what is ‘ordinary’ or extreme? When does something become disruptive? And to whom? Janet Roitman (2013) asks whether we perhaps exclude certain avenues of understanding by labelling something as ‘crisis’. What is often overlooked, when utilizing a ‘crisis framework’, may be precisely those mundane elements which at times help anchor the potential disruption. As we find in the subtle writings of Michael Stasik (2010) and Michael Jackson (2013), keeping an open mind about the elements that ‘do work’, in times of perceived crisis, has been central to this ethnography. It is these elements which, as Katarzyna Grabska (2014) describes, through their encounters with disruption become empowering where they otherwise may not have been. In unexpected situations of disruption—whether through extraordinary conflicts or the more mundane repercussions of coming in contact with changing means of communication such as the mobile phone—the focus on elements that work reveals how ‘Walad Djifir belonging’ to that which the *ferīkh* stands for helps anchor/ground the ordinary and extraordinary into everyday life.

Walad Djifir have specific ways of dealing with both mundane and extraordinary issues surrounding Cattle, Remittances, Leadership, and Family. It is these ways which inform the nature of connectivity mediated through each connector. The next section discusses what the nature of connectivity entails for Walad Djifir faced with various elements of change (mundane and extraordinary) in their everyday lives.

The nature of connectivity

This ethnography has been structured around different connectors, as a way of understanding the daily life negotiations found within the *ferīkh* setting (layers of connectivity) and the way they are informed by dynamics taking place ‘outside’ the physical nomadic camp. After having spent time in the *ferīkh* and among family members living outside it, several connectors were identified: Leaders, Cattle, Remittances, and Family. A focus on these connectors has revealed the complexity of the ‘nature of connectivity’, with four main themes running throughout: fission and fusion; flexibility; mistrust; and constrained agency. These four interlinked themes ultimately inform that which we later identify as a social process of belonging informed by specific layers of connectivity—namely, groundedness.

Circles of belonging: Positionality and intersubjectivity

This belonging, however, and the nature of connectivity, cannot be understood without setting it next to the methodological issues of positionality and intersubjectivity. The position of the Walad Djifir in general—in relation to their socio-political, economic, and ecological surroundings—informs their reactions to situations of change (post-globalization). In turn, the specific position of the researcher and the main informants influences the type of data gathered, the manner in which it was gathered, and its interpretation. The nature of connectivity between the field and its inhabitants, the researcher and her informants, is thus one mediated by issues of positionality and intersubjectivity. This ethnography makes it clear from the start that it is an intersubjective one, based on the stories of and observations carried out among a specific extended family within the larger Walad Djifir community. Chapter 1 describes these dynamics, situating the research field as well as analysing the position of the researcher and informants.

The Walad Djifir are part of a larger nomadic group known as the Misseria Rouges. Making use of their own stories to describe past and present local politics, Chapter 1 details aspects of how they came to be in the Guéra and Batha regions. These past mobile itineraries have continued to a certain degree in the present day and are both the subject of and the tool with which research was carried out. Walad Djifir ‘live their lives’ in multiple locations, whether due to the needs of their livestock, to visit family members, or when carrying out wage labour. Fieldwork was therefore also carried out in various locations: different *ferīkhs* in the Guéra and Batha regions; in Mongo, Ati, and Koundjaar; in the capital N’Djaména; in Bangui (CAR); and in a remote village to the west of Bangui. These places were not chosen at random. Each contained either the same person I had been spending time with earlier but who had travelled; a family member (or more) related to people I had come to know during the first fieldwork sessions in 2011 and 2012; or was a site which provided context for the ‘connectors’ around which the chapters are written—such as a weekly market or a money transfer office. This ‘following’ of informants and connectors allowed for a more holistic understanding of Walad Djifir belonging in relation to different places and spaces (circles).

Through my interaction with the Walad Djifir, certain circles of belonging were reinforced—the position of main informant Bachar as mediator for family affairs, for example—and I too had specific frames of reference to which I belonged and was seen to belong. What then are the various ‘circles of belonging’ in relation to the Walad Djifir? A quick answer would be that they identify with their nomadic origins, are Arabs in terms of their roots and spoken language, Tijaniyya Muslims, and Chadian. Through the lens of different connectors, and specifically through people’s interaction with shifting, or perhaps evolving, social and economic networks embodied in each connector, we discern other circles of belonging: a feeling of belonging to Bangui or CAR in general, a belonging to a nomadic ‘way’ of doing things, a belonging to the Batha and Guéra regions, a belonging to either urban life or the rural setting of the *ferīkh*, and most importantly the feeling of belonging to family, whether near or far (in both a physical and metaphorical sense). This belonging, mediated through the nature of connectivity, ultimately contribute to Walad Djifir maintaining a feeling of groundedness.

Chapter 2 introduced the reader to the decisions (actions) surrounding land ownership and familial strife through focusing on local leaders as ‘connectors’ and moments of negotiation. In dealing with such issues as leadership-strife, land ownership, and the forming or strengthening of allegiances, members of the *ferīkh* are faced with remnants of administrative changes under the French and with the more contemporary dynamics linked to Chad’s system of governance.

Negotiations imply a certain agency, and the type of interaction, relationship, or context defines the frameworks within which they take place.³⁸⁹ Such a focus gives an idea of the socio-political structure of the semi-sedentary Walad Djifir and the frameworks in which people act and react. These frameworks are not fixed and consistent per situation. In the case of the death of Harun’s son and his own brother’s unwillingness to follow custom, the family became torn and one of their tribes pushed to start following a different *sheikh*. The value of sticking together as a family and tribe proved difficult to uphold; or, rather, each party had their own ideas on what was right. In the face of land-ownership strife between Walad Djifir and the *sheikh* of the Misseria Rouges, the overarching tribe to which they belong, there was a general consensus on how to act. The consensus was to stick together as Walad Djifir and to fight to regain their ancestral wet-season grazing land, although options for the means of fighting differed—some talked of taking up arms, while others argued for the legal route.

The chapter also shows that traditional leaders’ positions are coming into question (owing to their own actions), and others have started taking their places. These others are often men literate in both Arabic and French and knowledgeable about urban political ways. Literacy and the sharing of information have thus led to the employment of specific tactics to fight for the land they believe is theirs. Through examples of internal agreement and disagreement, normative narratives of what is good for the community surfaced, narratives which help us understand the workings of the *ferīkh*.

Throughout the case studies, a certain fission and fusion can be discerned—the alternative splitting or coming together at various levels of social organization, depending on the position and need of the individual, family, and tribal unit. It is this fission and fusion which reflects a continuity amidst change, a flexibility while falling back on older ‘ways of doing’—a form of groundedness, if you will. Is the *ferīkh*, then, a socially constructed space which binds the Walad Djifir together, whether through cohesion or friction? I would say it is. In dealing with issues of leadership and land, the nature of connectivity is framed by dynamics of fission and fusion. In this sense, the *ferīkh* functions as a framework of reference in relation to which people justify their actions, however ambiguous and inconsistent they appear to be.

Flexibility

While there is a certain discrepancy in how socio-political issues are tackled (alternatively deciding to bond together or separate), decisions about tackling issues surrounding another traditionally ‘nomadic’ subject—namely, that of cattle or livestock in general—appear to be more unanimous.

³⁸⁹ These in turn reveal the internalization of the *ferīkh* in the lives of individuals—not all, of course, but it does seem to be a reference people relate their decisions to, whether they then abide by the ‘norm’ or not (i.e. family or the *ferīkh*—and capital).

Chapter 3 looked at what changes and continuities exist in the way Walad Djifir adhere to a ‘nomadic way’ of life, in light of economic developments, political and ecological insecurity, and regional mobility. The commodification of livestock and the search for alternative forms of income—such as labour migration to Libya, commercial endeavours in CAR, or seasonal wage labour in N’Djaména—are analysed through the perceptions and attitudes of Walad Djifir to these processes.

A focus on livestock as connector revealed a certain flexibility in the logics surrounding such economic activities as cattle rearing, wage labour, and income and wealth generation. This flexibility characterizes the normative frameworks linked to actions and decisions made by Walad Djifir wanting to supplement their livelihood (e.g. Muhammad deciding to take up work in N’Djaména), those deciding where and how to invest their capital (e.g. Bachar and Zaynebah’s father), and those faced with a physical threat to their families and wealth (e.g. Adam in CAR). There is an element of individual control in this flexibility, as well as the will to protect and grow collective and individual wealth so as to ensure the future of any children. Together these strategies linked to norms and values provide a certain groundedness for Walad Djifir, a groundedness linked to wealth (in livestock, land, social networks), mobility, and flexibility vis-à-vis economic diversification. It is a continuation of a ‘nomadic way’ of doing things, though this time framed within a more personal ‘walk of life’ amidst change.

Mistrust

Chapter 4 introduces changes in the form of technologies and methods surrounding the transfer of money between Walad Djifir, both across national boundaries and within Chad. At the time of my fieldwork (2011–2015), most of the remittances received came from Libya. The case studies shine light on the existing ways in which money is sent through both traditional and digital means, and the reasons for choosing specific methods. The studies examine how developing communication technologies are complemented by existing practices of connectivity, within contexts of insecurity and over geographical distances.

In light of new technologies such as the mobile phone and services provided by money transfer operators, certain patterns of appropriation and flexibility emerge—patterns which replicate former ways of relating and connecting. The same can be observed when it comes to new mobilities and the new exchanges they often entail: old mistrusts persevere.

