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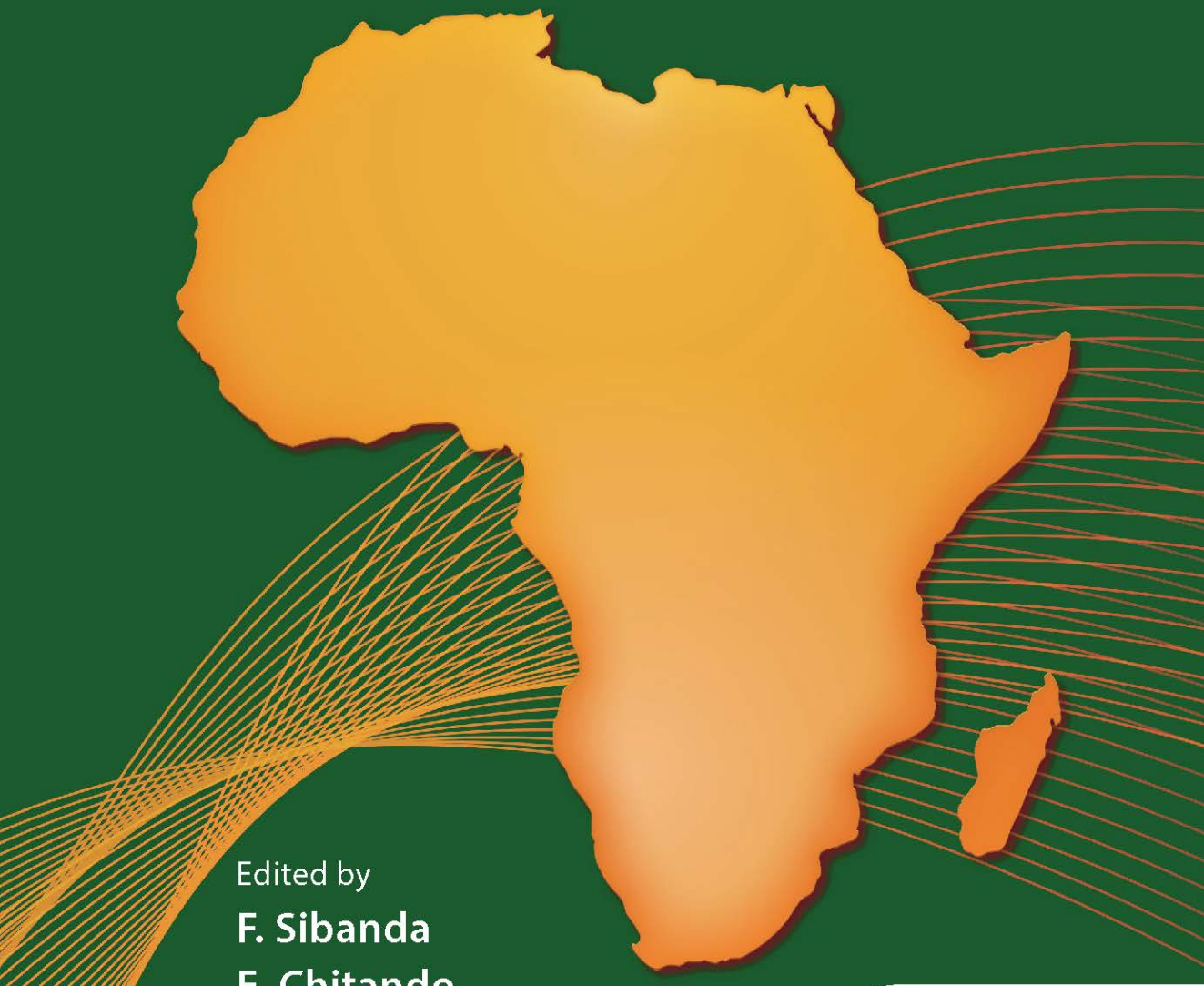

Edited by
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13 The role of religious leaders in supporting Niger's political revolution of 26 July 2023

Seyni Moumouni[1]

INTRODUCTION

Over the past four years, the international order has been turned upside down by several global crises: the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, terrorism in the Sahel and the recent wave of coups d'état in Africa. After Mali in 2020, Guinea in 2021 and Burkina Faso in 2022, it became Niger's turn to experience a coup d'état on 26 July 2023. This has prompted observers to speak about a "coup epidemic" or a "contagious coup", with a new phenomenon of "coup within a coup". The coup d'état that took place in Niger on 26 July 2023 was unexpected by the government of President Mohamed Bazoum. But what is special about these coups is that they are endemic and have caught off guard the "powerful boss-states" which for decades have intervened directly in the choice of leaders of the people, whose will is superbly ignored or altered by the corrupted votes.

