Living in the Wilderness? Or the Production of Displacement Culture under Enduring Political Insecurity in Chad.

Jonna Both[1], Mirjam De Bruijn[2] and Nakar S. Ndjindil[3]

[1]·AISSR, Amsterdam University, Cultural Anthropology, Amsterdam , The Netherlands
[2]·African Studies Centre, Anthropology/ History, Leiden, The Netherlands
[3]·Wageningen University, Nutriton, Wageningen, The Netherlands

jonnaboth@hotmail.com

In Chad an often heard reference to government agents like the military, police, customs and the government more in general is 'Les Sauvages'. 'The wild (people) refers mainly to the idea that the brutal acting by these agents is influenced by their inability to read and write, only knowing and acting upon a culture of violence. The common man experiences that there is no justice for him in the country. It is an expression by those feeling repressed and not feeling represented by the clan of people in power. This feeling is enduring and has a long history.

'Displacement is an exile of older certitudes of meaning, a possibly permanent sojourn in the wilderness.' (Hirsch 1994: 7, referring to Krupnik1983)

How does 'living in the wilderness' (not a reference to Chad as a *Heart of Darkness*, but as a permanent move away from (older)certitudes of meaning) or the feeling of being ruled by 'wild people' affect people on the long term? Does one need to become ´a wild man´ to survive an enduring wilderness?

In this paper we propose to study the impact of long term political insecurity on people in Chad. Instead of focussing on people in the margins of society, we focus on people in the middle: civil servants and their families. Not only meant to describe the current volatile situation in Chad that is marked by geographical displacement, disownment, marginalisation and political repression, the paper takes a historical perspective, emphasizing the enduring repression and the way this consecutively has become deeply engrained into the social fabric and the effect this has on people's identities and feelings of belonging. A new political culture, informed by fear and survival has been internalised by the people in our research.

To emphasize the continuum of, as well as variations in, insecurity we study two generations of people from southern Chad, allowing the stories of different generations of social navigation to take us more than 50 years back in history. We question whether we could frame what happens to the social fabric in its long term engagement with political insecurity, as producing a 'displacement culture'. And aim to establish how such an understanding will be fruitful to our understanding of societies marked by extensive political insecurity.