Walad Djifir base decisions about how to send money on the potential of deception and risk—that is, on the mistrust of those not within their familial networks. It is precisely this mistrust which grounds them in a world of fast-developing technologies, by providing them with a tool for appropriating such changes. The nature of a connectivity informed by ‘mistrust’ and coupled with practicality thus shows the continuing importance of familial networks when it comes to the digital transfer of money.

Constrained agency

In the last ‘connector’ chapter, we see a role for the connectors previously described, coupled with the role of family and together acting as a framework of support and constraint in times of

disruption. The setting is that of CAR, a country hosting first-, second-, and third-generation Walad Djifir. This chapter describes the dynamics of migration out of the ferīkh and into CAR, and the processes surrounding the eruption of violence following the 2013 coup. Throughout, family and the emotion of belonging are the factors which seem to ground people within such a disruptive context—belonging to a family while also belonging to two nations at the same time (CAR and Chad). Intermixed with this, the discussion posits that the flexibility of dealing with existing gender dynamics and hierarchies is influenced by financial independence. Family—not only in the form of obligations and expectations, but also in relation to the need/will to provide for them—is seen as presenting two sides of the same coin, both limiting and liberating the three women whose case studies are discussed.

Daily life, as mediated through the different connectors, is structured by specific frameworks—decisions vis-à-vis livestock, family, the sending of money—which all come with their own logics or reasoning (nature of connectivity). It is these frameworks that come to the fore when individuals are faced with moments of change. Together, the different connectors and the logics they embody all reveal a different aspect of the ferīkh as framework of reference—a groundedness amidst change.

Groundedness amidst wilderness

In short, the nature of the connections and the behaviours attached to each layer of connectivity reveal tendencies which together ‘ground’ Chadian Walad Djifir within the globalizing wilderness of the 21st century. The visual story which runs throughout this ethnography alternatively acts as a counterbalance to, and nuancing of, the written narrative. A first shallow encounter (a brief stay) in a nomadic camp calls up thoughts on how similar or different lives are now as compared with thirty, fifty, or one hundred years ago. In such an initial observation lies the basis for teasing out / untangling the feeling that there is a groundedness in the way Walad Djifir live their lives.³⁹⁰ Some may call it structure; but, to me, this implies something fairly static and unanimous for all. No, groundedness is relative and adaptable. It varies per personality, per situation, and per connector. If it is so variable, why is it even relative or useful for us as researchers?

The ambivalence of frameworks that ‘work’

The cases presented in this ethnography have shown that the frameworks that ‘work’, or characterize groundedness, can and do at times add to feelings of insecurity. Yet it is an insecurity

³⁹⁰ It is difficult to describe an initial feeling of wonder about how far life has changed in the past century without coming across as judgemental and even Eurocentric. I would hope that a life-time of growing up in various countries (Guinea Conakry, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Egypt, and Ethiopia), experiencing the variety which is our world and its people, has helped me to put these observations into perspective. It is up to the reader to decide whether this ethnography has been able to capture the nuances and contradictions of Walad Djifir life in an acceptable way. One day I hope to translate these writings into French so that Bachar and his children can read along and contribute their thoughts. A translation into Chadian Arabic, which the majority of the family members I spent time with will understand, is less likely—yet, who knows!

that does not mean flying off the side of the earth, a floating around aimlessly in space, a feeling of being lost. No, in most cases—even the case of Nagah (Chapter 5) and her family in the repatriate camp in Gawwi—however desperate and traumatized they were, people had something to fall back on, to keep them going on a daily basis: the need to provide for themselves, phone calls with family and friends, a concern with what was to become of them and what they could do. Nagah took up what she knew best: her small market trade. An uncle of hers, who studied socio-linguistics at the University in Bangui, became a teacher at a refugee camp in Sido (southern Chad). These are not success stories *per se*, since life was still hard and they were poor and did not have many or varied meals. Nor did they at that time have an idea of how to get out of the situation and improve it. But one day did move into the next.

It is the same with the young Mariam Lemoen: her days in the nomadic camp (Chapter 3) moved from one into another. The disruptions in her life were of a different order and cannot be compared to those Nagah's little boy Umar had gone through. The addition of many camels to her family's herd meant she found herself living far from the other children she would otherwise have been able to spend the evenings with. To what extent she perceived this as a disruption is difficult to tell. The point is that the walk of life throws up change, both positive and negative, both expected and unexpected. And motivations/reasons for belonging vary per person and situation.

In an interconnected region pervaded by rupture and continuity (as two sides of the coin which is 'change'), the mundane and the extraordinary go hand-in-hand. Despite the variety of changes, less or more severe, that Walad Djifir are faced with, there is a certain 'way of doing things' in their daily lives which is linked to the *ferikh* on numerous levels. It is this dynamic which informs and explains their groundedness and ability to 'continue' amidst change. Such changes take the shape of socio-political disruption (e.g. issues of land and leadership, a political coup), expected and unexpected insecurities (e.g. periods of drought, cattle disease, travelling across borders), and technological developments (e.g. in relation to communication networks and means of sending money over distances). Reactions to processes of social change are rooted in feelings of belonging and the practical nature of the connectivity.

In relation to livestock and ways of making a living, the nature of connectivity is characterized by a certain flexibility, typical of a nomadic 'walk of life'. The nature of mistrust in choosing which networks to use to send money is embedded in calculations of risk toward 'others' (i.e. those not belonging to the extended family). Through fission and fusion we see that belonging varies according to what is believed to be in the best interest and to what is socially acceptable/correct. When faced with non-Walad Djifir sub-tribes (such as that of the *chef de canton* who sold their wet-season pasture land to another sub-tribe), belonging to the Walad Djifir becomes dominant. When issues surface within the extended family (*ferikh* as lineage), there is a certain ambivalence and seeming inconsistency to loyalties observed, depending more on an individual notion of 'what is right'. In relation to the constrained agency we find vis-à-vis family, we see a further detailing in gradations of belonging—toward in-laws, a husband (whether estranged or present), and children.

Groundedness in wealth and family

The question then is how to interpret these frameworks of connectivity and belonging in terms of their contribution to a feeling of groundedness. To the Walad Djifir of Central Chad, their arid Sahelian surroundings are no mystery. Their surroundings and their sedentary-nomadic lifestyle rearing various livestock and growing crops have dictated their daily lives for decennia. Tools for survival include (but are not limited to) experience, information flows, and family. These same tools kick in during times of distress, sudden or otherwise. While the survival tools are an aid to the Walad Djifir, they at times also form a constraint. Day-to-day struggles not only include the harsh climate and dry lands but also enter into the social spheres of daily life—of familial disputes and the socio-politics involved with leadership. Guidelines of ‘normative’ behaviour vis-à-vis loyalty and brotherhood go hand-in-hand with political and economic agendas (and hierarchies and power relationships). Familial relationships form the context in which experiences (including those of duress) are navigated and lived. Reacting to situations of hardship—whether those caused by arid land, leadership-strife, or civil war—is engrained in a Walad Djifir’s way of life. This is not to say that contact with such disruption has rendered them immune to its effects. It has, however, given them certain tools with which to tackle such situations, a certain something to hold on to—a groundedness.

This groundedness seems to be a coin with two sides, one of contrasting characteristics: basing decisions on mistrust when choosing through which networks to send money (Chapter 4), flexibility while adhering to the nomadic ‘walk of life’ (Chapter 3), family providing both constraint and agency (Chapter 5), and choosing to split or join together when faced with socio-political issues (Chapter 2). It is precisely this two-sidedness which informs the ways in which Walad Djifir function and link up to the globalizing wilderness and all its potential changes.

Ultimately, the motivations for reacting in specific ways to situations are linked to the safe-keeping of wealth and the family’s future. To what extent these two values/assets will continue to be linked to the nomadic setting will vary per individual. For most of the main informants, whose stories run through the chapters, the means of safeguarding their wealth and family (their future) resonates with the norms and values we find in the physical pastoral-nomadic setting of the *ferīkh*. The shape this safeguarding takes, however, has been changing.

The majority of those who refer to themselves as Walad Djifir still carry out some form of nomadic pastoralism, complementing this with other means of making a living, such as through agriculture or wage labour. Some first-, second-, and third-generation Walad Djifir still associate with their pastoral-nomadic roots but have left the nomadic camp behind and set up a commercial business in an urban or rural town, or have taken up another form of income-generation. Experiences of living ‘outside’ the pastoral-nomadic setting—as in the case of Bachar, Zaynebah’s father, and Nagah—have seen people investing in land and the building of houses for their offspring, rather than in livestock alone. The importance of an education has become more prominent, although this is certainly also a dynamic we find among several Walad Djifir within the camps. The extended family still plays an important role in motivations for decisions concerning the future, yet we also observe a subtle shift taking place—a shift which sees the individual and his/her children gaining a more central role.

While the world around the Walad Djifir continues to change—as will the future wishes, wants, and needs of Walad Djifir themselves—on a theoretical level, the *ferīkh* as central concept may well remain. The empirical reality of the *ferīkh* made it a logical departure point for researching this nomadic community. What I observed amongst the nomadic Walad Djifir was that their daily lives are extremely intertwined with the way they organize themselves within the *ferīkh* setting, whereby geographical and economic boundaries do not necessarily form constrictions. Throughout this dissertation, the *ferīkh* has, therefore, been conceptualised as a specific physical place embodying various networks which span time and geographical space. The theoretical basis for the *ferīkh* as concept is laid out in the introduction, with each subsequent chapter providing elements which contribute to a definition of the *ferīkh*. Approaching the *ferīkh* through a connectivity lens has allowed for the analytical inclusion of both these sedentary and mobile characteristics of the physical nomadic camp and its people.