The coup of 26 July 2023 was Niger's fifth military coup. The new authorities of Niger united within the CNSP (National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland / Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie). The CNSP is made up of military chiefs from Niger's defence and security forces. The Council is headed by General Abdourahamane Tchiani. The coup process in Niger was similar to that in. Mali and Burkina Faso, which had justified the overthrow of their regimes by the continuous deterioration of security and bad political, economic and social governance.[2] In the early hours of the coup d'état, there was first of all uncertainty, then fear of manipulation by the regime in power, because the deposed regime had prevented so-called coups (fake coups d'état) in the past, and Nigeriens had no idea that it would be possible to topple the government like a sandcastle. But when the coup was confirmed, thousands of Nigeriens spontaneously went in the streets to express their joy and relief. It was at this moment that the slogan "*Laabu Sanni No!*" (Homeland above all!) was born, and the watchword was sung everywhere to mobilise the population.

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1 Research Director in Ideas Civilisation and History, African and Malagasy Council of High Education (Cames); Former Director of IRSH (Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines), Abdou Moumouni University; Corresponding Member, UNESCO's Sub-Commission "Education and Research"; Chairman, UNESCO National Committee of World Memory. Director of the Scientific Laboratory: Langue et Civilisation Arabo-musulmanes (LICA).

2 Moumouni S. 2018. "Religious Radicalism and Security Threats in the Sahel", in Green MC, Gunn TJ, Mark Hill M (eds) *Religion, Law and Security in Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 21-30.

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Faced with the challenges facing the revolution, what strategies did the people develop to support the CNSP's political leaders? And what role did religious leaders play in this movement to defend the revolution and the homeland? This chapter begins with an overview of the first hours of the 26 July 2023, revolution. It then analyzes the sanctions and threats facing Niger. It offers a historical, political and religious overview of Niger to show the weight of religion in mobilising the masses and the spirit of living together reigning between the different religious groups, and it analyzes the moral and spiritual aspects and tools in the religious discourse of political and religious leaders.

THE FIRST HOURS OF THE REVOLUTION "*LAABU SANNI NO!*"

For the deeply religious people of Niger, it was the Hand of Allah, the Almighty, Clement and Merciful, who had come to rescue the people of Niger from their suffering. God was seen as the sole architect of the events that have unfolded in Niger since 26 July 2023. He has been main recourse. Any form of disobedience to God is seen as a brake on the struggle. In the huge crowd gathered at the Place de la Concertation, a veteran said loudly: "Niger! Niger outraged! Niger broken! Niger martyred! But Niger liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of its Army!"[3] Then the veteran prostrated himself, performing two *rakats* (cyles of prayer) and asking God for justice for the victims of terrorism in Niger at Banibangou to Bosso, justice for all the children of Téra killed by the French army and freedom for Sheikh Ali Boureima Djabourga,[4] who was unjustly kept in prison.[5] A young man climbed to the top of the buildings to hoist the Niger flag, to the applause of the crowd and accompanied by the national anthem.

To the democracy of imposed servitude, the people of Niger opposed the strength of popular legitimacy, which they used as a solid shield to protect the providential "coup d'état" that had just freed them from an external occupation and influence.

3 De Gaulle C. 1944. Speech of General De Gaulle's delivered at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, France, 25 August 1944 (known for the statement, "Paris outraged! Paris Broken! Paris martyred! But Paris liberated!")

4 Sheikh Ali Boureima Djabourga is a 65-year-old reputed religious leader from the village of Djabourga Dargol in the Tera department of the Tillaberi region.

