

Islands of integration or islands of marginality? Dynamics of belonging and otherisation in the Sahelian Chad

Histories of otherisation through race, ethnicity, or other forms of belonging follow context-specific trajectories. Building on nine months' fieldwork in Chad, this article engages with discussions about otherisation in postcolonial Africa. The article moves from the description of micro-divisions in the Guéra province, in the Chadian Sahel, to discuss theoretical paradigms connecting African discourses on race and ethnicity to precolonial cleavages or colonial divisions, and theories that connect emerging ideas of autochthony in contemporary Africa with neoliberal reforms of governance. It shows that both precolonial cleavages and colonial shaping of identities through labels were contradictory and remain important because of their use by French colonial and Chad postcolonial governments to divide and rule local people. This fostered forms of political competition based on otherisation further reinforced by neoliberal reforms of local governance. Hence, the increasing dynamics of otherisation are not specific to Guéra's cleavages but connected to divisive forms of governance.

Autochthony, Ethnicity, Post-Colonialism, Post-Slavery, Race, Sahelian Chad

Introduction

We are like an island in the sea, here in Guéra: but now our origin is not so relevant, we are Hadjiray, we are from Guéra. Mahmoud [the founder of their village] arrived here seven generations ago, we were all born in Guéra for generations, so we are Hadjiray, I am Hadjiray, though I don't speak a [local] dialect, I speak Arabic. Unfortunately, our Hadjiray friends don't like this, but we are all the same. Who can remember five ancestors born in Guéra? Nobody! But we can speak of much more than five! (...) My father is from Jujube and my mother Bidio. We are a heterogeneous melt here. Among the Abbassid there are people with Arabic, Hausa, Migami, Bidio, Kenga, Sara, Bornou mothers, we are so much mixed.

I heard this statement from Sheba, an old brother of the canton chief of Jujube¹, in the Guéra province of Chad. This is one of many examples of the importance that Guéra people give to someone's origin. In the canton of Jujube this issue is particularly relevant: until 2003, when the canton managed to get a new name, its inhabitants were called "Yalnas", a word meaning "the

¹ I changed the names of people and places to protect the anonymity of the participants.

children of the people” in Chadian Arabic and considered to be related to a past as slaves. In colonial times, the French labelled as Yalnas groups of Muslim farmers who spoke Chadian Arabic as their mother tongue, unlike the other local groups who were animists and spoke one of the various Nilo-Saharan or Chadic dialects widespread in the region. Sheba’s statement summarises the narratives of Jujube people about their social position in Guéra: it stresses the fact that everybody in Guéra – including Jujube – is *Hadjiray*, a label² meaning “people of the mountains” used since the 1950s to indicate all the inhabitants of the region (Seli 2013), but, at the same time, emphasises the Jujube being like “an island in the sea”, as they are the only ones whose mother tongue is Chadian Arabic. However, other *Hadjiray* often use the label “Yalnas” to stigmatise Jujube people as slave-descendants, proving that origin matters.

This article explores the label “Yalnas”, drawing some conclusions about the way different groups define their identities and interact between each other in the Guéra province. I focus on the impact that local labels have on social cohesion. What are the origins, impacts and meanings of these labels? What are the more effective theoretical tools to analyse them? I connect these reflections with the debates about the dynamics of “otherisation” either through “racialisation” or “ethnicisation” (Mamdani, Hall, Glassman 2000, 2004; Pierre 2018, 2020) and those about the idea of “autochthony” in postcolonial Africa (Geschiera 2009, Côte 2020). I engage with these debates by analysing the way specific labels are used in Guéra. I develop two main points: first, Guéra people attach importance to these labels mainly because of their use and relevance in post-colonial governance; second, although the reforms of governance of the last three decades have promoted a divisive use of them, aimed to otherise rivals, the impacts of these labels are not univocal but change according to specific situations. These conclusions highlight the importance of an anthropological approach to this topic: indeed, rather than focusing on the meaning and origin of categories such as race and ethnicity, anthropologists can explore their connections with

² I use the word “label” to describe the names that the colonial government gave to local groups when setting up its administrative system. I use this term as in the case of Guéra it was not clear whether these labels were meant to indicate a specific “ethnic group”, a specific “race” or an administrative division. This term enables me to represent the ambiguity of colonial classification.

contemporary forms of governance and the impacts of governance reforms on how identities are used on the micro political level.

In the article, I first summarise the debate about race and ethnicity in Africa and the practices of otherisation related to it. I then argue, through the example of the label “Yalnas”, that these practices were reproduced by the postcolonial state, where existing elites used the tools developed in precolonial and colonial times to assert their position and marginalise other groups, creating a scattered and conflicting political arena.

Otherisation and identities in post-colonial Africa

When I started my fieldwork in Guéra, I aimed to explore the social legacies left by slavery, locating my research in the broader paradigm of the post-slavery studies. Although a post-slavery approach allowed me to put the division and cleavages I was observing on the ground in an historical perspective, I found the category of otherisation as it emerged in work about race and ethnicity in Africa more effective for analysing Guéra’s political arena and contextualise the condition of groups locally stigmatised as slave-descendants in broader local political dynamics. Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 2001, 2009) is a central scholar on the debate about otherisation in postcolonial Africa. He builds on the connection between ethnicity and the administrative divisions of the colonial governments as developed since the 1980s (Amselle, M’Bokolo 1985), and connects the persistence of categories related to race and ethnicity to the institutional legacies of colonialism. Mamdani (2001, 19-39) argues that the category of “race” defined groups vertically, putting the White European on the top to legitimise imperialistic rule, while “ethnicity” divided colonized subjects horizontally into smaller groups, with the aim to prevent collective action against the colonial system. Mamdani made this argument through the examples of the colonial divisions between Hutu and Tutsi “races” in Rwanda (2001) and the invention of an Arab “race” distinct from the “Fur”, one of the various “African” ethnicities in Dar Fur (2009). Jenima Pierre (2018, 217-218; 2020, 225 - 226) also emphasised how colonial powers “ethnicised” only Africans, creating

implicitly racialised forms of governance by lowering the status of the African groups fragmented into distinct and fixed ethnic subunits. While these approaches emphasise the impact of colonial categories on contemporary ethnic and racial divisions, other scholars stressed that they hide the role of African elites in manipulating and reproducing colonial categories and ignore the existence of indigenous categories of otherisation before colonisation. Jonathon Glassman (2000, 397 – 398) explored the active role of African elites during and after the struggle for independence in Zanzibar, where racialization started in the precolonial interactions between Arab elites and local inhabitants of the island. Bruce Hall (2011) made a similar point through the analysis of racial stereotypes between Bellah-Iklan and the other Tuareg groups in the Niger Bend. He argued (2011, 2) that “there are African histories of race that do not obey colonial logics” and criticises Mamdani for hiding the agency that colonised groups had under the colonial government, ignoring how “African intellectuals shaped new ethnic frameworks out of the cultural raw material of their past” (Hall 2011, 9).