This juxtaposition of sedentarity in mobility, and mobility in sedentarity is not unique to this specific group of pastoral nomads of central Chad, nor are the various other socio-political, economic, and historical elements which govern their daily lives. In this sense, the *ferīkh* as analytical concept may prove to be a useful tool of analysis for the description and understanding of other marginal communities where insecurities and crises seem to be anchored in the everyday. An everyday defined by the intricate relationship between mobility and stasis. Personally, ‘the *ferīkh*’ has helped me understand the lives of the Walad Djifir within our globalising world. It has provided a way to analyse how they weave this globalizing world into their own, revealing how certain aspects of their daily lives change, while others do not. Whichever changes or continuities take place, they are grounded in their connectivity (to the *ferīkh*).

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Appendix 1: Glossary of Chadian Arabic and French terms

Abāla: Those that rear camels

Ahaliéh: Alliances between communities

Ammar al-bir / *Kabīr al-bir*: The one that manages the pastoral well

Baha'īm: The herd (of cattle)

Baqqara: Cattle herders; lit. cattle

Barāda: A metal tea pot which is used to brew the tea as well as serve it.

Barsh: A nomadic tent. The roof used to be made of woven mats but has now often been replaced by a kind of very heavy tarp. The roof is supported by wooden sticks, carved into v-shapes at the top so as to hold another stick across them.

Bidon: Jerry-can

Bir: A well

Boule: Cooked like porridge and then rolled into a ball, this staple food can be accompanied by different sauces. In Chad boule is often made from sorghum, maize, millet, rice, cassava or peanuts, depending on which crop is in season locally.

Collecteur: In CAR, used to refer to those that go from mine to mine collecting diamonds to then sell them on to larger companies.

Dabanga: A granary

Damréh: A more or less permanent nomadic camp, or a village of pastoralists

Da'inéh: A grouping of several ferīkhs for displacement during the transhumance, mainly for security reasons

Darat: Typically between October and November, the time after the rainy season during which food crops mature and are harvested.

Delou: A tool used to extract water from a well, made of leather and able to hold eight, twenty, or thirty litres, depending on the animal or man pulling it up. The ones the Walad Djifir typically use by hand hold approximately twenty/thirty litres, as it usually only takes two ‘pulls’ to fill one jerry tank (40 litres).

Djallabeya: A long, loose-fitting piece of clothing.

Doungous: Used to refer to the territory of a *kashim beyt* (lineage and sub-lineage). In general use, it refers to old ancestral villages.

‘Eidd: An area or zone with many ground-water wells (a zone where ground water is easily reached)

Fakīr: An arabic word for a Sufi Muslim who has devoted himself to poverty and worship.

Ferīkh (pl. *furkhān*): Nomadic camp

Gaiysh: Pasture (herbaceous vegetation)

Goz: A fairly sandy terrain on which the penicillary millet (*doukhoun*) is cultivated.

Habīl: Rope

Kabīr hana ferīkh: Head of the nomadic camp (*kabīr ‘an al-ferīkh*)

Khalīfa: The administrative representative of a sultan, a chief of a canton, or of a nomadic tribe’s chief in a specific locality. Typically in charge of collecting and paying taxes in name of the tribe.

Kharīf: Rainy season, between July and September

Khashim beyt: A subdivision of a lineage within a tribe. A distinction can be made between the *khashim beyt kabīr* (larger lineage) and the *khashim beyt saghir* (smaller sub-lineage). (pl. *khashim buyūt*)

Kouzi: A round hut made of stone bricks and a straw roof, most often used by sedentary populations—and so it is interesting to see the nomadic Walad Djifir building such homes of their own in their permanent villages. These villages are characterised by both *kouzi*’s and traditional nomadic tents (*barsh*)

Makharaf (pl. *makhārif*): Place where pastoralists, sedentary and transhumant, stay during the rainy season.

Māl: The animals / herd.

Marabout: An arabic word for a teacher of Islam and at times a religious leader as well. One who has studied the Qur'ān.

Murhal (pl. *marāhil*): Transhumance corridor.

Naga: Typically, clayey and flat bare ground which is floodable. Once the rainy season starts, camps will be moved away from such terrain.

Qabīla: Tribe

al-Rūha: Pastoralism; lit. the travel

Rushāsh: The start of the rainy season, around the month of June

Seyf: The dry season

Shittéh: The cold season, between December and February

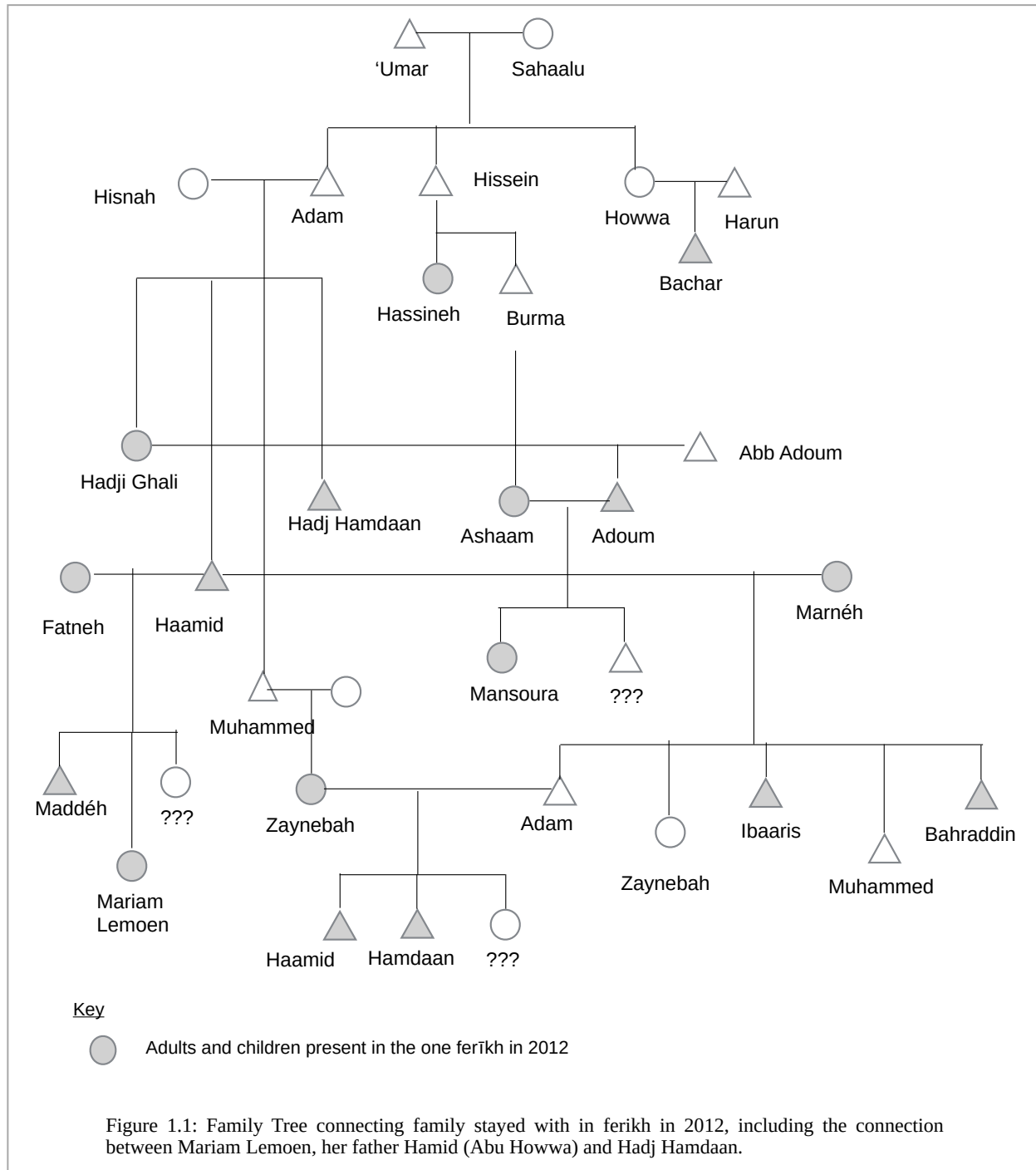
Sokhān: (*sokhaan* in text) The *sokhaan* can be found in every Chadian household. They are usually made of plastic and look like a kettle, having a handle and spout. They come in various colours, sizes, and qualities. The *sokhaan* is filled with water and used to wash one's hands before a meal, for Muslims to carry out their ablutions, and also to take with you to the 'bathroom'.