5 The French military convoy in transit from Niger to Mali fired on demonstrators in Téra who were protesting against the presence of foreign military bases. See "Au Niger, deux morts dans des heurts lors du passage d'un convoi militaire français" [In Niger, two dead in clashes during the passage of a French military convoy], *Le Monde*, 27 November 2021. In the wake of the Tamou tragedy on Monday October 24, 65-year-old religious leader Sheikh Ali Boureima delivered a public sermon castigating the authorities of Bazoum's regime for their handling of the insecurity that continues to plunge Nigeriens into mourning, particularly in the Tillabéri region. He prayed that God would come to Niger's aid against those plotting with outsiders to create chaos in the country. Arrested and sentenced to two (2) years in prison on 8 November 2022. Sheikh Ali was released on 28 September 2023. See "Insécurités et liberté d'expression: Cheikh Ali Boureima, la parole qui dérange" [Insecurity and freedom of expression: Cheikh Ali Boureiman, speech that disturbs] NigerDiaspora.net, 9 November 2022.

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Niger has experienced several coups d'état, but never before have we witnessed such a mobilisation of the people in support of the Army. In 2018, the deposed regime decided to change the national anthem "La Nigérienne".[6] On 22 June 2022, the plenary session of the parliament voted in favour of the new anthem, entitled "L'honneur de la patrie". It was then promulgated by Law n°2023-27 of 26 June 2023 one month before the revolutionary coup.[7]

The title and content of this new anthem are perfectly in tune with the ideals of the revolution and the concept of "*Laabu Sanni No!"* This concept theorises the commitment of the people of Niger to support the revolution. It served as a full train, in a patriotic burst to galvanise young revolutionaries. The powerful and moving images of these men, women and children chanting the revolution's new national anthem and storming the country's symbolic squares in support of the revolution will remain engraved in the memory of the people of Niger. This people's revolution reflects the immense anger and hardship endured by the people of Niger for more than a decade, during which the country's existential conditions were mortgaged in the grip of terrorism. The people's revolution demand justice for the sacrificed young fighters of the defence and security forces, justice for civilian and military victims, justice for the young people of killed at Téra killed, justice for displaced populations, justice for closed schools, justice for misappropriated public property, justice for violated freedoms. Justice of all sorts!

Like all revolutions, that of Niger which happened on 26 July 2023 was a palace revolution for freedom and dignity against occupation, oppression and servitude. This chapter was inspired by the 26 July 2023 military coup of the CNSP (Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie) and the incredibly popular support it generated in the idea of a "Niger revolution".

SANCTIONS AND THREAT OF MILITARY INTERVENTION AGAINST NIGER

Following the coup d'état, a conference of heads of state and government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held on 30 July 2023 in Abuja, Nigeria, called on the military to restore constitutional order by reinstating President Mohamed Bazoum. This decision was accompanied by sanctions and a seven-day ultimatum running from 31 July to 6 August 2023, with the option of military intervention on the table. These are unprecedented and extremely serious sanctions against Niger, in various respects, which experts consider illegal because they have no legal basis. A total of nine sanctions have been imposed, including the closure of land and air borders between ECOWAS countries and Niger, and the suspension of all commercial, financial and service transactions between ECOWAS member states and Niger. Nigeria has suspended its electricity supply to Niger, and Benin has closed its border and access to the sea to Niger. These sanctions have caused thousands of hospital deaths and worsened the country's socio-economic

6 The old anthem, "La Nigérienne", was adopted by Law n°61-20 of July 12, 1961.

7 Law n°2023-27 of 26 June 2023.

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situation. Due to the lack of medical supplies on site and the ban on humanitarian aid. General Abdourahamane Tchiani asserted in one of his speeches: "Those who oppose us have no limits when it comes to defending their selfish interests. They will only stop in the face of the Niger people's determination to defend their interests and sovereignty. They will stop only in the face of a united people led by patriotic leaders. They will only stop in the face of our resilience and our commitment to defend our dignity, our freedom and our country."[8] But CNSP is accompanied by the popular revolution, on the condition of a reciprocity aiming at immediately satisfying the interests of people with respect security, territorial and economic sovereignty and social justice. The new authorities accuse regional institutions such as ECOWAS of double standards in their decision making. For the same reasons, Niger has been more severely punished than other countries that have experienced coups d'état before it, such as Mali in 2020, Guinea in 2021 and Burkina Faso in 2022.