I follow Mamdani (2001, 2009) and Pierre (2018, 2020) on the importance of the administrative landscape established by the colonial government in a context such as Chad, where there had never been a single central power controlling the territory before colonisation, while I agree with Glassman (2000, 2004) and Hall (2011) when they state that overemphasising the role of colonialism hides the agency of local elites in the construction of postcolonial hierarchies. These two approaches offer an important key for an anthropological analysis recognising the multiple idioms and modality of possible otherisation. Glassman (2004, 726 – 728) stresses that racism can also exist without a specific idea of race as developed in the West, but could be embedded in other discourses, especially in relation to descent, a similar point to Pierre’s (2020, 225 – 226) description of “ethnisation” as a form of “racialisation” of the Africans by the colonisers that continues to impact on African divisions related to race. Although the two authors do not agree on the main cause of these processes, they both recognise how people in Africa can be otherised according to different discourses and that this otherisation has a major political impact. Through my

ethnographic observations in Guéra, I aim to connect these issues of otherisation to another relevant contemporary debate in rural Africa: research into the role of “autochthony” in the struggle for local resources.

Scholars have shown that neoliberal decentralisation reforms of governance in sub-Saharan Africa encouraged various forms of belonging (Bayart et al. 2001 Socpa 2016), leading to what Peter Geschiere (2011, 339) defined as “culturalisation of citizenship”: a governance system that connects rights and access to resources to cultural identities. These studies start from the importance of state institutions in reproducing divisive categories, but their focus switches from the colonial creation of the labels to their manipulation in the contemporary struggle for resources. In a context of decentralisation and political competition at the local level, the idiom of autochthony limits access to rights to those with specific “cultural” attributes, generally related to the group’s origin of belonging, as shown by Antoine Socpa (2016) in the case of Cameroon. Muriel Côte (2020, 174) builds on this to argue, through her analysis of forestry policies in Burkina Faso, that autochthony is a tool to obtain what Hannah Arendt (1973, 296 – 297) defined as the “right to have rights”, in a contest where citizenship is framed as a “claim” rather than a “right”. In my fieldwork in Guéra, I noticed how these dynamics contribute to and are entangled with various forms of otherisation. Indeed, local people frame their status sometimes according to their relationship to land (autochthony) through a *margay*³ – a precolonial worship site where farming people worshipped the mountain spirits – sometimes according to a belonging to a common *kachimbeyt* – a Chadian Arabic word translated as “genealogy” and indicating a common descent⁴ – hence otherising local groups that could not connect to local land or a common descent. This dynamic is relatively common in the Sahel area, a semi-arid strip between the Sahara Desert and the savannas where for centuries different groups kept moving looking for grazing or farming areas according to climatic or political transformations. Often non-Muslim farmers inhabiting the savannas shared territory and resources

³ For all Chadian Arabic words, I use the translation as reported by Guéra scholar Dangbet Zakinet in a collective study about herder transhumance in Guéra (Marty et al. 2009).

⁴ In the article I use the term “descent”, rather than genealogy, as genealogy is used almost exclusively by Arabic speaking groups, while through descent I can include also similar practices developed by non-Arabic speaking groups.

with nomadic or seminomadic groups of Muslims, creating complex interactions based on different ideas of territoriality and descent - as described in the cases of Mauritania (Leservoisier 2012) or Mali (Grémont 2012) – and developing fluid identities with strong political connotations, as observed by Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele (2019, 94-115) in northern Chad. In Guéra, claims of autochthony generally emerge in the narratives of farmers, and claims of descent in the narratives of Arab herders or farmers who converted to Islam before arriving in Guéra; however, the two narratives are often intertwined and are both aimed to prove a legitimate “origin” of the group. These narratives mainly emerge in competition for land or political legitimacy. My argument is that both narratives stem from a similar system of governance that makes local labels a tool for claims based on a specific origin – either autochthony or descent – and stereotypes related to it, and that an anthropological analysis could highlight roles and contradictions related to these labels. In the next section, I will present the context and the methods of my research in Guéra.

Approaching otherisation in the mountains of the Guéra

Guéra is a mountainous area stretching between the Sahel and the savannas of central Chad. Since the establishment of the Wadai sultanate (1635 – 1911), a major actor in slave-trades across the Sahara between the 16th and 20th centuries), the mountains of Guéra sheltered scattered groups of animist farmers fleeing from the slave-raids of the Wadai and its allies (Fuchs 1997, 14 – 18). The memories of this period have a strong impact on the identities of Guéra groups and the relationships between them. French colonised Guéra in 1906 and established an administrative system. This is the moment the region was unified under the same political power and the various groups of farmers, who migrated in different waves since the 16th century, developed different narratives to justify their unification and ruling over a territory as a canton. Hence, narratives of the past have a crucial political role and collecting them presents specific methodological challenges, as there are abundant memories connected to the slave-raids that overlap with contemporary political claims and depict the origin of the different groups in a contradictory way. I explored in depth the Guéra

narratives mainly from the point of view of local informants coming from the group labelled as Yalnas. A young historian whose mother came from Jujube introduced me to the canton chief, and he agreed to host me and help me contact the elders of the villages under his authority. I spent a total of four months (August to December 2014) supported by my fieldwork assistant Annour, one of the chief's cousins, in collecting the stories of local villages. We visited 27 different villages and nomadic camps and had collective interviews about the past of their villages with around 60 elders⁵ related to the canton chief's family. This strategy gave me a clear idea about the dominant narrative in the canton. However, the meetings with the elders were very formal and left small room for discordant voices. Therefore, I tried to collect as many alternative points of view as possible, usually through informal chats with young people who would have felt intimidated in front of the elders. I triangulated the data obtained in Jujube with local stories from the neighbouring villages, as well as from the few written sources available; and I spent five months (January to June 2015) in the capital of the province, Mongo, where I held formal interviews and informal conversations with members of local associations. Thanks to these sources, I could also discuss the pasts of five villages inhabited by other ethnic groups, where the local people would not have been comfortable if I had been introduced by Annour.