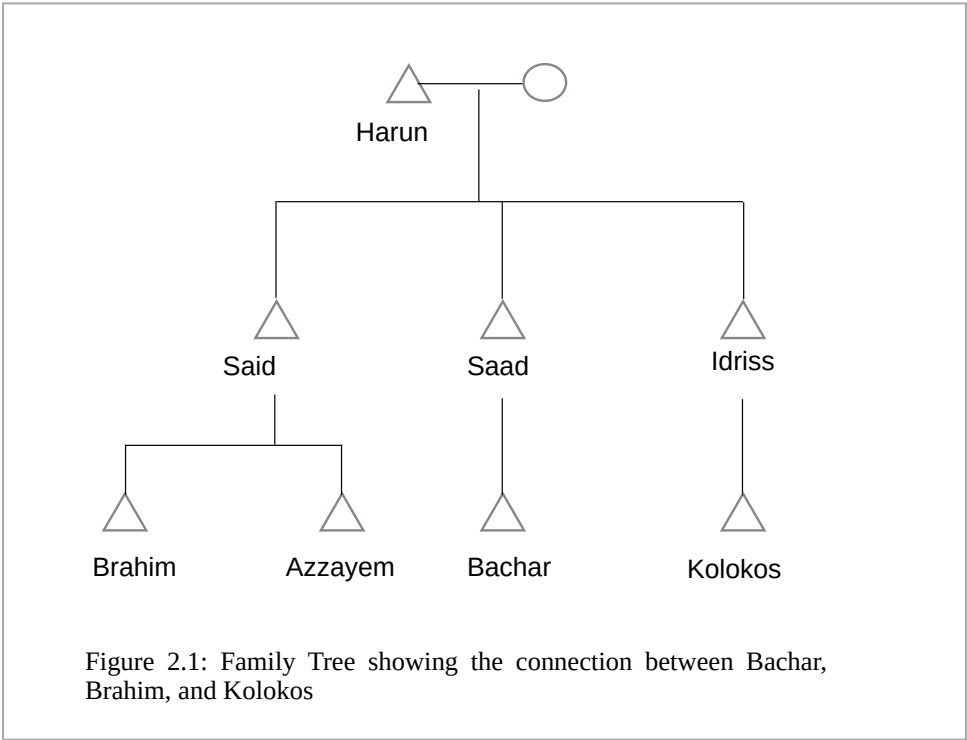
Wādi: dry river bed

Zerrība: Animal enclosure—in the case of the Walad Djifir, mostly for smaller animals such as sheep, goats and young calves—keeping them safe from predators at night. The *zerrība* is often found in the middle of a group of tents (a camp), with the tent openings facing outwards.

Appendix 2: Family Trees

The Family Trees below can also be found in the text.





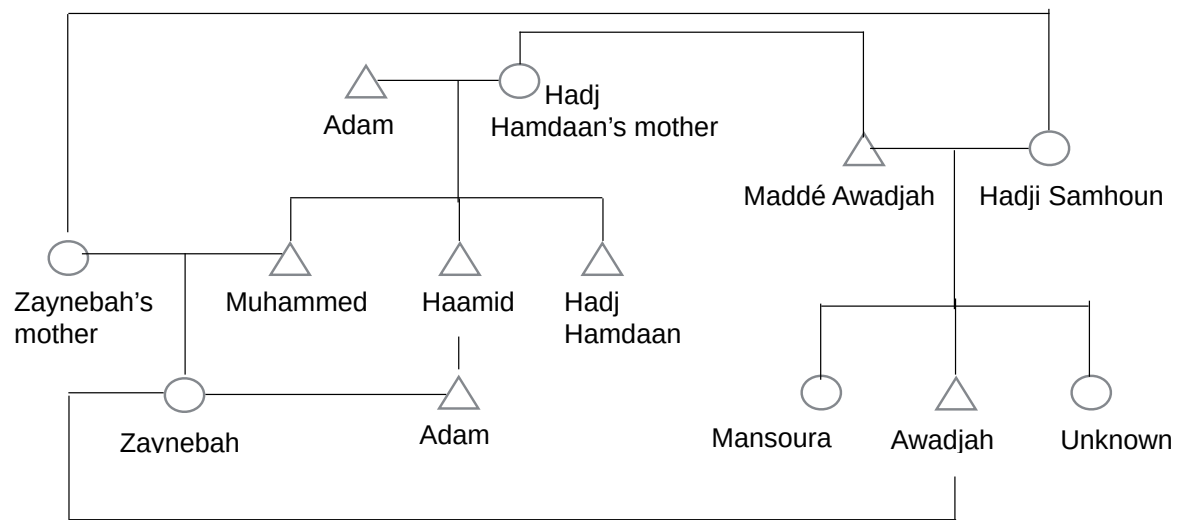
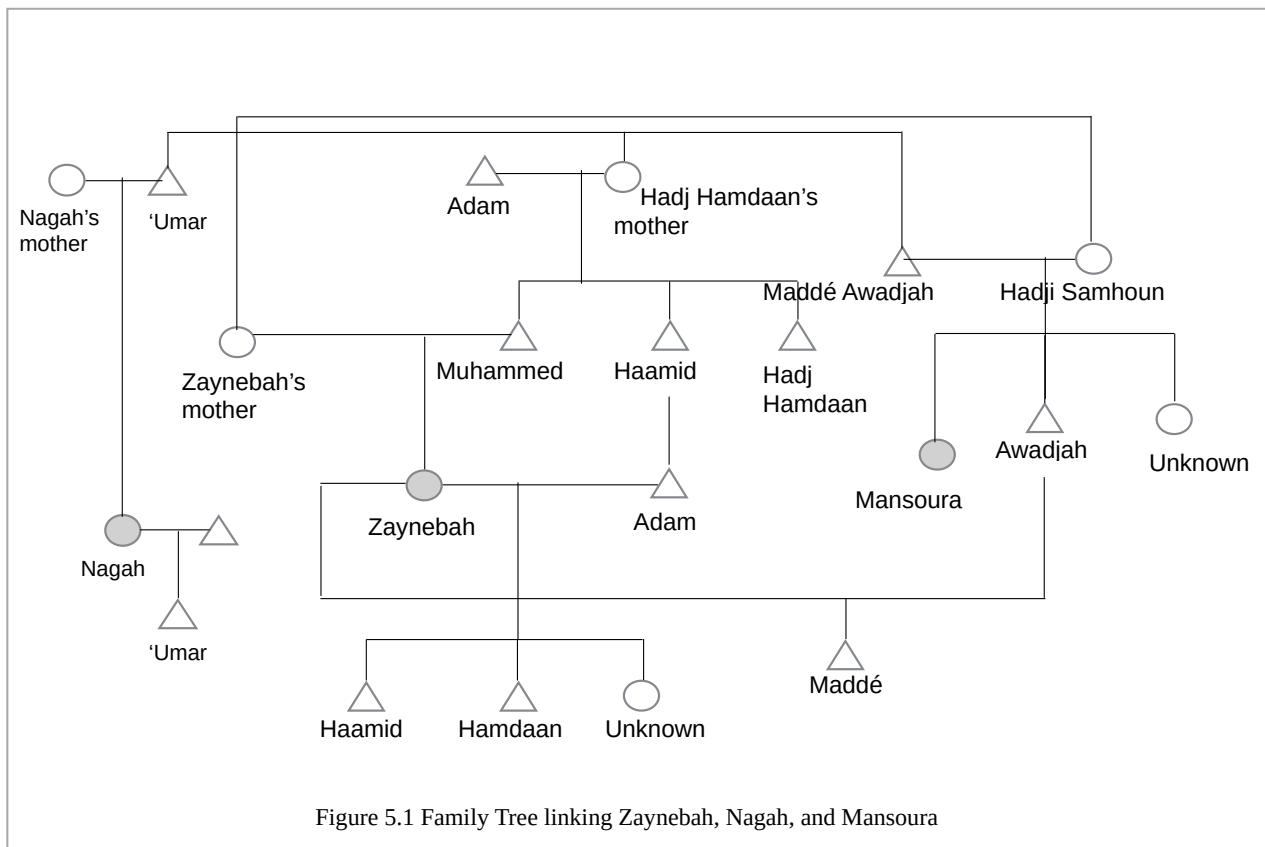


Figure 3.2: Family Tree of Hadj Hamdaan and Zaynebah's link to Hadj Awadjah



Appendix 3: Bangui Questionnaire

Questionnaire, Oct/Nov 2012, Bangui, RCA

1. Sexe: Homme ou Femme
2. Âge:
3. Lieu et pays de naissance:
4. Lieu de naissance de la mère:
5. Lieu de naissance du père:
6. Lieu de résidence à Bangui maintenant:
7. Année d'arrivée à Bangui:
8. Si vous n'êtes pas né ici, comment êtes-vous arrivés à Bangui, par quel moyen de transport et votre itinéraire (par quelles routes et villes)? Si vous-êtes né ici, répondre pour ton père et ta mère.
9. Quel temps vous a pris pour votre premier voyage?
10. Le coût du votre premier voyage (estimation)?
11. La raison de votre premier voyage en RCA, ou le raison de tes parents?
12. Vous (ou tes parents) connaissez qui à Bangui avant votre arrivée, et comment vous connaissez c'est personne?
13. À le premier arrivée avez-vous, ou tes parents, été chez lui pour vous aider?
14. Comment vous avez trouvé l'accueil ou bien votre premier lieu de résidence?
15. Comment vous avez trouvé votre premier travail? Si vous ne travaillez pas, expliquez.
16. Quel travail? Ou bien, quelles études?
17. Quelles sont les raisons qui vous empêchent de rentrer au Tchad?
18. Qu'est-ce qui vous occupe actuellement en RCA?
19. Est-ce que vous avez obtenu l'identité centrafricaine et si oui depuis quand?
20. Avez-vous visité votre famille au Tchad, si oui combien de fois et dans quelles années?
- 21.

