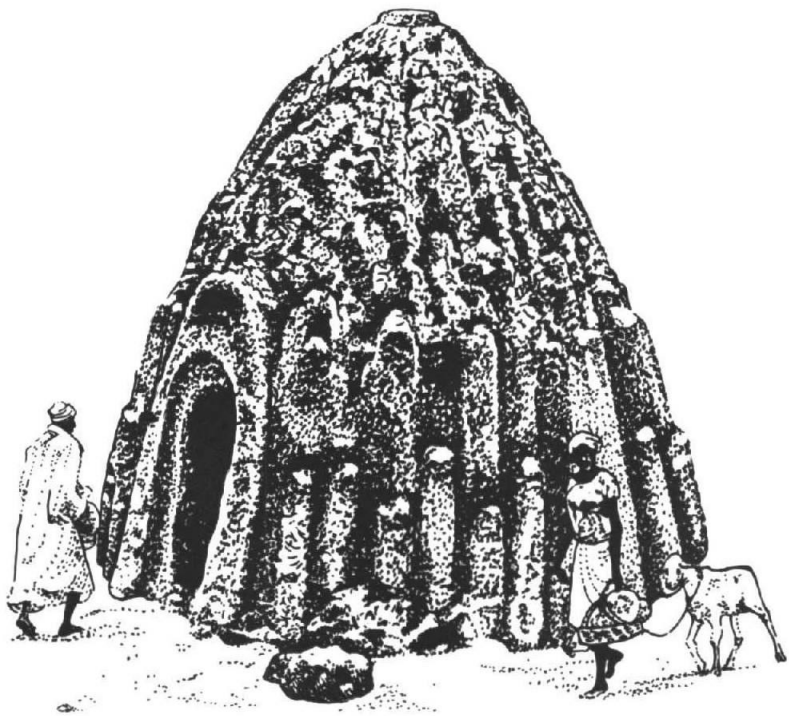
Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment



A bee-hived shaped mud hut, sometimes found in areas of Mayo-Kebbi Prefecture

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATION, ETHNIC and linguistic diversity, and religious differences have presented serious obstacles to nation building in Chad. A range of environments has contributed to the evolution of a variety of life-styles and social structures, including nomadic societies in the Sahara Desert in the north, seminomadic (or semisedentary) peoples in the Sahel (see Glossary) in the center, and agricultural communities in the *soudanian* south. With three of Africa's four major language families represented within its borders, Chad's peoples do not share broad cultural characteristics, as do, for example, the Bantu peoples of countries in central, eastern, and southern Africa. Religion also divides Chad's people among followers of classical African religions, Islam, and Christianity. Ethnic differences often overlay and intensify these divisions.

Preoccupied with assuring the country's survival, successive Chadian governments have had little motivation or resources to deal with urgent social and economic problems. Up-to-date population data—necessary for reliable development planning—are lacking; however, a census scheduled for 1989 promised to remedy this problem partially.

Other challenges include providing adequate education and health care. Starting in the mid-1960s, civil strife has undermined the Chadian goal of universal primary school education. It has also brought the exile of much of the country's intellectual community and the flight of foreign personnel who had staffed institutions of higher learning. Health care has fared even more poorly than has education. Although the number of medical facilities of all kinds seems to have grown between the early 1970s and the early 1980s, the number of trained personnel has not kept pace. And once again, the violence of war and discontent with the government in rural areas have provoked the closing of many facilities and the flight of their staffs.

Physical Setting

Located in north-central Africa, Chad stretches for about 1,800 kilometers from its northernmost point to its southern boundary. Except in the far northwest and south, where its borders converge, Chad's average width is about 800 kilometers. Its area of 1,284,000 square kilometers is roughly equal to the combined areas of Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. Chad's neighbors include

Libya to the north, Niger and Nigeria to the west, Sudan to the east, Central African Republic to the south, and Cameroon to the southwest.

Chad exhibits two striking geographical characteristics. First, the country is landlocked. N'Djamena, the capital, is located more than 1,100 kilometers northeast of the Atlantic Ocean; Abéché, a major city in the east, lies 2,650 kilometers from the Red Sea; and Faya Largeau, a much smaller but strategically important center in the north, is in the middle of the Sahara Desert, 1,550 kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea. These vast distances from the sea have had a profound impact on Chad's historical and contemporary development. The second noteworthy characteristic is that the country borders on very different parts of the African continent: North Africa, with its Islamic culture and economic orientation toward the Mediterranean Basin; West Africa, with its diverse religions and cultures and its history of highly developed states and regional economies; Northeast Africa, oriented toward the Nile Valley and Red Sea region; and Central or Equatorial Africa, some of whose people have retained classical African religions while others have adopted Christianity, and whose economies were part of the great Zaire River system. Although much of Chad's distinctiveness comes from this diversity of influences, since independence the diversity has also been an obstacle to the creation of a national identity.

The Land

Although Chadian society is economically, socially, and culturally fragmented, the country's geography is unified by the Lake Chad Basin (see fig. 3). Once a huge inland sea (the Paleochadian Sea) whose only remnant is shallow Lake Chad, this vast depression extends west into Nigeria and Niger. The larger, northern portion of the basin is bounded within Chad by the Tibesti Mountains in the northwest, the Ennedi Plateau in the northeast, the Ouaddaï Highlands in the east along the border with Sudan, the Guéra Massif in central Chad, and the Mandara Mountains along Chad's southwestern border with Cameroon. The smaller, southern part of the basin falls almost exclusively in Chad. It is delimited in the north by the Guéra Massif, in the south by highlands 250 kilometers south of the border with Central African Republic, and in the southwest by the Mandara Mountains.

Lake Chad, located in the southwestern part of the basin at an altitude of 282 meters, surprisingly does not mark the basin's lowest point; instead, this is found in the Bodele and Djourab regions in the north-central and northeastern parts of the country, respectively.

This oddity arises because the great stationary dunes (*ergs*) of the Kanem region create a dam, preventing lake waters from flowing to the basin's lowest point. At various times in the past, and as late as the 1870s, the Bahr el Ghazal Depression, which extends from the northeastern part of the lake to the Djourab, acted as an overflow canal; since independence, climatic conditions have made overflows impossible.