I choose to work mainly in Jujube because the construction of the identity of its inhabitants is problematic. Like the authors of the first colonial reports (Derendinger 1912, Duault 1938, 28-29), most of the Hadjiray consider Yalnas as synonymous with slave-descendant, assuming that those indicated by this label are an assortment of people united by the lack of a common origin. Jujube people reject the stigma related to the label "Yalnas" to the point that in 2003 they officially renamed their canton⁶ Abbassid, claiming to be members of a Wadai *kachimbeyt* whose leader migrated to Guéra in the early 19th century. Although the idea of the "island" developed by Sheba in the initial quote may suggest an effort to differentiate Jujube from the other Hadjiray, he also

⁵ Sometimes I held individual interviews with key informants; at other times I had open conversations with groups of elders of the village, who opted to talk collectively with me about their history.

⁶ Arrêté 586/PR/MAT/DG/DIAT/SCT/2003 on 25th March 2003

stressed that whatever its origin may be, Jujube as a village has existed for two centuries in Guéra and since then its inhabitants have interacted with the other Hadjiray. He emphasised the frequent intermarriages and alliances they have with other people and that enabled them to be integrated as Hadjiray. However, even though formally cancelled because of its derogatory meaning when the canton was renamed, most of the local groups keep using the label Yalnas to emphasise the ambiguities of Jujube *kachimbeyt* and, in general, despite the common label of Hadjiray, Guéra people frequently use more specific labels in political debates and in daily discourses. Exploring the meaning of these labels both in the historical sources and in their contemporary use was a clue to understand why origin matter and how contradictories narratives about origin impact on social and political life. The next section will explore the origin of the label Yalnas in historical sources.

Precolonial memories and colonial divisions: the origin of local labels in Guéra

A first step to understand the value and meaning of local labels in Guéra is to explore their historical creation. Narratives about precolonial raids and local reactions to them are frequent in Guéra stories, but there are few written sources before colonization. Peter Fuchs (1997, 17) studied the diary of both Arabs and European explorers and noticed a brief mention of “Dar Kodro” – a territory ruled by a Dadjo⁷ king in the northern part of Guéra - in the work of explorers Heinrich Barth and Gustav Nachtigal. Under French colonisation (1900 – 1960), Guéra was for the first time controlled by a single power and the colonial rulers divided the various groups into administrative “cantons”, creating most of the contemporary labels. Apart from “Dadjo” and “Arabs”, all the other labels originated in this period (Le Rouvreur 1962, 121-123).

I base my analysis mainly on three documents: the colonial reports of Lieutenant Jean Robert Derendinger (1912) and Louis Duault (1938) and the 1933 census of a town at the southern edge of Guéra. In these reports, the French never clearly defined their ideas about race and ethnicity, but used categories with different origin and meaning to distinguish between what they

⁷ Dadjo is an ethnic group living across central Chad and Sudan. They have three cantons in Guéra.

defined as different “races”. Indeed, they operated a general division between the label “Arabs”, a broad cultural category used by local people and regrouping nomadic Arabic speaking groups already Islamised, and the label “Kirdi”, a slur used by local Muslim to indicate those considered as animists. Derendinger (1912, 4) claims that this distinction comes from how Arabs divided the region between “us, the Muslim, the believers, civilised and them, the savages, the pagans (..) the meat for slavery”. Belonging to Islam and use of Arabic as mother tongue are the main element of this division; hence, the position of the people labelled as “Yalnas”, the only arabophone and Islamised farmers, appears peculiar.

Derendinger is the first source that mentions this label— never used in precolonial sources about Chad or in other Sahelian areas —as he met with a community presenting themselves as “Yalnas”. These people claimed to be former captives of Arabs who managed to flee from their nomadic camps called *ferricks* and hide in a well-protected mountain. When there were enough of them, they negotiated an agreement with the Arabs: the runaway captives would get their freedom as “Yalnas” in exchange for a regular yearly tribute and the promise to bar any new runaway captives from their community. In Derendinger account it appears that these people embraced the label Yalnas; however, nowadays the groups initially labelled as Yalnas refute this label. Moreover, Guéra groups describe in different ways the meaning and origin of this label, whose value seems more connected to contextual political struggles than to its historical origin, as I will explain more clearly in the two following sections.

Derendinger (1912) uses the word “races” for the three main categories of his report, “Arab”, “Kirdi” and “Yalnas”; however, neither he nor other colonial officials define this term and the way he uses it encompasses both physical and cultural aspects. He mentions how the race of the Yalnas is influenced by the Arabs “in their temperament and customs”, but at the same time used physical markers such as the skin colour, although Yalnas intermarriages with Arabs during captivity gave them “a lighter colour and a longer profile” than the other Kirdi (Derendinger 1912, 9 – 10). In 1923, colonial officials administratively divided Guéra into various cantons, creating

further divisions among “Kirdi” by labelling them according to the names of the newly created cantons. In the census of the village of Abou Deia in 1933⁸, Arab, Kirdi and Yalnas were still the three mains’ categories, while the additional labels appear as a sub-classification. Therefore, the colonial reports mention groups such as “Kirdi Bidio”, “Kirdi Dangaleat”, “Arab Missirie”, “Arab Zuruk”, “Yalnas Abou Deia”, etc. Some of these labels were subsequently changed as inaccurate (Seli 2013, 30-38), while, between the 1920s and 1950s, most Guéra people converted to Islam and the label Kirdi progressively disappeared, replaced by the term “Hadjiray” (Seli 2013, 25-26). “Yalnas” remained as a category with an unclear status. Both Derendinger (1912, 9-12) and Duault (1938, 28-29) show appreciation for the Yalnas, as combining the best qualities of Kirdi and Arabs. However, their appreciation is deeply imbued in the colonial racism. An example is this statement from a 1921 report:

*Not all Chad races are lazy. If the Yalnas, for example, workers and disciplined, give us good workers, the Arabs rebel against any kind of work. Their habit of using captives prevented them for a long-time taking care of their own basic needs, making them very lazy, fatalist, not worried about the future.*⁹

There are not alternative written sources about Guéra people until the seminal work of European anthropologists in the area in the 1960s and 1970s. The scholars emphasized the complex and changing networks of alliances among local sedentary farmers (Pouillon 1964, Vincent 1975, Fuchs 1997) as well as between farmers and herders (Vandame 1975). Both Vincent (1975) and Fuchs (1997) focused on the groups labelled as “kirdi” by the colonial sources and distinguished among them between those who present themselves as *gens de la terre*, whose legendary ancestors were born in the mountains, inheriting a spiritual link with the “spirits” of the mountain, and those who self-define as *gens de la chefferie*, descendants of invaders who, at a certain point, took over political power from the *gens de la terre*, whilst leaving them religious authority through the

⁸ *Circulaire* 297, 5 July 1938

⁹ Aix-en-Provence, 11_FM_SG_TCH_I_8 (1912), 106

worship of the *margay*. In contemporary Guéra, the narratives about these events justify political alliances and land tenure divisions among local groups, also for a peculiar canton like the canton of Jujube, as I will explain later.

While anthropologists explored the religious practices and origins of the Hadjiray, the Arab herders seasonally inhabiting the Guéra area received less attention. Charles Vandame (1975) explored the cooperative relationships between Arab herders and Hadjiray farmers in the contemporary Dangaleat canton, while other authors either explored their genealogies (Zeltner 2002, Kodi 2007) or contemporary practices of transhumance (Marty et al. 2009), emphasising the importance Arab people give to their origin through genealogies, as opposed to the Hadjiray's focus on the *margay*. Fuchs (1997, 241-246) notes that since the 1970s it has also been important among the Hadjiray to find a connection with migrants from "the east" who brought Islam in Guéra. He emphasised the role of local "rebellions" in this: indeed, between 1965 until the late 1980s Chad was torn apart by a devastating civil war, with mainly northerner Muslim rebels fighting against the central government. At that time, the rebels controlled most of Guéra territory and, because of the common religion, forged political alliances with local Muslim groups while forced animist groups to convert to Islam. These events pushed Guéra farmers to find a Muslim descent in their genealogies.

The violence of these groups and the aggressive answer of the national army led to massive displacements of people and villages, which finally came to an end with the establishment of the Déby regime, in 1990. The stability brought by the Déby regime marked the beginning of a new political phase for the Guéra province: villagers resettled in the rural areas, urban elites created civil society associations engaged with rural development, and the government recognised new decentralised institutions and increased the political role of customary authorities, recognising them first as "auxiliaries"¹⁰ and then as "custodians of traditions".¹¹ These policies followed a general

¹⁰ Loi organique N° 13/PR/2010 du 25 Aout 2010

¹¹ Titre XIV of 2018 Chad Constitution 2018

trend of decentralisation across the whole Sahel which created new forms of both participation and competition at the rural level (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2011, Socpa 2016, Côte 2020).

However, the Deby regime mainly used these reforms to appoint loyal customary chiefs and reinforce their power on the ground, while it never enforced elected administrative authorities in the rural areas (Debos 2013). This increased the role of NGOs which brought development projects and funding, as well as the expansion of farming activities previously prevented by political instability. New needs, new institutions and growing competition for land (Alladjabah, Tcheckote 2018) influenced the way the Hadjiray represent and use their local identities, as I will explore in the next section.

Local appropriation and transformation of colonial labels

The formulation of the labels in Guéra have officially remained quite stable since the 1920s. Neither anthropologists nor colonial administrators have challenged their meanings: their administrative use by colonial and postcolonial governments crystallised them as markers of identity, and Hadjiray people manipulated rather than rejected them. I have already mentioned that the label “Yalnas” represents a central case in term of the ambiguities of the local narratives. In colonial times, its appropriation by Jujube people was the easier strategy for being integrated into the administrative system. Colonial reports and old ethnographies simply defined Yalnas as a label for runaway or liberated captives. However, in contemporary Guéra the meaning and origin of that label is debated, and each position represents a specific claim in terms of rights and status.

The elders of Jujube claimed to me that the label was their own creation and they replaced it as they realised that people tend to “misinterpret it”. In more informal conversations I heard slightly different versions. Some young people shared their points of view with me, stating that it would have not been possible for them to talk in group conversation with the elders of the village, who are strongly committed to a specific version of the history. Yassin, a nurse in his early 20s in one of the villages of Jujube canton, gave me this explanation:

The origin of Yalnas' name is different: when the French were in Boulong, the chief did not trust them, so he sent some of his slaves to the first meeting. When the French asked who they were, the answer was "Yalnas", because they had no idea about their origin¹².

According to him, the elders do not like to present this version as it recalls the importance of slavery in the past, which may lead to misunderstanding about their slave-free origin. Indeed, in all the versions – formal and more informal - I heard among Jujube people, the common point was that the founder of the village were slave-hunters and that was the only reason for the presence of slaves in Jujube. Although they admit it might be possible that the group integrated some former slaves, the lineage has its own clear and recognised origin, which is totally slave-free. This is the point that people outside Jujube criticise the most. An elder in the village of Zola, the nearest Bidio¹³ village to Jujube, mentioned Duault's (1938, 28-29) description of the Yalnas as "runaway captives" as the more realistic explanation of Jujube people's origin¹⁴. My sources in Mongo, mainly people working for the state or local civil society, were even more direct. Djimet, the head of a local association, living in Mongo and coming from a Bidio family, stated this:

Yalnas are slaves who fled their masters and hid in the forest in Guéra. When the French arrived, they got the name Yalnas from their neighbours, as they had no common origin and had different fathers. They were allowed to settle, but the land they occupy is for the Bidio. (...) All the people who used to speak Arabic and had no idea about their origin were put among the Yalnas. Nowadays there are no taboos about marrying.¹⁵

In other cases, there was some room for acceptance of Jujube people's claims. For example, John, a social worker in his 30s from a Dangaleat family, recognises that some in Jujube may be of Wadai descent.