22. Vous-avez faire le(s) visite(s) par quel moyen du transport et c'est quoi votre itinéraire (par quelles routes et villes)?
23. Quel temps vous a pris pour cette voyage(s)?
24. Le coût du cette voyage(s)?
25. Comment tu communique avec ta famille du Tchad?
26. Combien de fois, et de quoi vous parlez?
27. Combien vous coûte la communication avec votre famille du Tchad par mois?
28. Comment vous communiquez avant l'utilisation du téléphone portable ?
29. Est-ce que vous recevez des visites du Tchad? Si oui, qui ?
30. Voudrais-tu rentrer au Tchad? Pourquoi oui/non?
31. Si oui dans quel village ou ville iras-tu?
32. Quel travail feras-tu au Tchad?
33. Quels souvenirs (bien ou mauvais) gardez-vous de votre séjour en RCA?
34. Pour quoi ces souvenirs restent dans votre mémoire?

SUMMARY

Setting the scene

Travel and communicating over distances is an integral part of the livelihood of the Walad Djifir, a sub-tribe of the Chadian Misseria Rouges. There is a certain pride in the air when members who have travelled far and wide return home to their families and terrain—a pride that is closely linked to belonging to this terrain, their ‘wilderness’.³⁹¹ While walking or driving through the country, people often point out specific trees and *wadis*, recounting memories experienced in those spots. When heading out to visit family in a new location, the landscape’s features act as guides while the sun’s position points out a general direction. Specifically shaped trees or boulders become distinct road signs. To know the land is something every Walad Djifir is taught from a young age. When children get lost, having roamed too far with their goats or camels, an audible sigh of relief can be heard throughout the camps when the child is found. Knowing the land and relaying news from one person to another are features which contribute to successful travelling.

There are various reasons why the Walad Djifir travel. The first and foremost is the daily necessity to water and feed their animals, an activity that involves almost all members of the *ferikh* (nomadic camp), excepting the elderly, mothers with household tasks, and very young children. Women often make twice-daily trips to the ‘*eidd* (location of watering holes and wells) to collect enough water for their household to wash and cook, while the men mainly travel between the ‘*eidd*, their field, and their *ferikh*. It is primarily the younger children, girls and boys, who spend time out with the goats, sheep, cattle, and camels during the day. Younger adult men will spend the night with them and the cattle *en brousse* when necessary. Depending on the season and availability of feeding, the smaller animals (goats and sheep) return to the *ferikh* toward late afternoon, together with their young herders. As camels need a lot of space to keep, they may stay away from the camps for up to a week at a time, returning for a night or two before leaving again.

People also spend time visiting each other, for special occasions and simple social visits. Women help each other out when preparing for a wedding and will leave their household a few days before the ceremony in order to allow for travel and preparation time. Going out to offer condolences is very important and never too late. In cases of sickness, people will be visited or, when deemed

³⁹¹ The Walad Djifir themselves refer to the land on which animals graze as *al-khalla*. This same word is also used when one needs to go to the bathroom. French speakers would say *la brousse*. The use of the term ‘wilderness’ will be discussed in more detail in the Introduction. The combination of ‘their’ and ‘wilderness’ used here suggests a factor of control or ownership over the land. So yes, there is an aspect of the unknown and wild but not necessarily chaotic—people understand and know the land or terrain they and their herds live in.

necessary, transported to a clinic or hospital. When a baby is born, women will go to see the new mother and child in her *ferīkh* while the men gather to hold a naming ceremony a week later.

Travels between these semi-permanent *ferīkhs* and villages are carried out in a variety of ways. Short distances are frequently undertaken on foot, at a fairly fast pace. Women and children often travel on the back of a donkey; men prefer horses, although not every man has one at his disposal. Several distances can be covered using the existing road network; people often start out on foot until a ride can be hitched. On market days, one can be sure of a higher frequency of mini-vans, pickup trucks, and motor-taxis. Some have deals with motor-taxis in neighbouring villages, making an appointment by phone to be collected along the road.

On occasion, people may leave their family and friends for days or weeks on end, travelling to visit a distant *ferīkh*, in search of work in a larger city or town, or for commercial purposes. Several members have family abroad: in Nigeria as livestock merchants, travelling to and fro; in Libya as temporary labour migrants; and as merchants in the Central African Republic (CAR), often on a more permanent and second-generation basis.

The approach

Travel (and movement in general) takes many forms. Apart from the more literal reasons for these varieties of mobility, this ethnography is interested in the nature of the connections which cause people to move and interact. How do these different connections help to form the way lives are lived? What keeps families ‘together’, for example, if such keeping together even occurs? Evolving communication technologies certainly play a role but need to be understood within existing socio-economic frameworks. This ethnography is ultimately a story of the different ways in which mobility, connectivity, and belonging manifest themselves. It illustrates the necessities and values that create belonging in a post-modern and continuously insecure world, through the narratives of a sub-tribe of semi-sedentary nomads, identifying themselves as Walad Djifir of Central Chad.

The Introduction describes how I approach the region in which the Walad Djifir live: as one constructed by an historical process of interactions and made up of different yet overlapping ‘puzzle’ pieces—ecology, infrastructure, trade networks, conflicts, people, news, and ideas—which are not limited by national borders and which ultimately interact with those being researched. This research looks at practices found among the Chadian Walad Djifir within such an interconnected context by describing the ways life in the nomadic camp (*ferīkh*) link up to these larger (inter)national and regional dynamics. It examines the contemporary situations of several extended family members of the Walad Djifir, in terms of their being part of a larger system of mobility (and stasis) within the region. Through focusing on ‘connectors’ and daily life ‘negotiations’, I look at the internalization of the *ferīkh* in the lives of individuals. What place does it hold in these entangled and connected regional dynamics, and what is the resulting impact on people’s lives?

The nature of the way the field developed, and I in it, meant that my focus soon became on the ‘everyday’,³⁹² allowing for things to surface that people themselves found important. Ironically, this ended up including insecurities, moments of discord, frustration, and sadness—often created by familial expectations and obligations, and in part related to gender and age-based hierarchies, combined with Islamic custom. This led me to question the role of the more ‘mundane’ daily happenings—choices, decisions, moments—in relation to experiences of insecurity or disruption.

Conflict studies seem usually to set out from a logic premised around conflict and insecurity. Existing nomadic studies, in turn, place much emphasis on structure. This ethnography proposes a connectivity approach as an alternative means with which to look at networks (Strathern 1996) and the social, in relation to nomadic society and within a context of insecurity/conflict and connectivity (the wilderness). It suggests a focus on the socio-political and socio-economic characteristics surrounding connections in a globalizing world.

At the same time, by approaching this nomadic group thorough the variety of ways in which their daily lives in the nomadic camp are linked (connected) to the world outside of their camp, this ethnography departs from nomadic studies that focus on the more classical aspects of pastoral-nomadic life (e.g. livestock issues such as diseases; market dynamics; public health; ecological issues such as drought and scarcity; access to resources; sedentary–nomadic conflicts; sedentarization, whether forced or not; marginalization in relation to the state). Instead, it seeks to contribute to a ‘nomadology’ (Fischer & Kohl 2010) which looks at the interconnectedness of these aspects, including dynamics which are no longer either ‘typically’ sedentary or nomadic and are bound neither geographically nor economically. This ethnography thus situates the Walad Djifir in their contemporary world, a world which sees people coming in contact with new technologies and moving in and out of the physical nomadic setting. It does touch upon various aspects of nomadic life—cattle, socio-political organization, mobility—yet it includes such dynamics as remittances (and the infrastructures involved) and family and belonging in times of crisis. These are, of course, phenomena which can be found in most societies. Here, however, they are brought together and analysed through a connectivity lens.

Within the approach sketched in the foregoing, this ethnography questions how Walad Djifir interact with various places and spaces. What role do space and place play in keeping the larger group or family together? To examine such lines of questioning, we look at what aspects of the social fabric are important. In the process, we touch upon debates in contemporary anthropology related to agency and structure and also very much to the more recent discourses on ‘connections’ and ‘connectivity’. The key here seems to lie in the structuring role of all that the *ferīkh* embodies—including external factors—combined with the agency of individuals and external events themselves. The main question this ethnography poses is whether, within a context of social relating over distance and insecurity, the *ferīkh* continues to play a role in organizing ‘life choices’. A focus on connections and connectivity thus explores whether, in 21st-century Chad, that which the *ferīkh*

³⁹² This methodological focus on ‘daily life’, one coupled with a method of participant observation, involved long walks with Bachar and other Walad Djifir, conversations in the heat of the day under a shady tree or over dinner in the evening. Open-ended interviews brought forth context, both historical and contemporary, based on the memories of informants and their present-day experiences (see Both 2017 on using memory as a method of exploring ‘the past in the present’; see also Chapter 1).

embodies continues to provide a form of groundedness for Walad Djifir moving out of and back into the *ferikh*. In doing so, I approach the *ferikh* as a physical place as well as a social and material network.

Throughout this ethnography, visuals are presented in two ways: as a way to illustrate that which is described in words, and as a way of telling a complementary story. The written narrative is an intersubjective interpretation of a mix of senses. Photographs embody a certain subjectivity in terms of what is or is not portrayed. This process of interpreting both the visible and non-visible is a means through which to approach the understanding and positioning of Walad Djifir daily life, within the existing dominant visual imagery emerging from Chad and the wider region.

The results

On a micro-scale, the dynamics we find in 21st-century Chad—a country and region with a long history of political turmoil and ecological insecurity—can be observed and understood through this specific community of semi-sedentary pastoral nomads, for whom mobility and insecurity are intrinsic. The various networks we see family members using in their daily lives are grounded within the extended family—in their expectations and beliefs, in their way of life. This ‘way of life’ is ultimately and inextricably linked to the *ferikh*, both as a physical nomadic camp where people live and as the family unit. Understanding this reality shines light on a piece of the puzzle that is modern-day Chad.