North and northeast of Lake Chad, the basin extends for more than 800 kilometers, passing through regions characterized by great rolling dunes separated by very deep depressions. Although vegetation holds the dunes in place in the Kanem region, farther north they are bare and have a fluid, rippling character. From its low point in the Djourab, the basin then rises to the plateaus and peaks of the Tibesti Mountains in the north. The summit of this formation—as well as the highest point in the Sahara Desert—is Emi Koussi, a dormant volcano that reaches 3,414 meters above sea level. The basin's northeastern limit is the Ennedi Plateau, whose limestone bed rises in steps etched by erosion.

East of the lake, the basin rises gradually to the Ouaddaï Highlands, which mark Chad's eastern border and also divide the Chad and Nile watersheds. Southeast of Lake Chad, the regular contours of the terrain are broken by the Guéra Massif, which divides the basin into its northern and southern parts.

South of the lake lie the floodplains of the Chari and Logone rivers, much of which are inundated during the rainy season. Farther south, the basin floor slopes upward, forming a series of low sand and clay plateaus, called *koros,* which eventually climb to 615 meters above sea level. South of the Chadian border, the *koros* divide the Lake Chad Basin from the Ubangi-Zaire river system.

Water Systems

Permanent streams do not exist in northern or central Chad. Following infrequent rains in the Ennedi Plateau and Ouaddaï Highlands, water may flow through depressions called *enneris* and wadis. Often the result of flash floods, such streams usually dry out within a few days as the remaining puddles seep into the sandy clay soil. The most important of these streams is the Batha, which in the rainy season carries water west from the Ouaddaï Highlands and the Guéra Massif to Lake Fitri.

Chad's major rivers are the Chari and the Logone and their tributaries, which flow from the southeast into Lake Chad. Both river systems rise in the highlands of Central African Republic and Cameroon, regions that receive more than 1,250 millimeters of rainfall annually. Fed by rivers of Central African Republic, as well

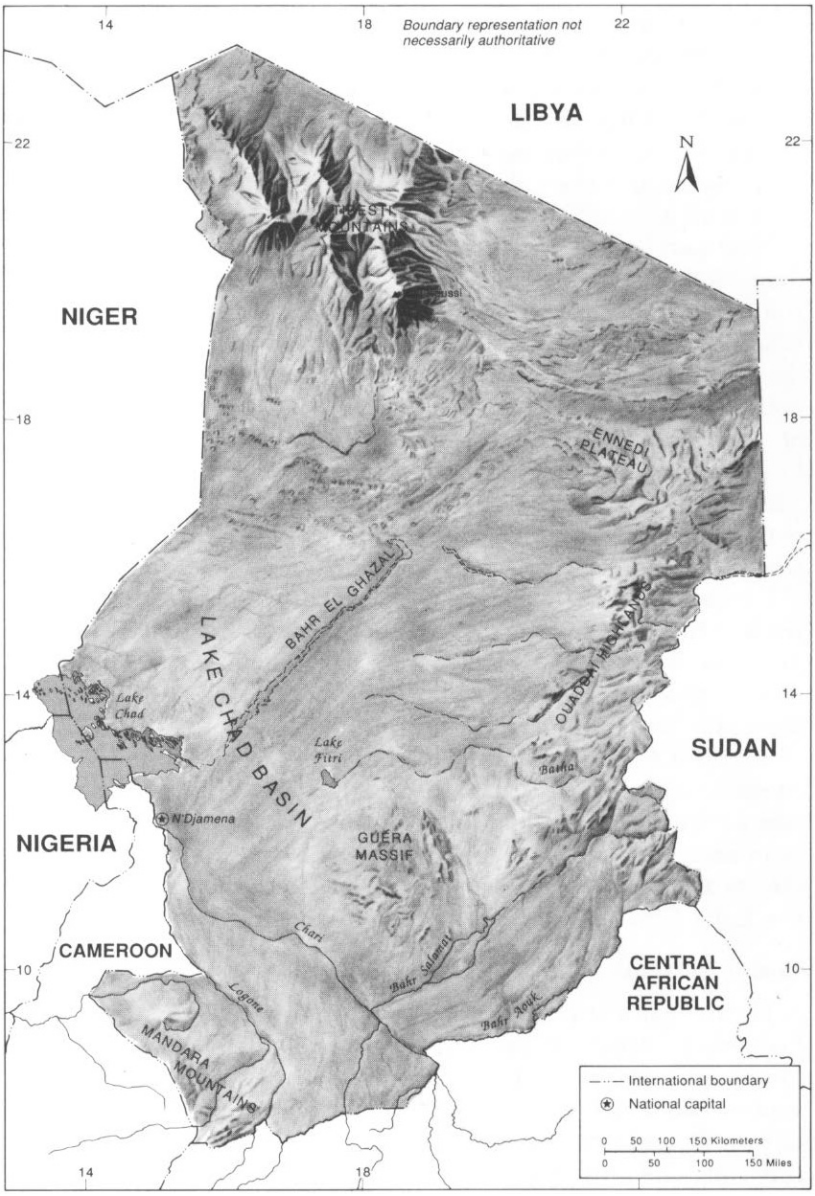


Figure 3. Topography and Drainage

as by the Bahr Salamat, Bahr Aouk, and Bahr Sara rivers of southeastern Chad, the Chari River is about 1,200 kilometers long.

From its origins near the city of Sarh, the middle course of the Chari makes its way through swampy terrain; the lower Chari is joined by the Logone River near N'Djamena. The Chari's volume varies greatly, from 17 cubic meters per second during the dry season to 340 cubic meters per second during the wettest part of the year.

The Logone River is formed by tributaries flowing from Cameroon and Central African Republic. Both shorter and smaller in volume than the Chari, it flows northeast for 960 kilometers; its volume ranges from five to eighty-five cubic meters per second. At N'Djamena the Logone empties into the Chari, and the combined rivers flow together for thirty kilometers through a large delta and into Lake Chad. At the end of the rainy season in the fall, the river overflows its banks and creates a huge floodplain in the delta.

The seventh largest lake in the world (and the fourth largest in Africa), Lake Chad is located in the *sahelian* zone, a region just south of the Sahara Desert. The Chari River contributes 95 percent of Lake Chad's water, an average annual volume of 40 billion cubic meters, 95 percent of which is lost to evaporation. The size of the lake is determined by rains in the southern highlands bordering the basin and by temperatures in the Sahel. Fluctuations in both cause the lake to change dramatically in size, from 9,800 square kilometers in the dry season to 25,500 at the end of the rainy season. Lake Chad also changes greatly in size from one year to another. In 1870 its maximum area was 28,000 square kilometers. The measurement dropped to 12,700 in 1908. In the 1940s and 1950s, the lake remained small, but it grew again to 26,000 square kilometers in 1963. The droughts of the late 1960s, early 1970s, and mid-1980s caused Lake Chad to shrink once again, however. The only other lakes of importance in Chad are Lake Fitri, in Batha Prefecture, and Lake Iro, in the marshy southeast.