These sanctions are considered by the majority of the people inappropriate and unacceptable, aggravating the socio-economic situation and impacting populations already hard-hit by years of insecurity, while at the same time strengthening terrorist groups. Military intervention is not one of the sanctions foreseen by the law of ECOWAS. Moreover, Article 58 of the revised ECOWAS Treaty obliges states to work towards preserving and maintaining peace, stability and security in the region, giving priority to dialogue, consultation, conciliation, mediation and other peaceful means of settling disputes.[9] In short, the diplomatic route must be preferred in this situation. The people of Niger believe that sub-regional institutions such as ECOWAS and Precede with: West African Economic and Monetary Union UEMOA are out of touch with African realities. They have been too quick to make decisions.

In Africa, alongside the institutional framework for conflict resolution, there is a traditional space for conflict resolution. Before any sanctions are applied, there should be negotiation involving traditional chiefs, religious leaders and communities of elders. It was long after sanctions had been applied that ECOWAS sent delegations to negotiate. The people are severely affected by these sanctions, and do not understand what is being done to them. This situation has led to the mobilisation of the nation's forces of all persuasions in support of CNSP. Traditional chiefs, religious leaders and civil society organisations, including youth organisations, took part in marches and declarations of support and condemnation of the economic and diplomatic sanctions against Niger. ECOWAS's stance against Niger and the threat of military intervention led to the mobilisation of religious and civil society organisations in the public debate. The presence of religious

8 Tchiani A. 2023. Speech of President General Abdourahamane Tchiani on the occasion of Niger's Independence Day, 2 August 2023.

9 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). 1993. Revised Treaty. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission, Cotonou, 24 July, art 58, para 2(e) (requiring that signatory states « employ where appropriate, good offices, conciliation, mediation and other methods of peaceful settlement of disputes »).

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leaders in the public arena in Niger is part of history that reflects the evolution of Niger's social and political life. The participation of religious leaders in popular demonstrations in defence of the homeland and against the presence of foreign bases has attracted the attention of observers.[10] In the Sahel—and in Niger in particular—the security context has been marked for several years by the presence of terrorist groups which sow chaos and desolation. Exactions by terrorist groups against the civilian population are becoming increasingly recurrent. The terrorists' actions are characterised by the forced levying of the *zakat* (religious tax), kidnappings, targeted assassinations of traditional chiefs and religious leaders, physical violence, theft and confiscation of property.

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS OVERVIEW OF NIGER

As a former French colony, Niger became an independent state in 1960. The Niger of today is located in West Africa, between the Sahara in the north and the Sahel in the south. As President of the Governing Council (1957-1958) Djibo Bakary (1922-1998), Niger's was the first head of government under colonial rule. He campaigned for full independence for Niger within Sawaba (Parti Progressiste Nigérien) his political party. Bakara took a stand against the "French community" in the 1958 constitutional referendum. His stance in favour of African emancipation, justice and social reform led to his political marginalisation. Bakara stated: "I believe our duty is to tell France's representatives what the vast majority of the people we claim to represent want and think. To serve the cause of the greatest number, not to use it as a springboard to satisfy ambitions of pleasure and power. To achieve this, we need to know our problems for ourselves and by ourselves and have the will to solve them by our own means first, then with the help of others, but always taking into account our African realities."[11]

More than sixty years after Niger's nominal independence in 1960, these problems remain unresolved, despite the immense mining resources discovered later, some of which are being exploited to the detriment of the people. Niger is one of the countries with the greatest potential in terms of mining, natural and energy resources, but it is regularly ranked last in the development index. This reflects the failure of the economic and social policies implemented by successive regimes.[12]

Like other African countries, Niger's population is deeply religious. Niger's religious context is marked by the presence of two groups of believers: the

10 « Sahel : les leaders salafistes, alliés inattendus des régimes putschistes » [Sahel: Salafist leaders, unexpected allies of putschist regimes], *Le Monde*, 26 February 2024.

11 Bakary D. 1992 « Silence ! on décolonise…» : itinéraire politique et syndical d'un militant Africain » [Silence! we decolonise…": political and trade union itinerary of an African activist]. Paris : *L'Harmattan*, Paris, 9.