This ethnography begins by explaining how it borrows from studies on pastoralism/nomadism, insecurity/crisis, mobility, and connectivity (see Introduction, and described in part in ‘The approach’ section above). It then goes on to situate the research field, its informants, and the researcher herself in terms of their intersubjective positionalities. The next four chapters are each centred around a different ‘connector’, mediating the connectivity and interactions of Walad Djifir with a post-globalization world. Everyday observations and conversations allowed for these four connectors to surface: Leaders, Livestock, Remittances, and Family. Each connector carries ‘within’ it specific logics and reasonings which inform the (re)actions and decisions of Walad Djifir.

Chapter 2 takes local leaders as its central ‘connector’, allowing for the local negotiations and decisions surrounding land ownership and familial strife to surface. Negotiations imply a certain agency, and the type of interaction, relationship, or context defines the frameworks within which negotiations take place. Such a focus gives an idea of the socio-political structure of the semi-sedentary Walad Djifir and the frameworks in which people act and react. In dealing with such issues as leadership-strife, land ownership, and the forming or strengthening of allegiances, members of the *ferikh* are faced with remnants of regional and national administrative changes under the French, and with the more contemporary dynamics linked to Chad’s system of governance. These include the coming into question of ‘traditional’ leaders’ positions and the growing importance of literacy in Arabic and French and in the rules of governance (i.e. civil rights and ways to ensure them). The normative narratives which surfaced on what is good for the community highlight the ways decisions and actions are framed by dynamics of fission and fusion. This fission and fusion is characterized by the alternative splitting or coming together at various

levels of social organization, depending on the position and need of the individual, family, and tribal unit. It is this fission and fusion which reflect a continuity amidst change, a flexibility while falling back on older ‘ways of doing’—a form of groundedness, if you will. In this sense, the *ferīkh* functions as a framework of reference toward which (1) people justify their actions, however unambiguous and inconsistent they appear to be; and (2) ground these actions toward general regional tendencies in a very local way.

Chapter 3 focuses on livestock as a connector, embodying within it values and norms vis-à-vis more general economic developments, political and ecological insecurity, and local, national and regional mobility. Case studies explore tendencies toward the commodification of livestock and the search for alternative forms of income. A certain ‘nomadic’ flexibility was found in the logics surrounding such economic activities, linked to an individual desire and need to protect and grow individual and collective wealth so as to ensure the future of any children there may be. There is thus a certain continuation of a ‘nomadic way’ of doing things, linked to an albeit more personal wealth—in livestock, land, social networks—mobility, and flexibility vis-à-vis economic diversification.

Chapter 4 looks at the local and non-local dynamics surrounding the sending of money (remittances), as a means to explore the way such global technological developments are appropriated by the Walad Djifir. ‘Following the money’ revealed the various patterns, reasons, and nature of Walad Djifir mobility and their links to differing layers of insecurity. One such layer of insecurity took the shape of regional political violence, such as in Libya and CAR, though with differing effects in terms of push and pull factors for migrating there: Libya became popular due to high demand for herders and guards, while CAR saw most Walad Djifir leave. A second layer of insecurity was informed by local dynamics of road robbers intercepting money, money being lost on its way through the transfer chain—whether through the hands of a merchant or official money transfer operator—the need for some form of identification (and lacking any) when using official channels, and a general illiteracy toward these official channels. Another layer of insecurity, almost intrinsic to the second, involved the mistrust of certain networks through which to send money. It is this mistrust—apart from the mere practicality of whatever networks exist in their proximity—that I found determines the decisions that the Walad Djifir make when choosing how to send money. It is also precisely this mistrust which grounds them in a world of fast-developing technologies, by providing them with a tool for appropriating such changes (thus acting as ‘a framework that works’). A nature of connectivity, informed by ‘mistrust’ and coupled with practicality, thus shows the continuing importance of familial networks when it comes to the digital transfer of money.

Chapter 5 uses a focus on family as connector, to understand the dynamics of coping with disruption following the violent aftermath of the 2013 coup in CAR. It compares the stories of three women (second- and third-generation Walad Djifir born and raised in urban Bangui), showing how family and a sense of belonging ground them within such a disruptive context—belonging to a family, but also to two nations at the same time (CAR and Chad). Intermixed with this, the chapter posits that the flexibility of dealing with existing gender dynamics and hierarchies is influenced by financial independence. Family, not only in the form of obligations and expectations but also in

relation to the need/will to provide for them, is seen as presenting two sides of the same coin—both limiting (constraining) and liberating (agency) the three women whose case studies are presented.

In summary, the nature of connectivity (fission and fusion, flexibility, mistrust, constrained agency) embodied in each connector structures daily life choices. It is these frameworks that surface when individuals are faced with moments of mundane and extraordinary change. Together, the different connectors and the logics they embody all reveal a different aspect of the *ferīkh* as framework of reference—a groundedness amidst change. This groundedness, however, is not characterized by unanimity; instead, it is relative and adaptable—varying per personality, per situation, and per connector. Nevertheless, it does act as a frame of reference for the making of decisions.

Returning briefly to the notion of travel and movement in general, all Walad Djifir—those remaining in their nomadic camps, those working in urban centres within the country, and those living a different life in other countries—seem to, at one point or another, alternatively deal with moments of mundane and extraordinary change. This ethnography has explored the ‘everyday’ nature of this change, through a focus on connectivity and belonging, revealing very local ways of dealing with larger post-globalization dynamics.

SAMENVATTING

Setting the scene

Reizen en communiceren over afstanden is een integraal onderdeel van de liveliheid van de Walad Djifir, een sub-stam van de Tsjadeese Missera Rouges. Er heerst een zekere trots als leden terugkeren naar hun familie en terrein, een trots dat nauw verbonden is met het gevoel van behoren tot (belonging) bij het terrein, hun 'wilderness'. Tijdens het lopen of rijden door het landschap wijzen mensen vaak specifieke bomen en *wadis* aan, terugblikkend op dingen die op die plekken zijn gebeurd. Op bezoek gaand bij familie in een nieuwe lokatie fungeren de eigenschappen van het landschap als gids, terwijl de positie van de zon de algemene richting aangeeft. Specifiek gevormde bomen en rotsen zijn als verkeersborden, "hier rechts af". Elke Walad Djifir wordt vanaf een jonge leeftijd geleerd om het land te kennen. Als kinderen kwijt raken doordat ze te ver af zijn gedwaald met de geiten of kamelen, worden er grote zoektochten opgezet en klinkt er een brede zucht van opluchting door de kampen als het kind eenmaal weer (levend) gevonden is. Het land kennen en het verspreiden van nieuws van persoon naar persoon zijn allemaal eigenschappen die bijdragen aan succesvol reizen.

Er zijn verschillende redenen waarom de Walad Djifir reizen. De eerste en belangrijkste is de dagelijkse noodzaak om hun dieren water te geven en te voeden, een activiteit waarbij bijna alle leden van de *ferīkh* (nomadisch kamp) zijn betrokken, behalve ouderen, moeders met huishoudelijke taken en zeer jonge kinderen. Vrouwen maken vaak tweemaal daags uitstapjes naar de '*eidd* (daar waar de dieren te drinken krijgen uit grondwater putten) om genoeg water te verzamelen voor hun huishouden om zich te wassen en te koken, terwijl de mannen voornamelijk reizen tussen de '*eidd*, hun veld en hun *ferīkh*. Het zijn vooral de jongere kinderen, meisjes en jongens, die overdag tijd doorbrengen met de geiten, schapen, runderen en kamelen. Jongere volwassen mannen zullen, indien nodig, de kinderen vergezellen als ze de nacht met het vee *en brousse* doorbrengen. Afhankelijk van het seizoen en de beschikbaarheid van voeding, keren de kleinere dieren (geiten en schapen) terug naar de *ferīkh* tegen het einde van de middag, samen met hun jonge herders. Omdat kamelen veel ruimte nodig hebben, blijven ze soms een week achter elkaar weg van de kampen, om voor een nacht of twee terug te keren voordat ze weer vertrekken.

Mensen brengen ook tijd door met bezoeken aan elkaar, voor speciale gelegenheden of gewoon zomaar. Vrouwen helpen elkaar bij het voorbereiden van een bruiloft en gaan vaak een paar dagen voor de ceremonie op pad zodat er genoeg tijd is om alles op orde te maken, en voor de reis zelf. Condoleren is heel belangrijk en nooit te laat. In geval van ziekte worden mensen bezocht of, indien nodig geacht, naar een kliniek of ziekenhuis vervoerd. Wanneer een baby wordt geboren, zullen

vrouwen de nieuwe moeder en het kind in haar *ferīkh* komen opzoeken, terwijl de mannen een week later bijeenkomen om een naamgevingsceremonie te houden.

Reizen tussen deze semi-permanente *ferīkh*'s en dorpen worden op verschillende manieren uitgevoerd. Korte afstanden worden vaak te voet gedaan, in een redelijk snel tempo. Vrouwen en kinderen reizen meestal op de rug van een ezel; mannen geven de voorkeur aan paarden, hoewel niet elke man er één tot zijn beschikking heeft. Een aantal afstanden kunnen worden afgelegd met behulp van het bestaande wegennet; mensen beginnen vaak te voet totdat een rit kan worden gevonden. Op marktdagen kan men zeker zijn van een hogere frequentie van minibusjes, pick-ups en motor-taxi's. Sommigen hebben afspraken met motor-taxi's in naburige dorpen, een telefoontje volstaat om een ophaalpunt langs de weg af te spreken.