Climate

The Lake Chad Basin embraces a great range of tropical climates from north to south, although most of these climates tend to be dry. Apart from the far north, most regions are characterized by a cycle of alternating rainy and dry seasons. In any given year, the duration of each season is determined largely by the positions of two great air masses—a maritime mass over the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest and a much drier continental mass. During the rainy season, winds from the southwest push the moister maritime system north over the African continent where it meets and slips under the continental mass along a front called the "intertropical

convergence zone." At the height of the rainy season, the front may reach as far as Kanem Prefecture. By the middle of the dry season, the intertropical convergence zone moves south of Chad, taking the rain with it. This weather system contributes to the formation of three major regions of climate and vegetation.

Saharan Region

The Saharan region covers roughly the northern third of the country, including Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti Prefecture along with the northern parts of Kanem, Batha, and Biltine prefectures (see fig. 1). Much of this area receives only traces of rain during the entire year; at Faya Largeau, for example, annual rainfall averages less than thirty millimeters. Scattered small oases and occasional wells provide water for a few date palms or small plots of millet and garden crops. In much of the north, the average daily maximum temperature is about 32°C during January, the coolest month of the year, and about 45°C during May, the hottest month. On occasion, strong winds from the northeast produce violent sandstorms. In northern Biltine Prefecture, a region called the Mortcha plays a major role in animal husbandry. Dry for nine months of the year, it receives 350 millimeters or more of rain, mostly during July and August. A carpet of green springs from the desert during this brief wet season, attracting herders from throughout the region who come to pasture their cattle and camels. Because very few wells and springs have water throughout the year, the herders leave with the end of the rains, turning over the land to the antelopes, gazelles, and ostriches that can survive with little groundwater.

Sahelian Region

The semiarid *sahelian* zone, or Sahel, forms a belt about 500 kilometers wide that runs from Lac and Chari-Baguirmi prefectures eastward through Guéra, Ouaddaï, and northern Salamat prefectures to the Sudanese frontier. The climate in this transition zone between the desert and the southern *soudanian* zone is divided into a rainy season (from June to early September) and a dry period (from October to May). In the northern Sahel, thorny shrubs and acacia trees grow wild, while date palms, cereals, and garden crops are raised in scattered oases. Outside these settlements, nomads tend their flocks during the rainy season, moving southward as forage and surface water disappear with the onset of the dry part of the year. The central Sahel is characterized by drought-resistant grasses and small woods. Rainfall is more abundant there than in the Saharan region. For example, N'Djamena records a maximum

Villagers drawing water from a wood-lined well
Courtesy United Nations (Uri Golani)

annual average rainfall of 580 millimeters, while Ouaddaï Prefecture receives just a bit less. During the hot season, in April and May, maximum temperatures frequently rise above 40°C. In the southern part of the Sahel, rainfall is sufficient to permit crop production on unirrigated land, and millet and sorghum are grown (see Agriculture, ch. 3). Agriculture is also common in the marshlands east of Lake Chad and near swamps or wells. Many farmers in the region combine subsistence agriculture with the raising of cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry.

Soudanian Region

The humid *soudanian* zone includes the southern prefectures of Mayo-Kebbi, Tandjilé, Logone Occidental, Logone Oriental, Moyen-Chari, and southern Salamat. Between April and October, the rainy season brings between 750 and 1,250 millimeters of precipitation. Temperatures are high throughout the year. Daytime readings in Moundou, the major city in the southwest, range from 27°C in the middle of the cool season in January to about 40°C in the hot months of March, April, and May.

The *soudanian* region is predominantly savanna, or plains covered with a mixture of tropical or subtropical grasses and woodlands. The growth is lush during the rainy season but turns brown and dormant during the five-month dry season between November and March. Over a large part of the region, however, natural vegetation has yielded to agriculture.

Population

In the late 1980s, demographic data for Chad were very incomplete. One of the most important demographic techniques is projection from one set of data to anticipate the evolution of the population, but the lack of a national census in Chad has made applying such a technique difficult. In addition, population projections assume that the population has evolved with regularity since the last collection of data. In Chad, domestic conflict, foreign military occupation of part of its territory, and serious famines, from 1968 through 1973 and in the early 1980s, have disrupted the regular change of the population. As a result, many population estimates were probably inaccurate. In 1988 most population estimates continued to be based on projections from partial studies made in 1964 and 1968 by the National Institute of Economic and Statistical Studies (Institut National des Etudes Statistiques et Economiques—INSEE) in France and by the Chadian government. These survey data, projected forward, were the major reference sources for the Chadian government and for many international

agencies and foreign governments. Two organizations, the Sahel Institute (Institut du Sahel—INSAH) and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), gave different figures for Chad's population in 1985. The first organization estimated the population at almost 5 million; the second, at 5.2 million. In the late 1980s, cognizant of the need for demographic data for planning, the Ministry of Planning and Reconstruction and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa began planning the first national census for 1989.

Estimates of total population acquire greater meaning when the processes behind them are examined more closely. Population change is the sum of two sets of additions and two sets of subtractions. First, there are additions through births. In mid-1987 the PRB estimated Chad's birthrate at 43 live births per 1,000 inhabitants annually (the world average was 28 in 1987). The same organization suggested that, on average, Chadian women gave birth to 5.9 children over their reproductive years, a slightly lower number than the 6.3 average for Africa women as a whole.

Second, there are additions through immigration. Although ethnic, political, and economic ties connect most regions of Chad with neighboring states, such links probably have not brought a large number of permanent immigrants. By the late 1980s, Chadians who had fled the civil strife in the southern and central parts of the country during the late 1970s and early 1980s apparently had returned in large numbers. Nonetheless, overall immigration probably has not exceeded emigration.