There are many Wadai people here, but they could be from various origins: member of the royal

¹² Yassin, Jujube, November 2014

¹³ Bidio and Migami are the local ethnic group inhabiting the area near Jujube.

¹⁴ Elders of Zola, April 2015

¹⁵ John, Mongo, April 2015

*family, soldiers who fled and remained here, captured soldiers who then settled. They are spread and mixed, here everything is mixed.*¹⁶

The main issue in these stories is the origin of the group, as being an autochthonous group or a group of former enslaved people influences status locally. Moreover, labels do not embody only the presumed past of the groups but also stereotypes potentially used to otherise. Zakaria, a middle-age social worker from a Dadjo family who used to work in Jujube, connects the origin of the people of Jujube with some of their specific characteristics:

*I don't want to talk too much about their origins, you can ask them and compare their answers with those of their neighbours. You know, often Wadai used to buy the more fit and strong men, leaving here the old and sick, so they may be the descendants of those people.*¹⁷

The mention of the fact that Wadai people used to leave only the “sick and weak people” diminishes Jujube people – who represent themselves as former warriors – as descendants of weak former slaves, the other Hadjiray being the stronger ones who resisted slave-raids. It is important to notice that potential otherisations happens both ways: in Jujube, I heard negative stereotypes of the other Hadjiray, who have not a clear descent and have less knowledge of Islam, so they often behave inappropriately. I heard allegations of female hypergamy against neighbouring villages associated with these stereotypes on both sides, although nowadays intermarriages are frequent among almost all Hadjiray groups.¹⁸

Despite the frequency of these stories, it is important to notice that people origins do not necessarily impact on marriage choices: origin matters in relation to access to resources, hence mainly in the rural contexts. The story of Afef, a security guard in his 30s working in Mongo, is an example on how in urban situation people might be aware of stereotypes and narrative of the past, but just ignore them. Afef met his wife in Mongo and did not investigate about her origin.

¹⁶ Djimet, Mongo, October 2014

¹⁷ Zakaria, Balabar, May 2015

¹⁸ The only exception is the endogamy of the blacksmith, widespread all-over Chadian Sahel (Ndjalamava 2010). As this phenomenon exhibits peculiar dynamics, I will not tackle it in this article.

I am a Dangaleat, but my family moved to Gojolo, in the Migami canton. This happened before the French arrived and is related to a fight in the village (...) There are two main land chiefs in my area, Djogo and Dalmata, which are close to Mapita. People in Mapita are from the same family of Jujube; they started using Migami language more recently. In my area there are many people mixed, I can speak the Migami of Djogo, the Migami of Moro, Arabic and Dangaleat. Now I have good contact with the Dangaleat people my family come from (...) I married a girl from Jujube; we met in Mongo. Her father is a relative from Ibeth, while I think her mother is from another village, but I don't know where. We grew up in Mongo and don't care too much about this.¹⁹

In the conversation, he showed me that he is aware of the distinctions and knowledge local people might contextually use to otherise opponents, but this did not affect his marriage. I heard various similar stories in Mongo, in contrast with the importance given to belonging at the rural level. Indeed, the impact of the different labels emerges when there are political controversies. The frequent local use of labels to explain political struggles shows that they are not just a top-down creation, nor the reproduction of pre-existing cleavages, but a space for production of meaning and identities that has continued since the French implanted their system of administration. Identity labels matter in contemporary Guéra and are growing in importance in other African contexts (Bayart et al. 2001, , Socpa 2016). The impact of the labels and the stereotypes lying behind them are a structural political issue that I explore in the next section.

Reproduction of ambiguities and tensions in contemporary Guéra

Since their establishment in colonial times, the labels to indicate Guéra groups have been quite flexible, and, more importantly, rarely neutral. The use of the label “Yalnas” is an example: although since the renaming of the canton in 2003, the inhabitants of Jujube should officially be called Abbassid, most of the other Hadjiray groups continue to use the label “Yalnas” as a way to diminish their status and affect their rights. Indeed, the effort to erase the old label through the new

¹⁹ Afef, Mongo, April 2015

name started at the same time as the broader transformation in term of governance and availability of resources in the 1990s. Jujube people started the canton renaming procedure in 1999, when the competition among canton chiefs to be involved in development projects or get compensation for the use of land was increasing. Since the 1980s. Jujube people had different conflicts with their neighbours, mainly about the limits of arable land and the rights over land related compensations between the villages located at the boundaries of the cantons (Colosio 2021; 11 - 15). The label used for the canton has an impact on these struggles: during my fieldwork, in various situations Hadjiray groups questioned the legitimacy of Jujube land or its involvement in development interventions because as “Yalnas” they deserve less rights than groups with a clear origin. As in Guéra land is becoming scarcer and the funds from international aid are often allocated through customary authorities, the tensions between different groups for the management of the land or the entitlement to deal with state or humanitarian institutions are increasing. Discussions about this topic are entangled with the meanings of local labels.