12 See Djibo M. 2001. *Les transformations politiques au Niger à la veille de l'indépendance*. [Political transformations in Niger on the eve of independence]. Paris: L'Harmattan, 29; Zakari M. 2009. *L'islam dans l'espace nigérien: des origines à 2000* [Islam in Niger: from its origins to 2000], vols 1 and 2. Paris: L'Harmattan.

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monotheistic group, made up of the so-called "religions of the book" (Islam and Christianity), and the polytheistic group, which includes followers of the traditional religion known as animism. The first group is embraced by the majority of the population, while the second, although much smaller in number, receives the same treatment from the ministry in charge.[13] This religious landscape quickly reveals the remarkable dynamism of monotheistic religions in general, and Islam in particular. In Niger, different religions coexist peacefully.

Animism. Niger's religious context is that of the Sahel. Niger, like the rest of the Sahelian countries, it has inherited the traditional religion of the land, the ancient religious practices found in all human societies. The religion of authentic Africa is animism: belief in the forces of nature. Africa is often associated with the world of fetishes and masks. Ancestor worship, the worship of bush spirits and the phenomena of possession are all manifestations of African religiosity. Traditional religion has many followers within Islam and Christianity. Syncretistic practice in Africa has been the subject of numerous socio-anthropological studies. Indeed, Muslims and Christians frequently consult animist priests at the same time. Animist cults can be found all over Niger.

Islam. The Islamic religion is practised by the majority of Nigeriens. The strong social influence of Islam can hardly be overstated. The relationship between Islam and politics has been deeply rooted in Sahelian countries since the Middle Ages. Everywhere, Islamic cultural centres were built in crossroads towns. These centres attracted the *ulemas* of the Islamic world. This tradition, both sacred and political, was observed by successive sub-Saharan kings and rulers in the hope of deriving maximum religious and political gain from this reality. In the Niger of today, since its nominal independence, the country's political leaders have integrated into their daily lives acts designed to prove their religiosity—their "Islamity"—through participation in public religious ceremonies, such as weekly Friday prayers and collective prayers on the Muslim feasts of Ramadan, Tabaski and Mouloud (the commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). In 1962 and 1966, President Diori Hamani made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Since then, the rite of pilgrimage to Mecca has been part of the political and cultural agenda of all Niger's other heads of state.[14]

Christianity. The first Christians to settle in Niger were the fathers of SMA (Société des Missions Africaines). From the moment they arrived, they set to work evangelising the people of Niger. These missions were taken over by their co-religionists who arrived in Niger. These included the SIM (Sudan Interrior Mission)

13 There is no discrimination against animism, since the state recognises all religions practised on the territory.

14 The Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine attended the Hajj 2024 accompanied by several members of the government. See "Hadj 2024: Le Premier Ministre, Ministre de l'Economie et des Finances Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine à Médine en Arabie Saoudite" [Hajj 2024: Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Finance Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine in Medina in Saudi Arabia], *Radio-télévision du Niger* (RTN)/YouTube.

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of Protestants in 1924, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles in 1947 and the Redemptorists in 1948. As soon as they arrived, these missions set about evangelising the people of Niger. Christians were divided between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics are grouped together in the Archdiocese of Niamey and in the Dioceses of Maradi and Zinder, while Protestants are to be found in the various districts through their temples and chapels.

The missions have worked both in town and in the countryside, with many achievements to their credit in the socio-cultural, health and religious fields. In the early 1960s, Niger established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. According to the newspaper *La Croix* in 1978, there were six hundred and fifty Catholics in Niger. Most of them came from animist localities, such as Doutchi and Dolbal. According to the same source, in addition to Niger Catholics, there were also twelve thousand foreign Catholics. In 2016, eleven SMA priests (SMA) carried out a first evangelisation ministry in Niamey and in the interior of the country.