Subtractions for population decrease also are calculated for two sets of events. First, there are subtractions through deaths. In the mid-1980s, the PRB estimated Chad's mortality rate at 23 deaths annually per 1,000 inhabitants—one of the highest mortality rates in the world (the global average stood at 10 in 1987). Civilian and military deaths, resulting from warfare, poor health conditions, and drought undoubtedly have contributed to this high mortality rate. The yearly infant mortality rate (the number of children per 1,000 births who die before age one) was also extremely high in Chad, estimated by INSAH and the PRB at 155 and 143, respectively. Among children, a second peak in mortality occurs after weaning (from about one and one-half to two years of age), when they are deprived of their mothers' natural immunities. High mortality rates are indicative of short life expectancies. In Chad, INSAH estimated the life expectancy for a female born in the period 1975–80 at 43.4 years; for a male, it was even lower—38.5 years.

Emigration is the second form of subtraction. Although the data for Chad were partial, labor migration and refugee flight were the two major types of emigration. In recent decades, some of the old

labor migration streams have continued, such as that to Sudan, and newer ones have joined them, such as those to Nigeria and the oil-rich countries of the Middle East during the petroleum boom of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Since independence, refugee flight has been a major component of emigration. In the late 1960s, troubles in eastern and southeastern Chad provoked emigration to Sudan. Patterns of flight have shifted with shifts in the theater of conflict. Following the battles of N'Djamena in 1979 and 1980, many residents sought refuge across the Chari River in neighboring Cameroon. Violence against southerners in N'Djamena brought further emigration, and the de facto partitioning of the country during the early 1980s brought retribution against northern merchants living in the southern cities of Moundou and Sarh. Although some of these people later returned to their homes within Chad, others sought refuge in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Central African Republic; some members of the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia fled to Western Europe. In the 1980s, the conflict shifted north, where the Chadian and Libyan armies clashed repeatedly. These campaigns marked a major escalation in violence and probably provoked flight as well (see Civil Conflict and Libyan Intervention, ch. 5).

As a population, Chadians were quite young (see fig. 4). The PRB estimated that 44 percent of the population was younger than fifteen in 1987. Only 2 percent of the population was older than sixty-four. These percentages are best appreciated as components of what is called the dependency ratio—the combined percentage of people less than fifteen and more than sixty-four, who, because they are considered only marginally productive, must be supported by the remainder of the population. Although some social scientists and development analysts challenge this conventional definition, pointing out that in rural Africa and urban shantytowns children may indeed add to the household income, most demographers agree that the measure is nonetheless a good general indicator of the dependency burden. In Chad, then, the 46 percent of the population less than fifteen and more than sixty-four essentially had to be supported by the other 54 percent. Although this ratio was not the highest in Africa, the level of dependency was difficult for Chadian society to bear, in part because poor health and inadequate nutrition already took such a high toll among the working population, and because mechanization had not raised productivity.

In terms of the sex structure of the population, the 1964 INSAH survey calculated that there were 90 males for every 100 females; in urban centers, the male percentage of the population rose slightly,

to 96 for every 100 women. A small part of this imbalance may be attributed to higher male mortality rates, but male labor migration is probably a much more important factor. The absence of a census or more recent demographic surveys made it impossible to determine if the Chadian Civil War had affected the sex ratio.

In the late 1980s, Chad had a low population density of about 3.8 people per square kilometer. The population was also very unevenly distributed because of contrasts in climate and physical environment. The Saharan zone was the least densely populated. In 1982 it was estimated to have a population density of 0.15 per square kilometer. Most inhabitants of the region lived in its southern reaches, south of 16° north latitude.

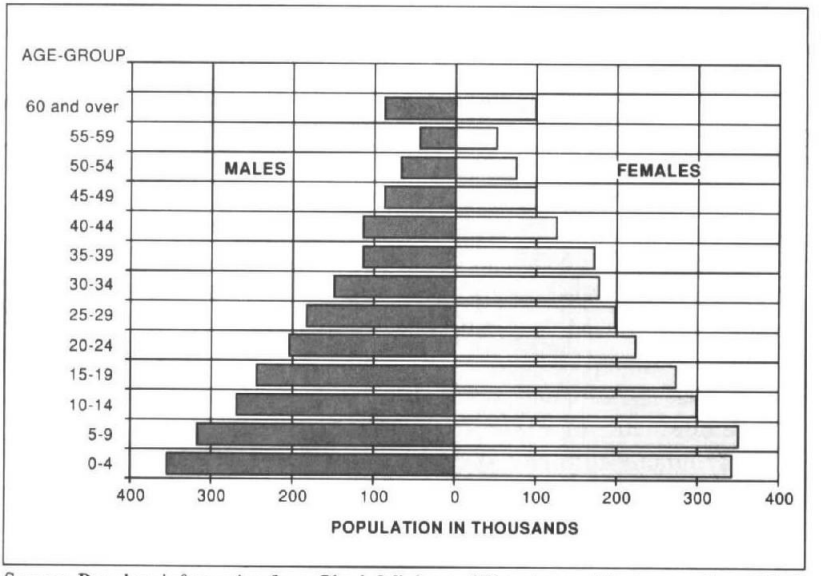
The *sahelian* zone had a population density of seven persons per square kilometer in 1971. Within the region, broad spectrums of rainfall and environment and the diverse life-styles that accompany them have resulted in widely varying population densities, from very low among the nomads in the northern regions to much higher among the agricultural populations in the south.

The highest population densities—about thirteen people per square kilometer—occurred in the *soudanian* zone. In 1971 almost 45 percent of the total Chadian population lived in this region.

Chad was quite rural. The PRB placed the urban population of Africa at 31 percent in 1985, whereas Chad's urban population was estimated at only 22 percent. Although the urban population remained relatively small, urbanization accelerated in the 1980s. Whereas in 1971 only seven centers had more than 10,000 inhabitants, INSAH estimated that by 1978 nine cities had populations of more than 20,000. From a total of 132,502 enumerated in the urban census of 1968, N'Djamena's population grew to 150,000 in 1971, nearly doubling to 280,000 in 1978. Although much of the population abandoned the city during the battles of 1979 and 1980, most people returned over the next several years. In 1983 the Chadian government predicted that urban growth would continue at an annual rate of 7.8 percent for the capital and 4.6 percent for secondary cities such as Moundou, Sarh, and Abéché.