Zo af en toe verlaten mensen hun familie en vrienden voor dagen of weken achtereen—om familie in een verre *ferīkh* te bezoeken, op zoek naar werk in een grotere stad of dorp, of voor commerciële doeleinden. Verschillende leden hebben familie in het buitenland: in Nigeria als veehandelaren die heen en weer reizen; in Libië als tijdelijke arbeidsmigranten; en als handelaars in de Centraal-Afrikaanse Republiek (CAR), vaak op een meer permanente en tweede generatie basis.

De aanpak

Reizen en beweging in het algemeen nemen vele vormen aan. Afgezien van de meer letterlijke redenen voor deze variaties van mobiliteit, is deze etnografie geïnteresseerd in de aard van de verbindingen (connections) die ervoor zorgen dat mensen bewegen en communiceren. Hoe dragen deze verschillende verbindingen bij aan de manier waarop levens worden geleefd? Evoluerende communicatietechnologieën spelen zeker een rol, maar moeten worden begrepen binnen bestaande sociaal-economische kaders. Deze etnografie is uiteindelijk een verhaal over de verschillende manieren waarop mobiliteit, connectiviteit en verbondenheid (belonging) zich manifesteren onder een substam van semi-sedentaire nomaden, die zichzelf identificeren als Walad Djifir van Centraal-Tsjaad. Hun verhalen illustreren hoe bepaalde normen, waarden en noodzakelijkheden een gevoel van belonging creëren in een postmoderne en continu onzekere wereld.

De Inleiding beschrijft hoe ik de regio waarin de Walad Djifir leven, benader als één die tot stand is gekomen door een historisch proces van interacties en die opgemaakt is uit verschillende maar overlappende elementen, of 'puzzelstukken'—ecologie, infrastructuur, handelsnetwerken, conflicten, mensen, nieuws en ideeën—die niet worden beperkt door nationale grenzen en die uiteindelijk een wisselwerking hebben met de onderzochten. Dit onderzoek kijkt naar de handelingen van de Walad Djifir in zo'n context van interverbondenheid, door de manieren te beschrijven waarop het leven in het nomadische kamp (*ferīkh*) verbonden is met een bredere (inter)nationale en regionale dynamiek. Het bekijkt de hedendaagse situaties van verschillende familieleden en hoe zij onderdeel zijn van een groter systeem van mobiliteit (en stasis) binnen de regio. Door me te concentreren op 'connectoren' en dagelijkse 'onderhandelingen', kijk ik naar de internalisering van de *ferīkh* in het leven van individuen. Welke plaats heeft het in de met elkaar verweven regionale dynamieken, en wat is de daaruit voortvloeiende invloed op het leven van mensen?

De manier waarop het veld zich ontwikkelde, en ik erin, betekende dat mijn focus snel op het ‘alledaagse’ kwam en de dingen die mensen zelf belangrijk vonden naar boven kwamen. Ik was niet persé op zoek naar onzekerheden of momenten van onenigheid, frustratie en verdriet. Ironisch genoeg kwamen deze wel naar voren, vaak gecreëerd door familiale verwachtingen en verplichtingen, en deels gerelateerd aan geslacht en leeftijd-gebaseerde hiërarchieën, gecombineerd met islamitische gewoonten. Dit bracht me ertoe om de rol van de meer ‘mondaine’ (mundane) dagelijkse gebeurtenissen—keuzes, beslissingen, momenten—in relatie tot ervaringen van onveiligheid (insecurity) of verstoring (disruption) te bevragen.

Conflictstudies lijken meestal uit te gaan van een logica gebaseerd op conflict en onveiligheid. Bestaande nomadische studies leggen op hun beurt veel nadruk op structuur. Deze etnografie stelt een connectiviteitsbenadering (connectivity approach) voor als een alternatieve manier om te kijken naar netwerken (Strathern 1996) en het sociale, in relatie tot de nomadische samenleving en in een context van onveiligheid/conflict, en connectiviteit (de wildernis). Het suggereert een focus op de sociaal-politieke en sociaal-economische kenmerken rondom verbindingen (connections) in een globaliserende wereld.

Deze etnografie richt zich op de verschillende manieren waarop het dagelijks leven in het nomadisch kamp verbonden is met de wereld buiten het kamp. Hiermee wijkt deze studie af van andere nomaden etnografieën die zich vaak op de meer klassieke aspecten van het pastoraal-nomaden leven richten, (bv. zaken gerelateerd aan het vee zoals veeziektes en marktdynamieken; volksgezondheid; ecologische kwesties zoals droogte en schaarste; toegang tot hulpbronnen; sedentaire-nomadische conflicten; sedentarialisatie, al dan niet gedwongen; marginalisatie in relatie tot de staat). In plaats daarvan probeert deze studie bij te dragen aan een ‘nomadologie’ (Fischer & Kohl 2010) die kijkt naar de onderlinge verbondenheid van deze aspecten, inclusief dynamieken die niet langer ‘typisch’ sedentaire of nomadisch zijn, en niet geografisch noch economisch gebonden zijn. Deze etnografie plaatst de Walad Djifir dus in hun hedendaagse wereld, een wereld waarin mensen in contact komen met nieuwe technologieën en zich bewegen in en uit de fysieke nomadische setting. Het raakt natuurlijk aan verschillende aspecten van het nomadische leven—vee, sociaal-politieke organisatie, mobiliteit—maar beschrijft vooral ook dynamieken zoals die rondom het versturen van geld en de betrokken infrastructuren, en familie en verbondenheid in tijden van crisis. Dit zijn natuurlijk fenomenen die in de meeste samenlevingen te vinden zijn. Hier worden ze echter samengebracht en geanalyseerd via een connectiviteits-lens.

Binnen de hierboven geschetste benadering bevraagt deze etnografie hoe Walad Djifir met verschillende plaatsen (place) en ruimtes (space) omgaan. Welke rol spelen ruimte en plaats om de grotere groep of familie bij elkaar te houden? Om dergelijke lijnen van vragen te onderzoeken, kijken we naar welke aspecten van het sociale weefsel belangrijk zijn. Onbedoeld raken we debatten in de hedendaagse antropologie met betrekking tot agency en structuur, en vooral de meer recente verhandelingen over ‘connecties’ en ‘connectivity’. De sleutel lijkt hier te liggen in de structurerende rol van alles wat de ferīkh belichaamt—inclusief externe factoren, gecombineerd met de keuzevrijheid (agency) van individuen en externe gebeurtenissen zelf. De belangrijkste vraag die deze etnografie stelt, is of de ferīkh, in een context van sociale relaties over afstand en onzekerheid,

een rol blijft spelen bij het organiseren van ‘levenskeuzes’. Een focus op verbindingen en connectiviteit onderzoekt dus of—in dit Tsjaad uit de 21ste eeuw—datgene wat de ferīkh belichaamt, een vorm van geaardheid (groundedness) blijft bieden voor Walad Djifir die uit de ferīkh weggaan en weer terugkeren. Daarbij benader ik de ferīkh als een fysieke plaats, en als een sociaal en materieel netwerk.

In deze etnografie word beeldmateriaal op twee manieren gepresenteerd: als een manier om datgene te illustreren dat in woorden wordt beschreven, en als een manier om een complementair verhaal te vertellen. Het geschreven verhaal is een intersubjectieve interpretatie van een mix van zintuigen. Foto’s belichamen een zekere subjectiviteit in termen van wat wel of niet wordt afgebeeld. Dit proces van interpretatie, van zowel het zichtbare als het niet-zichtbare, is een middel om het begrip en de positionering van het dagelijkse leven van Walad Djifir te benaderen, binnen de bestaande dominante visuele beelden die uit Tsjaad en de wijde regio komen.

De resultaten

Op microschaal kan de dynamiek die we in de 21e eeuw Tsjaad vinden—een land en regio met een lange geschiedenis van politieke onrust en ecologische onzekerheid—worden geobserveerd en geïnterpreteerd aan de hand van deze specifieke gemeenschap van semi-sedentaire pastorale nomaden voor wie mobiliteit en onveiligheid een intrinsiek deel van hun levens zijn. De verschillende netwerken die we familieleden in hun dagelijks leven zien gebruiken, zijn geaard/gegrond(?) (grounded) in het gezin (extended family)—in hun verwachtingen en overtuigingen, en in hun manier van leven. Deze ‘manier van leven’ is uiteindelijk en onlosmakelijk verbonden met de ferīkh, zowel als een fysiek nomadisch kamp waar mensen wonen als als de familie-eenheid. Het begrijpen van deze realiteit geeft inzicht in een stukje van de puzzel dat het hedendaagse Tsjaad is.

Deze etnografie begint met uit te leggen hoe het voortkomt uit studies over pastoralisme/nomadisme, onveiligheid/crisis, mobiliteit en connectiviteit (zie Inleiding en gedeeltelijk beschreven in het gedeelte ‘De aanpak’ hierboven). Vervolgens plaatst het het onderzoeksveld, zijn informanten en de onderzoeker zelf in termen van hun intersubjectieve positionaliteit. De volgende vier hoofdstukken zijn elk gecentreerd rond een andere ‘connector’. Deze connectoren hebben een bemiddelingsrol in de connectiviteit en interacties van Walad Djifir met de post-globaliserings wereld. Dankzij dagelijkse observaties en gesprekken konden deze vier connectoren naar boven komen: leiders, vee, overmakingen en familie. Elke connector belichaamt specifieke logica en redeneringen die de (re)acties en beslissingen van Walad Djifir beïnvloeden.