In 2016, according to Kimso Boureima, President of the Alliance des Missionnaires des Eglises Evangéliques du Niger, Protestants numbered 60,000, mainly of Nigerien nationality, and Catholics numbered 35,000, often from other countries. In Niger, religious communities have always lived in perfect harmony. The authorities, anxious to preserve the climate of peace, have constantly taken measures to preserve and consolidate this peace and promote religious cohabitation. According to Bishop Michel Cartéguy: "Since its establishment in Niger in 1931, the Catholic Christian community has always been the object of benevolence on the part of the Nigerien authorities who have succeeded one another at the head of the State."[15]

The Nigerien authorities, concerned with the preservation of social peace, have always encouraged a good cohabitation between the religions that exist in Niger. All the constitutions of the Republic of Niger have reaffirmed the secular character of the Republic, except that of the Third Republic, where the term secular was replaced by reference to the "non-confessional" character of the Republic. On the subject of secularism, former president Diori Hamani has said: "The State of Niger has proclaimed itself to be secular, but secularism cannot be confused with anti-religious sectarianism. Our State respects all convictions, and surrounds all beliefs with the same respect, regardless of the numerical importance of their followers."[16] Thus, the Nigerian religious world is made up mostly of monotheists who believe in a single God, and are by far the most numerous, but polytheists have their place in the Republic alongside monotheists.

15 Michel Cartatéguy was Archbishop of Niamey from 2007 to 2014. He was replaced by the current archbishop, Monsignor Laurent Lampo.

16 Zakari M. 2009. « Le christianisme au niger contemporain » [Christianity in contemporary Niger], *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* [Africa: Quarterly magazine of studies and documentation of the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient, 64(3/4):530 (quoting Hamani D, *Le temps du Niger*, 16 May 1967).

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MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS IN THE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE OF POLITICAL LEADERS.

In Niger, religious people have always played a role in the crucial moments of its transformation. African religion scholar says in his book *Les musulmans et le pouvoir en Afrique noire* that "Islam ... was and remains both the translation and the vehicle of change." It has "emerged as a modern solution to the desperate quest for a meaning to be given to collective destinies to be built".[17] In the struggle for national liberation and the safeguarding of the homeland, religious leaders supported the revolution, which they considered to be in line with their decolonial commitment. In their speeches, religious leaders denounce the various influences of Western culture on Nigerien society, but behaviour, culture, languages and minds remain strongly impacted by colonisation. According to the political scientist Ndlovu Gatsheni,[18] "decoloniality" can take have two different dimensions. The first is a political and epistemological dimension aiming at liberating the peoples of the "former" colonies from the manifestations of the "coloniality" in the knowledge of thought and persons. The second is that it encompasses a "necessary language of the future of Africa".[19]

On 30 June and 1 July 2023, the President of National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) received traditional chiefs and religious leaders both from Muslims and Christians. The delegations were led by Sheikh Djibril Soumaila Karanta and the Catholic Church's General Vicar Abbé Anthony. The discussions were focused on the situation that Niger was facing after the events of 26 July 2023. The President General Abdourahamane Tchiani called for a patriotic surge and a sacred union behind the Security and Defence Forces (SDF) to face up to the threats against Niger. The CSNP president also received the Honourable Muhammad Sanussi II and the Sultan of Damagaram, the Honourable Aboubacar Sanda. On his arrival, the Emir of Kano, the Honourable Muhammad Sanussi II, emphasised the personal nature of his trip: "I have come in my own name, as I have noted it, and not on behalf of any government."[20] The religious leader regretted the current tensions between Nigeria and Niger, which are of concern to all citizens of both countries. In the face of such a situation, religious and traditional leaders cannot remain silent. He called on the entire Islamic Ummah to pray that Allah will bring us Peace and

17 Coulon C. 1983. *Les musulmans et le pouvoir en Afrique noire* [Muslims and power in black Africa], Paris : Kartala, Paris, 6.

18 See Ndlovu-Gatsheni SJ. 2015. "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa", *History Compass*, 13(10):485 -96.

19 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa", 485.

20 Yahya S. 2023. "Situation socio-politique: le Président du CNSP reçoit l'honorable Muhammad Sanusi II et le Sultan de Damagaram" [Socio-political situation: the President of the CNSP recognises the honourable Muhammad Sanusi II and the Sultan of Damagaram], *Le Sahel*, 13 August.

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prevent any conflict between Niger and Nigeria in particular, and between African countries in general."[21]

A few days later, on 12 August 2023, the CNSP received a large delegation of religious leaders from Nigeria, led by Sheikh Abdulahi Bala Lau.[22] The people of Niger had never felt so committed to a movement of resistance in the face of adversity for the reconquest and restoration of their sovereignty. A state which has its territory, or a portion of it, occupied by foreign forces cannot place itself among free and independent states.