Ali is a lawyer in his 50s who lived for twenty years in N’djamena. His family comes from a Bidio village and I asked his opinion on the issues people often mentions between the canton Bidio and its neighbours from Jujube. He mentioned to me a clinic that Jujube people were asking to have in their village, despite there being a clinic in the nearby Bidio village of Nevio, as a source of tensions between the two groups. First, he reminded me of the presumed hierarchy between them: *Yalnas were liberated by the French and arrived with them in Guéra. (..) At that time, Bidio men could marry Yalnas women, but not the opposite; we could not give them our girls. However, now things have changed. (...) They have been integrated, though they were foreigners.*

Then he tackled what he considered the major issue:

I don't know why, but their canton is getting a lot of help from NGOs, more than Bidio, probably this is why there are tensions between the two communities. The fact that they want their own clinic, while there is one already working in Nevio, is an outcome of this approach. However, this is not

*just between them and us, there are also similar tensions between different Bidio villages, especially when it's about projects requiring land and the state or companies have to give money as compensation.*²⁰

The case of the clinic in Nevio is one of several dividing the people of Jujube from those of Bidio villages, but Ali emphasised that these kinds of incidents also happen “among Bidio”, claiming that they do not represent specific hostility against Jujube people but a frequent dynamic in Guéra. A common issue in most of the conflict is the legitimate control of the land: often neighbouring groups have contrasting claims in term of land ownership, related to different interpretation of the past. Moussa Alladjaba and Hervé Tchekote (2018, 232) reported 63 political issues related to land tenure in Guéra in 2014 alone. Their analysis focused on contemporary issues, but generally when these tensions are explored more deeply rooted controversies emerge. In some cases, it is even the way the past is remembered that creates tensions. In 2013, a local history book written by a Migami historian (Doungous 2013) was withdrawn from the market because of the angry reactions of other members of the community. The comments I collected about this issue shows the connection between contemporary claims about local rights and the difficulties to agree on a common version of the past. Abdul, a social worker from the canton Migami, explained to me: *The problem with the book is that the author pretends that his family arrived there before the others, which is not true. Migami are a big family, but only a few of them were already here; the majority gradually arrived over time and were absorbed into the already existing groups. Being among the first matters, and that book irritated many people.*²¹

The importance of being “the firstcomer” among different Migami groups, as well as the stress on the fact that Yalnas had no land in the previous stories, confirm the connection between identities, land ownership and access to resources, a well-known dynamic all over the Sahel (Lentz 2013), in Chad further increased by the 2000s’ reforms, that reinforced the role of customary

²⁰ Ali, N'Djamena, March 2015

²¹ Abdul, Mongo, May 2015

authorities in a context of growing competition for land and resources. Focusing on the narratives of the struggles regarding the label “Yalnas”, this article goes one step further and argues that these categories are not exclusively political tools but are interlinked with the way local identities and meanings are produced and, therefore, contribute to new forms of otherisation. The fact that Ali specified that Yalnas were enslaved people and that in the past Bidio women did not marry them, as well as Zakaria’s previously described stereotypes about Jujube people’s ancestors being the “weaker and sick”, highlight prejudices that go beyond a simple political controversy. These kinds of stereotypes are generally associated to either the unclear origin of Jujube people or the fact that they are untrustworthy. Moreover, you can hear it not only from neighbours with whom the relationships are tense, but also from people not involved in the conflicts. Mahamat is a man in his late 40s from a Dadjo family which has a recognised alliance with Jujube. He is the head of a local organisation that frequently worked in Jujube in the past and, despite his strong ties with Jujube, mentioned a joke he had heard about Jujube people: “Never trust those who abandoned their mother tongue, they can abandon everything”²². Mahamat did not elaborate further on this point but told me to ask other people: they would confirm its meaning. Another joke I heard in Mongo was about the “Yalnas” people of Mapita, whose inhabitants are “sheep owners who are more qualified to organise cow markets”²³, hinting at the fact that they may regularly steal cow from other groups and then sell them. While among nomadic there is some sort of pride in the ability to steal cattle from other people, I never heard such a narrative among Jujube people or other farmer groups, who therefore would take it as another stereotype about their unreliability.

Stereotypes about Yalnas being unreliable or dishonest are an integral part of the argument used against their involvement in land management and development projects. Djimet, who runs various projects constructing stone-bunds, told me that he could not involve Jujube in his activities, as this would require some cooperation with the Bidio, who would never trust them in the management of what they consider their land. Even though he tried to stay neutral while explaining

²² Ibrahim, Mongo, October 2014

²³ Jacob, Mongo, February 2015

this, he seemed to agree with the Bidio position and reminded me that the only reason Jujube people were there was “because Bidio accepted their presence as guests, but if they change their mind, a small group like the Yalnas would be easily evicted”²⁴. These controversies are frequent in Guéra (Alladjaba, Tchekote 2018) and local groups use both autochthony and descent to claim legitimate control of land, in line with Guéra’s deep-rooted tradition of plurality and diversity. Indeed, the different layers of groups who migrated to Guéra over time and interacted according to different logics led to the coexistence of different principles of legitimacy (Vandame 1975). The creation of “cantons” under French rule fostered new divisions and crystallised the old ones. Nowadays, old controversies among local groups may emerge contextually and suddenly. In the words of David, an elder of Jujube, “sometime people eat with you and then, after a problem, decide to snub you”,²⁵ as if you abruptly became a stranger. Moreover, thanks to the flexibility of local narratives, the same group may claim rights through different sources of legitimacy. Despite their lack of *margay* and alleged Wadai origin, the people of Jujube also claim land ownership as an autochthonous group, and this claim is supported by at least one other local group allied with them, the Migami of Djogo. I visited Djogo, whose inhabitants claim to have hosted Jujube’s founder and given him one of the chief’s daughters as wife. Here the set of stereotypes about local groups’ relationships is different. The Djogo land chief explained their relationship with Jujube:

There have been many exchanges between them and us, both before and after the arrival of the French. Still now, there are Jujube people living here and Migami in Jujube. Some of them are still here and are now perfectly integrated, but they remember their origins. We were here already before Mahmoud and we had long been organised for defending ourselves from the Wadai, through a bell to be rung in case of the enemy approaching. (..) We arrived here before the others and converted to Islam later. We all [the Migami] have a common ancestor, but he is so far away, it’s hard to remember him. We were here for 1,500 years before the Dadjo arrived.