Languages and Ethnic Groups

The people of Chad speak more than 100 different languages and divide themselves into many ethnic groups. It is important to note, however, that language and ethnicity are not the same. Moreover, neither element can be tied to a particular physical type. The commonly held image that Africa is populated by discrete ethnic groups (or "tribes") who live isolated from each other, guarding their languages and customs jealously and intermarrying only



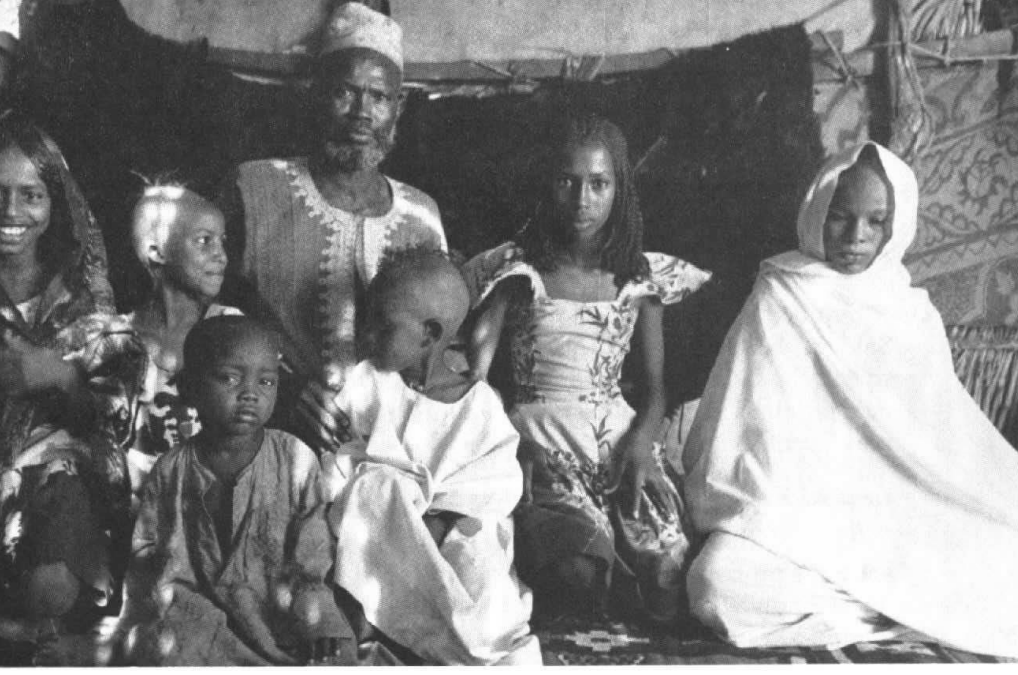
Source: Based on information from Chad, Ministry of Planning and Reconstruction, *Tchad: Relance économique en chiffres*, N'Djamena, Chad, 1983, 15.

Figure 4. Population Distribution by Age and Sex, 1982

with each other, is a stereotype that hinders understanding of the dynamics of African societies. In Chad, European conquest and administration intensified feelings of ethnic separateness by drawing local boundaries along perceived ethnic lines. The Europeans also appointed chiefs and other local African authorities who had little legitimacy over the groups they were to lead. In general, the French favored southerners over northerners and settled populations over nomads. This bias continued after independence and has been an important element in internecine conflict.

Although the possession of a common language shows that its speakers have lived together and have a common history, peoples also change languages. This is particularly so in Chad, where the openness of the terrain, marginal rainfall, frequent drought and famine, and low population densities have encouraged physical and linguistic mobility. Slave raids among non-Muslim peoples, internal slave trade, and exports of captives northward from the ninth to the twentieth centuries also have resulted in language changes.

Anthropologists view ethnicity as being more than genetics. Like language, ethnicity implies a shared heritage, partly economic, where people of the same ethnic group may share a livelihood, and partly social, taking the form of shared ways of doing things and



A seminomadic family of the Daza ethnic group
Courtesy UNICEF (Maggie Murray-Lee)

organizing relations among individuals and groups. Ethnicity also involves a cultural component made up of shared values and a common worldview. Like language, ethnicity is not immutable. Shared ways of doing things change over time and alter a group's perception of its own identity.

Not only do the social aspects of ethnic identity change but the biological composition (or gene pool) also may change over time. Although most ethnic groups emphasize intermarriage, people are often proscribed from seeking partners among close relatives—a prohibition that promotes biological variation. In all groups, the departure of some individuals or groups and the integration of others also changes the biological component.

The Chadian government has avoided official recognition of ethnicity. With the exception of a few surveys conducted shortly after independence, little data were available on this important aspect of Chadian society. Nonetheless, ethnic identity was a significant component of life in Chad.

Chad's languages fall into ten major groups, each of which belongs to either the Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic, or Congo-Kordofanian language family. These represent three of the four major language families in Africa; only the Khoisan languages of southern Africa are not represented. The presence of such different

languages suggests that the Lake Chad Basin may have been an important point of dispersal in ancient times.

Nilo-Saharan Languages

Similarities of language do not imply other congruences. Nilo-Saharan language speakers, for example, display a variety of lifestyles. Nomads in the Sahara, semisedentary and sedentary peoples in the Sahel, and sedentary populations in the *soudanian* zone all may speak Nilo-Saharan languages.

Central Saharan Languages

The distribution and numbers of Central Saharan language speakers probably have changed dramatically since independence. The Chadian Civil War and the Chadian-Libyan conflict have disrupted life in the northern part of the country. Also, the rise to power of two heads of state from the far north, Goukouni Oueddei and Hissein Habré, may have inspired the migration of northerners to the national capital and a greater integration of the region into the life of the country.

Teda and Daza are related languages in the Central Saharan group. Teda is spoken by the Toubou people of the Tibesti Mountains and by some inhabitants of nearby oases in northeastern Niger and southwestern Libya. Daza speakers live south of the Toubou in Borkou Subprefecture and Kanem Prefecture, between the Tibesti Mountains and Lake Chad (see fig. 5).

Despite their shared linguistic heritage, the Toubou and the Daza do not think of themselves as belonging to a common group. Moreover, each is further divided into subgroups identified with particular places. Among the Toubou, the Teda of Tibesti are the largest subgroup. Daza speakers separate themselves into more than a dozen groups. The Kreda of Bahr el Ghazal are the largest. Next in importance are the Daza of Kanem. Smaller and more scattered subgroups include the Charfarda of Ouaddaï; the Kecherda and Djagada of Kanem; the Doza, Annakaza, Kokorda, Kamadja, and Noarma of Borkou; and the Ounia, Gaeda, and Erdiha of Ennedi.