MORALISING AND SPIRITUAL TOOLS: PREACHING AND COLLECTIVE PRAYERS

In response to the meeting with the military authorities, the president of the Islamic Association of Niger invited the Muslim faithful to a collective prayer at Niamey's Grand Mosque. Muslims have denounced the belligerent behaviour of sub-regional institutions, and they have prayed for the victory of the of the military grouped in Security and Defence Forces (FDS) in the fight for Niger people's dignity and the respect of the country's sovereignty. The Nigerien people expressed their gratitude to Mali and Burkina Faso for their moral and military support. They invited all the Muslims to a new collective prayer on Friday 25 August 2023. They also asked them to fast and multiply invocations every Thursday, and to invoke Allah against the enemies of Niger. Because prayer is the believer's weapon. Religious leaders are men of prayer. They pray and invite others to pray. We need to pray and ask God to help us all find the right path that will bring us closer to God, without distancing us from one another and for the happiness of all. We must ask God to guide political leaders.

On Friday 8 September 2023, religious leaders from the Ahlusunna wa Djama'a Association[23] and the Tidjaniyya Brotherhood[24] organised a prayer and preaching session at Escadrille Crossroad,[25] named Place de la Résistance, against the presence of foreign armed forces in Niger. Although there is talk of a separation of powers between state and religion, there is really no opposition between the two. Religious leaders keep close to the political arena in many ways. Preaching is the main medium for political life, the state and society.

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21 Yahya, "Situation socio-politique: le Président du CNSP reçoit l'honorable Muhammad Sanusi II et le Sultan de Damagaram".

22 Yahya, "Situation socio-politique : le Président du CNSP reçoit l'honorable Muhammad Sanusi II et le Sultan de Damagaram".

23 The branch of fundamentalist Islamic founded by Muḥammad ben 'Abd al-Wahhāb. See Chabbi J. n.d. "Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb," Universalis.fr.

24 The Sufi brotherhood (*ṭarīqah*), founded by Aḥmad Al-Tijānī in 1782.

25 Abdou O. 2025. "Prières collective en soutien le CNSP: Le population imporle la paix, le prospérité, la stabilité et la cohésion sociale" [Collective prices in the CNSP: The population imposes peace, prosperity, stability and social cohesion], *Le Sahel*, 27 January.

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In the days following the "coup d'état", the daily life of Nigeriens was enflamed by preaching through the media and within the society in both urban and rural areas. The sermon began with demands in terms of values to be observed and countervalues to be rejected. The values are: (1) unity, (2) *sharia* (Muslim law), (3) *tarbiyya* (Islamic education), (4) social justice and (5) fairness. The counter-values are: (1) *shirk* (associating God with other gods), (2) *bid'a* (innovation) and (3) *qabilantchi* (Hausa for tribalism).

The first value emphasised was the *unity* that is the basis of patriotism and development. We must be united to safeguard our homeland. The fight must be waged in the sole interest of the nation. If we want this fight to succeed, we have to see no particular interest other than Niger. We must put Niger first. The fight for sovereignty is superior to personal interests. The second value that was emphasised was *sharia*, that "*doka Musilmtchi*" (Hausa for Muslim law) is the fundamental value that must govern Niger society and that we must not accept any law that is at odds with Islamic values. A third source of value was *tarbiyya*, a set of codes, practices and social, cultural and religious norms designed to determine the ethical choices and claims of the individual in society. The norms of *tarbiyya* are based on the cultural register of "good" cultural values and the values upheld by the Sunna. Islamic education (*tarbiyya*) was to serve as a moral shield to protect young people from depravity and deviance. Religious leaders call for curriculum reform. School curricula must be oriented towards Islamic values, development and in-depth knowledge of the country. The aim is to develop the love of their country in the heart of citizens through religious knowledge. Any program that does not take into account the realities of the country must be rejected. A fourth source of values is *adaltchi* (Hausa for social justice), with the Sunna as the key foundation of justice. Justice is the foundation of peace in any society. Moreover, God is for equity and calls people to greater fairness. So, we must act fairly. Change is only possible if we change ourselves, by practicing justice and avoiding straying from God's path. Finally, a fifth value is fairness as the foundation of development. Fairness is the driving force of society. Lack of fairness and injustice create frustration and destroy social harmony and peace. Social justice and fairness are the keys to development.