²⁴ Djimet, Mongo, June 2015

²⁵ David, Mongo, June 2015

The mention of the Dadjo was part of a comparison between Jujube people, who arrived as guests integrated through a marriage and, therefore, are nowadays a real local group, and the Dadjo, who violently occupied what Migami claim to be their own land, making the relationships between these two groups difficult. The Djogo chief depicts the Dadjo as unreliable people, while Jujube are friends who respected local hierarchies and took good care of the land that they received from the Djogo. As there is no coherent set of stereotypes constantly used, all local groups may occasionally be otherised or integrated as allies. Autochthony and descent can be contextually used to claim rights otherising other groups, but also to claim friendship and bring solidarity, as it was between the Migami of Djogo and the people of Jujube. Even the divide between the Arabs and the Hadjiray, which builds on the colonial divide between Arabs and Kirdi, has some degree of fluidity.

Arabs, like Hadjiray, are far from being a homogenous group: each group defend itself from the name of the founder of the *kachimbeyt* and they are sometimes internally racialized between “black” Arab who had more contact with the farmers and lighter “red” Arab, although the meaning of these colour marker is not univocal (Kodi 2007, 18; Marty et al. 2009, 228). Jujube people present themselves as an “island” of Arabic speakers among the non-arabophones Hadjiray and emphasised to me how they consider some of the Arabs as part of their family: Jujube canton chief exerts his authority over two *ferricks* whose inhabitants claim an Arab origin; the elders of two villages of the canton – Ibis and Karda – are Arabs who decided to settle and chose Jujube’s chief as their canton chief because they share a language, religion and lifestyle. However, the divisions described by Derendinger more than a century ago are still impacting on social life. The nomadic Arabs are the only Guéra groups refusing the label “Hadjiray”, and their attitude toward Hadjiray farmers may be problematic. Oumar, a young relative of Jujube’s canton chief, emphasised their potential negative attitude and this was the only conversation when the word “racist” was openly used:

Sometimes they are racist and don't want to marry other people. The different name also comes from this: there are the black Arabs – more mixed – and the red Arabs, who marry only other

*Arabs. For both Arabs and Abbassid, genealogy is very important; we should know about our original family.*²⁶

Framing the connection between Jujube people and the Arabs was difficult. In the story of Jujube there are Arabs who became members of their group, as in the villages of Ibis and Karda; Arabs who are allied and come every year to graze their cattle, although they have a different *kachimbeyt* and never became part of the group; and Arabs considered enemies in the past or a threat in the present, as they used to pillage Guéra villages and nowadays do not care if their cattle destroy farmers' fields. Following the broader transformations of the 1990s, many Arabs decided to abandon the nomadic life and settle in farmland or move to the city and start trading, following a common trend across the Sahel (Grémont 2012) and further blurring the classifications stemming from colonial times and reframed by post-colonial governments and NGOs (Marty et al. 2009). Although I did not specifically focus on this aspect, and the division between Arabs and non-Arabs seems more resilient than those among Hadjiray groups, the interactions Jujube people manage to have with various Arab groups suggest that the dynamics are similar: labels matter mainly as a political category, rather than as a marker of rooted identities, and the stigmatisation of some groups is a contemporary strategy to shape power relationships rather than cleavages engrained in Guéra society. Although local identities emerge powerfully in political competition, outside these specific issues they are fluid and flexible. For Jujube people, Arabs can be both brothers, sharing the land according to reciprocal needs, and invaders who have a different lifestyle and behave aggressively.

In Guéra, I heard a variety of narratives that might lead to contextual otherisation of some groups in specific contexts. French divisions forged the two “races” of “Arabs” and “Kirdi” and ambiguous category of “Yalnas” between them, which brought to the contemporary idea of Jujube as “an island in the sea” of the Hadjiray people. The changing meanings and use of these labels over time show how otherisation processes in Guéra are contextual and multilinear, and trigger different interactions, including both harsh divisions and a common ground for cooperation among people of

²⁶ Oumar, Abeche, April 2015

different origins. Nowadays, with growing local competition for land and resources, divisions are increasing. The Yalnas' status is more likely to be challenged and their past used to challenge their rights. However, the same label historically achieved a different purpose, and this otherisation is not something ineluctable or definitive but coexists with other forms of interaction. Despite the importance of label coming from colonial time in these dynamics, otherisation could be explained as an outcome of the growing competition for dwindling resources, and related to the broader "culturalisation of citizenship" (Geschiera 2011, 339) and the framing of citizenship as a claim, rather than a right (Côte 2020, 174).

Conclusion

This article explored the issue of otherisation in Guéra and connected it with contemporary debates about ideas of race, ethnicity and autochthony in post-colonial studies. I started from a contradiction in the Yalnas' narrative between their claim that the contemporary inhabitants of Guéra "are all Hadjiray" and a variety of locally relevant distinctions based on two criteria: common descent represented by the *kachimbeyt* and autochthony through the idea of *margay*. In Guéra, autochthony and descent are contextual categories which some groups may possibly use by claiming a "local" origin in specific struggles, but it does not radically marginalise any Hadjiray group. I explored these issues focusing the label "Yalnas" and its connection with the precolonial history and colonial governance of Guéra. I analysed it through two opposed approaches: the one focusing mostly on the role of the divisions brought by the colonial governments (Mamdani 2001, 2009; Pierre 2020); and the one who emphasise the agencies of local elites and their precolonial discourses (Glassman 2000, 2004; Hall 2011). I showed that the classification of the local people through labels by the colonial government was often contradictory and built on vague precolonial identities, and that the colonial government often coined and applied its labels moving from a flawed use of the categories of race and ethnicity. I then highlighted the importance of contemporary political issues in explaining the role of these labels and their use in contemporary struggles, as these concepts nowadays intersect

with contemporary policies of local resources management. I therefore tried to understand how and why the Hadjiray tend to reproduce a set of labels and stereotypes that have a weak connection with a much more fluid social reality.