About one-third of the Teda are nomads. The remainder, along with all of the Daza, are seminomadic, moving from pasture to pasture during eight or nine months each year but returning to permanent villages during the rains. In general, the Teda herd camels and live farther north, where they move from oasis to oasis. The Daza often herd camels, but they also raise horses, sheep, and goats. Their itineraries take them farther south, where some have acquired cattle (whose limited capacity to endure the heat and harsh environment of the northern regions has altered patterns of

transhumance). Some cattle owners leave their animals with herders in the south when they return north; others choose to remain in the south and entrust their other animals to relatives or herders who take them north.

Kanembu is the major language of Lac Prefecture and southern Kanem Prefecture. Although Kanuri, which derived from Kanembu, was the major language of the Borno Empire, in Chad it is limited to handfuls of speakers in urban centers. Kanuri remains a major language in southeastern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, and northern Cameroon.

In the early 1980s, the Kanembu constituted the greatest part of the population of Lac Prefecture, but some Kanembu also lived in Chari-Baguirmi Prefecture. Once the core ethnic group of the Kanem-Borno Empire, whose territories at one time included northeastern Nigeria and southern Libya, the Kanembu retain ties beyond the borders of Chad (see Kanem-Borno, ch. 1). For example, close family and commercial ties bind them with the Kanuri of northeastern Nigeria. Within Chad, many Kanembu of Lac and Kanem prefectures identify with the Alifa of Mao, the governor of the region in precolonial times.

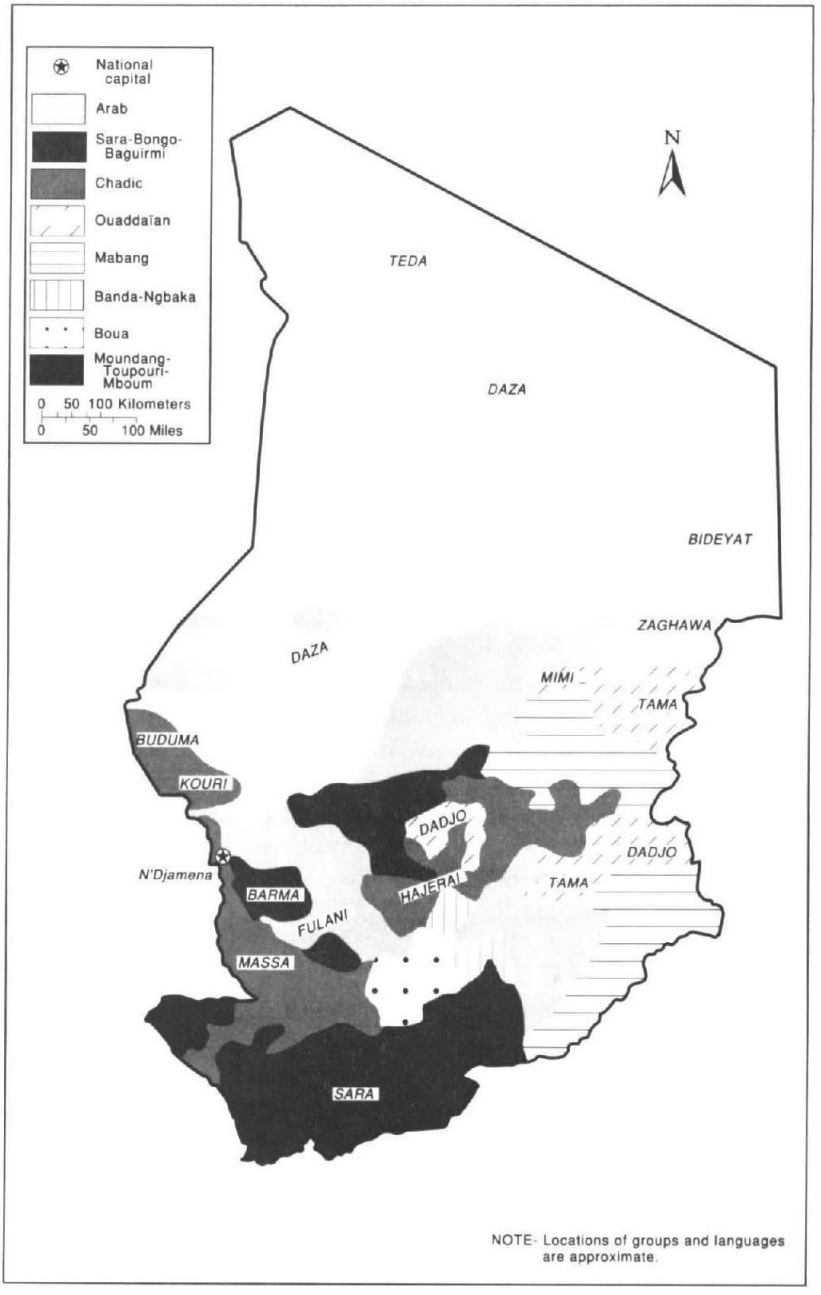
Baele (also erroneously called Bideyat) is the language of the Bideyat of Ennedi Subprefecture and the Zaghawa of Biltine Prefecture. Despite this similarity, the Zaghawa and the Bideyat exhibit diverse life-styles. Some Zaghawa live in a centralized sultanate, with a ruling family of Dadjo origin; these Zaghawa are semisedentary and prominent in local and regional commerce. Other Zaghawa, however, living primarily in the south, are nomads. The Bideyat also are nomadic.

Ouaddaïan Languages

The origins of Ouaddaïan languages remain obscure, although their distribution implies origins farther east, an interpretation supported by oral traditions. Speakers of Ouaddaïan languages may have moved westward to avoid Arab immigration from the east. Another theory suggests that speakers of Ouaddaïan languages once were continuously distributed throughout the region but subsequently lost ground as the population accepted Arabic.

Although some authorities separate Tama, Dadjo, and Mimi, others consider them to be part of a larger Ouaddaïan group, a linguistic archipelago stretching from western Sudan to central Chad. In Chad they are found in Biltine, Ouaddaï, and Guéra prefectures.

Tama languages are spoken in Biltine and northern Ouaddaï Prefectures, and include Tama, Marari (Abou Charib), Sungor,



Source: Based on information from Jean Cabot, *Atlas Practique du Tchad,* Paris, 1972, 36-37.