The counter-values are those that religious leaders believe associate Islamic values with other cultures, that Islam should be separate and apart from culture. The first countervalue is *shirk*, associating Islam with other cultures. Islamic fundamentalist discourse advocates an authentic Islam free of all other influences. So, the value there is the Sunna (Islamic tradition). Against this, religious leaders call for a return to prophetic tradition and propose a conception of modernity rooted in Islamic identity. The second counter-value is *bid'a* (innovation). On this point, Islamic clerics consider that Nigerien society is indiscriminately integrating everything that comes from outside. *Bid'a* takes place in particular, through the intrusion of the media in all its forms into the lives of Nigeriens. The expression "the world is a planetary village", and the concept of globalisation as "*maida duniya cikin daki guida*", which

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in Hausa literally means "locking the world up in one room".[26] Religious leaders believe that globalisation contributes to cultural alienation and moral domination. The third countervalue, *qabiilantchi* (racism), is a weapon used by imperialists to divide Africans and interfere in their affairs. Believers must avoid distinguishing themselves on communal, religious or other grounds. For God has said that we are all brothers and sisters of a single community, namely, the *Umma* or Islamic community.

CONCLUSION

Religious leaders have a powerful influence on people. The role of religious leaders in revolutions is complex and varies according to context. In Niger, religious leaders played a crucial role in supporting the revolution led by patriotic, republican military officers. It was a citizens' revolution, not an Islamic one, as in Iran in 1979. The strong mobilisation of the Nigerien people, jealous of their newfound freedom, was hailed the world over. It was underpinned by a strong understanding that the people of Niger were capable of assuming their responsibilities and defending them under the watchword: *Laabu Sanni No*. Defend the homeland when it is threatened.

The speeches of religious and civil society leaders give them an important social and political role, making them a counterweight in political governance. Niger's socio-political trajectory reveals their political weight. They are endowed with a capacity to influence the options of the state, which can only function by relying on policies. Their preaching on the love and defence of the homeland has shaped their sense of citizenship and their attachment to public affairs. In addition to their initial commitment to defend the Islamic religious values of Nigerien society, they set themselves the new task of producing a new nationalist discourse nourished by the sources of Islamic symbols. The result is a political use of religion.

The Islamic Association of Niger was assigned this task. The secular and religious contradictions dissipate and the alliance characterises their relationship. This alliance of circumstance between religious leaders and the state is aimed at the same objective, but the different allies do not have the same means at their disposal. Demonstrators specialise in various means of struggle, and each makes its own contribution.

Nevertheless, collective prayers, supererogatory fasting, the *Dua* (invocation) and *Kunut* (collective prayer) are the instruments used to combat external aggression. The occasion of these religious practices creates a communion of hearts between the demonstrators. Performance in resistance, or in the garb of resistance, means that each protester respects the other's area of specialisation. In other words, clerics preach, lead collective prayers and invoke God, while civil society actors deliver essentially secular discourses seasoned or sprinkled with religious expressions

26 Rhissa Achaffert H. 2024. « Yakin Kwkwlwai : Dimension Décoloniale d'un combat épistémologique au sein de l'Association Ihyaous Sunnah au Niger », Working Paper No. 46, Institute of African Studies, University of Beyreuth.

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decentred from their religious discursive space to a profane one. Thus, even political authorities give a religious tone to their speeches. Niger has experienced five coups d'état in its political history. Of these coups, the one of July 26, 2023 stood out from the others because of the context in which it took place. The security context linked to terrorism in the Sahel had a major influence on the coups d'état in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It was also this security situation that led to the strong support and mobilisation of the population.

By conveying moral and ethical principles such as respect for human dignity, justice, honesty and integrity, among others, religious leaders have a direct influence on the way business is conducted in societies. Religious leaders have a direct influence on the way business is conducted in societies. This can have an impact on transparency, accountability and trust in socio-cultural, economic and commercial relations. Religions are a factor for development, with expertise in almost every area of social life. Indeed, schools, universities, vocational training centres and faith-based health centres are renowned for the quality of their various services. And religious leaders are the promoters or managers of these works.

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