Hoofdstuk 2 neemt lokale leiders als centrale ‘connector’, waardoor de lokale onderhandelingen en beslissingen rond landeigendom en familiale strijd naar boven komen. Onderhandelingen impliceren een bepaald agency, en het type interactie, relatie of context bepaalt de kaders waarbinnen onderhandelingen plaatsvinden. Zo’n focus geeft een idee van de sociaal-politieke structuur van de semi-sedentaire Walad Djifir en de kaders waarin mensen handelen en reageren. Bij het omgaan met kwesties als leiderschapsstrijd, landeigendom en het vormen of versterken van trouw, worden leden van de ferīkh geconfronteerd met overblijfselen van regionale en nationale bestuurlijke veranderingen onder de Fransen, en met de meer eigentijdse dynamiek gekoppeld aan

het Tsjaadeese systeem van bestuur (governance). Deze omvatten het ter discussie stellen van de ‘traditionele’ leidersposities, en het groeiende belang van geletterdheid zowel in het Arabisch en Frans, als geletterdheid wat de regels van bestuur betreft (d.w.z. burgerrechten en manieren om deze te waarborgen). De normatieve verhalen die bovenkwamen over wat goed is voor de gemeenschap, benadrukken de manier waarop beslissingen en acties worden omlijst door een dynamiek van splijting (fission) en fusie (fusion). Deze ‘fission and fusion’ wordt gekenmerkt door het alternatief splitsen of samenkomen op verschillende niveaus van sociale organisatie, afhankelijk van de positie en behoefte van het individu, gezin en tribale eenheid. Het is deze fission and fusion die een continuïteit temidden van verandering weerspiegelt, een flexibiliteit die terugvalt op oudere ‘manieren van doen’ - een vorm van gronden, als je wilt. In deze zin functioneert de *ferikh* als een referentiekader waarnaar (1) mensen hun acties rechtvaardigen, hoe ondubbelzinnig en inconsistent ze ook lijken te zijn, en waardoor (2) de reacties op algemene regionale tendensen op een lokale manier worden geuit en ‘aarden’.

Hoofdstuk 3 richt zich op vee als verbindingselement (connector). In zijn rol als connector, belichaamt vee waarden en normen ten opzichte van meer algemene economische ontwikkelingen, politieke en ecologische onveiligheid en lokale, nationale en regionale mobiliteit. De case studies onderzoeken tendensen in de richting van de commodificatie van vee, en de zoektocht naar alternatieve vormen van inkomsten. Een zekere ‘nomadische’ flexibiliteit werd gevonden in de logica rond dergelijke economische activiteiten, gekoppeld aan een individuele wens en behoefte om individuele en collectieve rijkdom te beschermen en te laten groeien om de toekomst van kinderen te verzekeren. Er is dus een zekere voortzetting van een ‘nomadische manier’ om dingen te doen, gekoppeld aan een weliswaar meer persoonlijke rijkdom—in vee, land, sociale netwerken—mobiliteit en flexibiliteit ten opzichte van economische diversificatie.

Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt de lokale en niet-lokale dynamiek rond het verzenden van geld (remittances) als een middel om te onderzoeken hoe dergelijke globale technologische ontwikkelingen door Walad Djifir worden toegeëigend. ‘Het geld volgen’ onthulde de verschillende patronen, redenen en aard van de mobiliteit van Walad Djifir en hun banden met verschillende lagen van onveiligheid. Eén van die lagen van onveiligheid nam de vorm aan van regionaal politiek geweld, zoals in Libië en CAR, hoewel met verschillende effecten in termen van push- en pull-factoren voor migratie. Libië werd populair vanwege de grote vraag naar herders en bewakers, terwijl CAR de meeste Walad Djifir (soms tijdelijk) zag vertrekken. Een tweede laag van onveiligheid werd geïnformeerd door de lokale dynamiek van wegrovers die geld onderschepten, geld dat onderweg door de overdrachtsketen verloren ging—hetzij door de handen van een handelaar of een officiële exploitant van geldoverdrachten—de noodzaak van een vorm van nationale identificatie (en vooral het ontbreken daarvan) bij het gebruik van officiële kanalen, en een algemeen analfabetisme ten aanzien van deze officiële kanalen. Een andere laag van onveiligheid, bijna inherent aan de tweede, betrof het wantrouwen (mistrust) van bepaalde netwerken om geld te verzenden. Het is dit wantrouwen—afgezien van de praktische bruikbaarheid van welke netwerken er in de buurt zijn—die een grote rol speelt in welke beslissingen Walad Djifir maken ten opzichte van het versturen van geld. Het is ook precies dit wantrouwen dat hen in een

wereld van snel ontwikkelende technologieën steunt/grond, door hen een hulpmiddel te bieden om zich dergelijke veranderingen toe te eigenen (en dus te fungeren als ‘een kader dat werkt’). De nature van deze connectiviteit welke geïnformeerd wordt door ‘wantrouwen’ en gekoppeld is aan praktische bruikbaarheid, toont dus het blijvende belang aan van familiale netwerken als het gaat om de (digitale) overdracht van geld.

Hoofdstuk 5 gebruikt een focus op familie als connector, om de dynamiek van het omgaan met verstoringen na de gewelddadige nasleep van de coup in 2013 in CAR te begrijpen. Het vergelijkt de verhalen van drie vrouwen, Walad Djifir van de tweede en derde generatie, geboren en getogen in het stedelijke Bangui, en laat zien hoe familie en een gevoel van verbondenheid hen aard in zo’n ontwrichtende context—behorend tot een familie, maar ook tot twee naties (CAR en Tsjaad). Het hoofdstuk stelt dat de hoogte van flexibiliteit in het omgaan met bestaande gender dynamieken en hiërarchieën, beïnvloed wordt door financiële onafhankelijkheid. Familie, niet alleen in de vorm van verplichtingen en verwachtingen, maar ook in relatie tot de behoefte/wil om hun te voorzien, wordt gezien als twee kanten van dezelfde medaille. In de levens van de drie vrouwen speelt familie zowel een beperkende (constraining) als bevrijdende (agency) rol.

In samenvatting, de aard of nature van connectiviteit (fission and fusion, flexibiliteit, wantrouwen, constrained agency) die inherent is aan elke connector, structureert de keuzes van het dagelijks leven. Het zijn deze kaders die naar boven komen wanneer individuen worden geconfronteerd met momenten van alledaagse (mundane) en buitengewone (extraordinary) verandering. Samen onthullen de verschillende connectoren en de logica die ze belichamen allemaal een ander aspect van de ferīkh als referentiekader—een gronding (groundedness³⁹³) te midden van verandering. Deze geaardheid wordt echter niet gekenmerkt door unanimité; in plaats daarvan is het relatief en aanpasbaar—variërend per persoonlijkheid, per situatie en per connector. Desalniettemin fungeert het als referentiekader voor het nemen van beslissingen.

Terugkomend op het begrip reizen en beweging in het algemeen, lijken alle Walad Djifir—zowel degenen die in hun nomadische kampen verblijven, als degenen die in stedelijke centra in het land werken, en degenen die een niet-nomadisch leven leiden in andere landen—op het een of ander moment, afwisselend te maken krijgen met momenten van alledaagse en buitengewone verandering. Deze etnografie heeft de ‘alledaagse’ aard van deze verandering onderzocht, door een focus op connectiviteit en belonging, waarbij zeer lokale manieren naar boven komen om met grotere post-globalizerings dynamieken om te gaan.

³⁹³ Groundedness, een gegronding in iets (zoals gegrond zijn in theorie, of onderlegd in theorie). Hier een gegronding in dat waar de ferīkh voor staat. Het vormt de basis van de handelingen van zijn/haar leden. Het is iets waarop men kan terugvallen, maar wat niet uitsluit dat het soms een kritische relatie kan zijn—een referentiekader die bijdraagt aan de vorm die het dagelijks leven van Walad Djifir neemt.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Inge Butter (b. 1983) was born in Oostburg (the Netherlands). She grew up in different countries and returned to the Netherlands to study Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of non-Western Societies at Leiden University (2001–2006, doctoral programme), followed by a Bachelor in Arabic Language and Culture (2007–2011). For her doctoral thesis in Anthropology, Inge spent several months amongst the Zabbaleen (informal garbage collectors) of Cairo. Here she worked in five of the six different settlements in which the Zabbaleen were living at that time, developing an understanding of why the circumstances in each of these neighbourhoods were so different and mapping out the various waste-related activities per neighbourhood. From 2011 onwards she has been researching a group of semi-sedentary nomads based in Chad and CAR. Under the supervision of Prof. Mirjam de Bruijn and Prof. Maarten Mous, this PhD research was based at the African Studies Centre Leiden, with firm ties to the Humanities Department at Leiden University. The results of this research period, of which twelve months were spent in Chad and a part in Central African Republic, are presented in this ethnography. In 2015–2017 Inge co-managed a research project funded by the IFC (World Bank), co-developing a methodology for understanding people's perceptions and attitudes towards mobile money, organizing workshops with the research team and stakeholders, and compiling various reports with results from four different countries (Cameroon, DRC, Senegal and Zambia). Inge lives in London (UK) with her husband and two children, Emma (4) and Luuk (1).