Figure 5. Ethnolinguistic Map

Kibet, Mourro, and Dagel. The Tama speakers, who live in eastern Biltine Prefecture near the Sudanese border, are the largest of these groups. Although they live in the arid Sahel, crop rotation has allowed them to settle in permanent villages. The Tama live in cantons of several thousand people, each administered by a canton chief. For several centuries, central authority has been vested in sultans believed to be of Dadjo origin, who are enthroned in ceremonies at the ruins of Nir, the precolonial capital.

The Marari and Abou Charib, sedentary peoples sharing a Tama language, live south and west, respectively, of the Tama in Ouaddaï Prefecture. Although they speak a Tama language, their traditions suggest descent from the Tunjur, migrants from Sudan who once ruled the sultanate of Wadai (see Bagirmi and Wadai, ch. 1). To the west of the Tama and northwest of the Marari and Abou Charib are the Sungor, another sedentary population. The Sungor consider themselves to be of Yemeni ancestry, a popular and prestigious Islamic pedigree among Muslims of the region. Despite speaking a Tama language, Sungor society and customs most resemble those of the Maba.

The Dadjo language has eastern and western dialects. Once the rulers of the sultanate of Wadai, the Dadjo people were separated into two groups during the fifteenth century. At that time, the Tunjur conquered Wadai, and some Dadjo people fled west. The eastern Dadjo remained in southern present-day Ouaddaï Prefecture and, following defeat by the Tunjur, founded a new sultanate with its capital at Goz Béïda. Their descendants are primarily farmers. The western Dadjo live among the Hajerai peoples of northern Guéra Prefecture. Cognizant of their common origin, the eastern and western groups permit intermarriage.

Mimi is the least frequently spoken Ouaddaïan language. Mimi speakers who live in the plains use Arabic to communicate with their neighbors; Mimi speakers who live in the mountains generally speak Zaghawa with other highland dwellers.

Mabang Languages

Mabang languages are concentrated in the highlands of Ouaddaï Prefecture, but they are also spoken in Biltine and Salamat prefectures. Maba is the major language of the group. Maba speakers are semisedentary farmers who combine millet cultivation during the rainy season with herding during the drier parts of the year. For the last several decades, many Maba laborers have migrated to Sudan. The core ethnic group of the sultanate of Wadai, the Maba played a central role in that state even after conquest by rulers from the east in the seventeenth century. Wadai sultans frequently

took Maba women as first wives, and the first dignitary of the court usually was also Maba.

Massalit, another major Mabang language, is spoken by people who live east of the Maba along the Sudan border. Complemented by a far larger Massalit population in Sudan, the Chadian Massalit are farmers who rely on passing animal herds to fertilize their fields.

Massalat speakers are found farther west and are divided into two groups, one in eastern Batha near Ouaddaï Prefecture, and the other in northern Guéra Prefecture. Once part of the larger Massalit community, the Massalat have diverged from the main group. The two languages are sufficiently different that linguists classify Massalat in a separate subgroup. In addition, the Massalat physically and culturally resemble the Dadjo more closely than they do their relatives to the east.

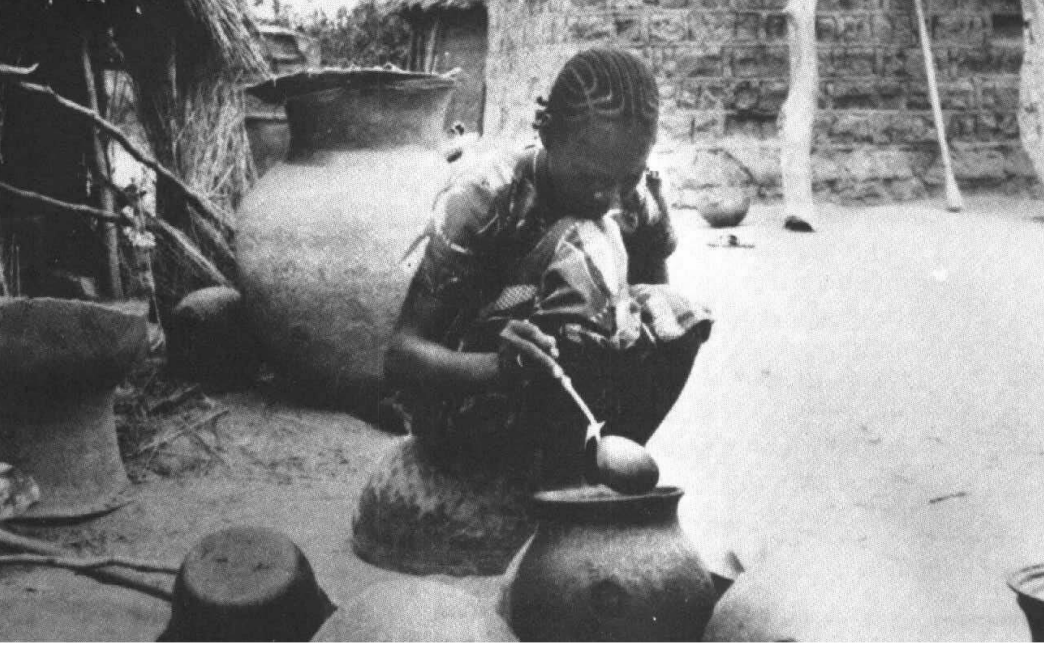
Runga is spoken over a large part of Salamat Prefecture and in a small part of Central African Republic. Many Runga speakers are farmers who grow millet, sorghum, peanuts, and cotton. In the nineteenth century, the Runga were ruled by sultans from a capital in the Salamat region. Herders of Wadai, the Runga also founded Dar al Kuti, the most important precolonial state in northern Central African Republic. Extensive slave raiding by the Sudanese warlord Rabih Fadlallah in the 1890s decimated the Runga in Chad; as late as the 1960s, they numbered only about 12,000.

Other Mabang languages spoken by much smaller populations include Marfa, Karanga, and Kashméré, found in the highlands north of Abéché; Koniéré, spoken in a small region just east of Abéché; and Bakhat, a language of restricted distribution, found west of Abéché.

Sara-Bongo-Baguirmi Languages

Classified in the Chari-Nile subfamily of the Nilo-Saharan languages, Sara-Bongo-Baguirmi languages are scattered from Lake Chad to the White Nile in southwestern Sudan. Unlike Central Saharan languages, when mapped out they form a patchwork quilt rather than a solid band.