My research confirms the growing trend of local conflicts in Guéra described by Alladjaba and Tcheckote (2018) and connects it with various forms of otherisation that are emerging across Africa. Geschiere (2011, 339) defined as “culturalisation of citizenship” the correlation of citizenship rights with some specific forms of belonging such as autochthony, while Côte (2020, 174) noticed how these discourses are framing citizenship rights as “claims” that foster competition on local political arenas. In Guéra, what Geschiere and Côte defined as autochthony emerges together with a set of stereotypes aiming to legitimise access to or exclusion from specific resources and is not the only criterion, as belonging in Guéra has been framed through multiple, overlapping and flexible claims. Hence, otherisation does not appear as the imposition of a specific stigma by a hegemonic power or the reproduction of rooted hierarchies, but is rather a contingent process connected to the fight for resources. It can affect different groups and be connected to a combination of different factors. These dynamics are creating a scattered social landscape, and the more local people use otherisation as a tool, the more stereotypes based on presumed racial or ethnic qualities emerge. However, interactions between different groups in Guéra do not necessarily produce exclusion and division: I found a long history of alliances that continue to be reproduced alongside divisions; even the broader divide between the people presenting themselves as “Arab” and the Hadjiray farmers is less rooted and stable than it appears in colonial texts. In this context, categories of race and ethnicity have little analytical value but are crucial political tools; and, building on Pierre (2018, 2020), the main impact of colonial governance is not the creation of racial or ethnic categories as such, but a modality of governance that pushes local actors to use and reproduce a variety of labels based on the implicit inferiority of the people indicated by them. An anthropological approach highlights how decentralisation reforms based on neoliberal models of governance are pushing local actors to otherise potential rivals. This analytical framework enables a

broader comparison of dynamics related to various forms of “politics of belonging”; and highlights that social cohesion issues are not a static legacy of the past, but the outcome of specific policies that need to be exposed and criticised.

References

- Alladjaba, Moussa and Hervé. Tchekote. 2018. "Conflits Fonciers Et Problématique De Développement Rural Dans La Sous-Préfecture De Mongo, Région Du Guéra (Tchad)." *European Scientific Journal*. 14, 1857-7881.
- Amselle, Jean Loup and Elikia M'Bokolo, eds. 1985. *Au cœur de l'ethnie: ethnies, tribalisme et État en Afrique*, La découverte
- Arendt, Hannah. 1973. *The origins of totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bayart, Jean François., Geschiere, Peter and Francis Nyamnjoh. 2001. Autochtonie, démocratie et citoyenneté en Afrique. *Critique internationale*, (1), 177-194.
- Brachet, Julien, and Judith Scheele. 2019. *The Value of Disorder: Autonomy, Prosperity, and Plunder in the Chadian Sahara*. Cambridge University Press.
- Colosio, Valerio. 2021. Becoming a slave-descendant: labels and paths of emancipation in Northern and Central Chad. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 1-19.
- Côte, Muriel. 2020. "Community-based citizenship: Autochthony and land claim politics under forest decentralization in Burkina Faso." *Geoforum* 109: 171-179.
- Debos, Marielle. 2013. 'La guerre des préfets: Répression, clientélisme et illégalismes d'État dans l'entre-guerres tchadien', *Politix*, N° 104(4), 47 - 65.
- Derendinger, Jean-Robert. 1912. *Autour de Mefi. Un peuple des affranchis, les Ial-Nas*. Librairie Militaire Universelle
- Doungous, Noussour. 2013. *Les Migami*. Al-Mouna
- Fuchs, Peter. 1997. *La religion des Hadjéray*, L'Harmattan.
- Geschiere, Peter. 2011. Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion-Paradoxes in the Politics of Belonging in Africa and Europe. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 18(1), 321-339.
- Glassman, Jonathon. 2000. "Sorting out the tribes: the creation of racial identities in colonial

Zanzibar's newspaper wars." *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 3: 395-428.

Glassman, Jonathon. 2004. "Slower Than a Massacre: The Multiple Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial Africa." *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3: 720–54

Grémont, Charles (2012) 'villages and Crossroads: Changing Territorialities among the Tuareg of Northern Mali', in *Saharan Frontiers*. Indiana University Press, 131– 145. Hall, Bruce. 2011. *A history of race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Vol. 115). Cambridge University Press.

Kodi, Mahamat. 2007. Les Arabes du Tchad. *Cahier d'histoire à la découverte du Tchad*, 10

Lentz, Carola. 2013. *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa: Natives and Strangers*. Indiana University Press.

Le Rouvreur, Albert. 1962. *Sahéliens et sahariens du Tchad*. Berger-Levrault.

Leservoisier, Olivier. 2012. 'Ethnicity and Interdependence: Moors and Haalpulaaren in the Senegal Valley', in *Saharan Frontiers*. Indiana University Press, 148 – 161.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2009. *Saviors and survivors: Darfur, politics, and the war on terror*, Verso

Marty, André, Antoine Eberschweiler, and Dangbet Zakinet. 2009. *Au coeur de la transhumance: un campement chamelier au Tchad central, Septembre 2006-Avril 2007*, Karthala.

Ndjalama, Alain. 2010. Les Haddad du centre et du nord Tchad. *Cahier d'histoire à la découverte du Tchad*, 24

Pierre, Jemima. 2018. Structure, project, process: anthropology, colonialism, and race in Africa. *Structure*, 96, 213-219.

- Pierre, Jemima. 2020. "Slavery, anthropological knowledge, and the racialization of Africans." *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 22: 220-231.
- Pouillon, Jean. 1964. La structure du pouvoir chez les Hadjerai (Tchad). *L'Homme*, 18-70.
- Seli, Djimet. 2013, *Deconnexions identitaires post-conflit : les Hadjeray du Tchad face à la mobilité et aux technologies de la communication*, PhD Thesis, Center for African Studies, Leiden
- Socpa, A., 2016. On "Autochthon" and "Allochthon" Divide: Ethnic Stereotypes and Social Conflict in Cameroon. *African Study Monographs*, 37(1), 17-28.
- Vandame, Charles. 1975. Notes sur l'organisation sociale, l'histoire, la vie rituelle, à Sara, village Kenga (Hadjeraï du Tchad). *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 45(1), 69-113.
- Vincent, Jean François. 1975. *Le pouvoir et le sacré chez les Hadjeray du Tchad*. Éditions Anthropos.
- Zeltner, Jean-Claude. *Histoire Des Arabes Sur Les Rives Du Lac Tchad*. Karthala, 2002.