Kouka, Bilala, and Medogo, languages spoken around Lake Fitri in southwestern Batha Prefecture, are the northernmost members of this subgroup. These languages are mutually comprehensible, and the peoples who use them are thought to be descendants of the core ethnic groups of the precolonial sultanate of Yao (a state founded by the Bulala, who ruled a vast region extending as far west as Kanem in the fifteenth century). The Kouka, Bilala, and



A young woman prepares a meal in a village in Chari-Baguirmi Prefecture
Courtesy Audrey Kizziar

Medogo populations intermarry and share institutions for the mediation of disputes. The groups farm and raise animals, which they sometimes entrust to neighboring Arabs. Their similarities are so striking that they are sometimes classed together as the Lisi.

Barma is spoken in Chari-Baguirmi Prefecture by the Baguirmi, the core population of another precolonial state. Today the Baguirmi are concentrated in and around Massenya, a city southeast of N'Djamena named for their precolonial capital. The Baguirmi identify themselves as either river Barmi or land Barmi. The land Barmi farm millet, sorghum, beans, sesame, peanuts, and cotton. The river Barmi fish along carefully demarcated stretches of the Chari and Bahr Ergig rivers. Arabic loanwords are numerous in Barma, a product of the Baguirmi's adoption of Islam and their interaction with neighboring Arab pastoralists over a long period of time. Long-standing economic ties with the West have also prompted the incorporation of a Kanuri commercial vocabulary.

Kenga, found among the Hajerai in Guéra Prefecture, is closely related to Barma. Although its speakers are said to have played a prominent role in the foundation of the Bagirmi Empire, today they resemble their highland neighbors more closely than their more distant linguistic relatives.

Sara languages of southern Chad constitute the quilt's largest patch, stretching from Logone Occidental Prefecture to eastern Moyen-Chari Prefecture. Linguists divide Sara languages into five subgroups. Sara languages seem to have drifted into southern Chad from the northeast. Eventually, Sara speakers left behind the northern languages of the group as they made their way to the richer hunting grounds and agricultural land south of the Chari River. This must have occurred very long ago, however, because the Sara languages and those of the northern members of the group are mutually unintelligible. Moreover, Sara oral traditions record only short-range migrations of Sara speakers in the south, suggesting that movement from the north happened earlier.

Boua

Boua languages are distributed along the middle Chari River in Moyen-Chari Prefecture and in central Guéra Prefecture. Like the Sara, they are divided into five subgroups: Boua proper, Neillim, Tounia, Koke, and Fanian or Mana. Only a few thousand people speak Boua languages, but it is believed that their ancestors preceded Sara-speaking settlers in the Chari Valley. Several centuries ago, all the Boua subgroups may have lived farther north in Guéra Prefecture. Under pressure from slave raiders along the Islamic frontier, some Boua speakers probably migrated southward. Although speakers of Boua proper submitted to neighboring slave raiders from the Bagirmi Empire, they in turn raided their Neillim neighbors to the southeast. Similarly, the Neillim attacked the Tounia to their southeast. The Tounia sought refuge among the Kaba (a Sara subgroup) on the site of the present-day city of Sarh.

Afro-Asiatic Languages

Two major Afro-Asiatic language are represented in Chad. Chadic languages stretch from the western borders of Nigeria to Ouaddaï Prefecture, and Arabic-speaking populations are scattered throughout the Sahel.

Chadic Languages

Most speakers of Chadic languages, including the 20 million speakers of Hausa, the major Chadic language, live west of Chad. The peculiar east-west distribution of Chadic along the southern fringe of the Sahara from western Nigeria to eastern Chad has led some experts to suggest that ancestral Chadic languages were spoken by peoples living along the southern shores of the Paleochadian Sea. The first cluster of languages is closely associated with water—the lake, the delta, the Chari and Logone rivers, and their adjacent

floodplains. Water also is important to the economies of most of the populations speaking these languages. In the second cluster, Chadic speakers are descended from refugee populations who perhaps sought shelter in the highlands when the contraction of the sea and the increased aridity of the region allowed the penetration of more aggressive herding populations.

Within Chad, the Chadic languages are distributed in two patterns. The first extends from Lake Chad south along the Chari and Logone rivers to Mayo-Kebbi Prefecture. Individual languages fall into five groups, arrayed from north to southeast.

Buduma-Kouri is spoken by two groups of lake people who intermarry despite some social differences. The Buduma, who believe that they are the original inhabitants of Lake Chad, live on its northern islands and shores. In the past, the Buduma spent much of their time fishing on lake islands. In recent times, however, their economic activities have diversified to include farming and herding. Active in commerce between Chad and Nigeria, the Buduma raise cattle whose very large and hollow horns serve as flotation devices that permit their owners to "herd" them in the lake itself. The lake has long protected the Buduma, allowing them to maintain a separate identity. Despite centuries of contact with Islamic states around the lake, for example, they maintained their own religion until the early twentieth century.

The Kouri, who speak the same language, live on the shores and islands of the southern part of Lake Chad. Devout Muslims, the Kouri believe that they are descendants of Muslim migrants from Yemen and that they are related to the Kanembu, whose medieval empire sponsored the spread of Islam in the region. Kouri economic activities resemble those of the Buduma; however, the absence of polders (see Glossary) along this part of the lakeshore has led the Kouri to confine farming to small plots around their villages. Although they confine their herds to the islands during the dry season, they may entrust them to neighboring Kanembu for pasturing during the rains.

Kotoko is spoken along the lower Chari and Logone rivers by peoples thought to be descendants of the legendary Sao (see Prehistory, ch. 1). Divided into small states with fortified cities as their capitals, the Kotoko consider themselves "owners of the land" by virtue of their long residence, and other peoples in the region recognize this claim. For example, neighboring Arabs pay tribute for the right to farm and herd. The Kotoko also have a monopoly over fishing and water transport. Rights to the waters of the Logone and Chari rivers are divided among the cities, each of which has a "chief of the waters," whose communications with the water

spirits determine the opening of the fishing season. Non-Kotoko must pay for the right to fish. Outnumbered in their own lands by Bororo and Arab herders, only about 7,000 Kotoko lived in Chad in the late 1960s; three times as many lived across the Logone in Cameroon. Strife in Chad—particularly the troubles in N'Djamena in 1979 and 1980—probably has accelerated the emigration of the Kotoko from Chad.

Massa languages, including Massa, Moussey, Marba, and Dari, are centered in southern Chari-Baguirmi and Mayo-Kebbi prefectures. The Massa proper farm, herd, and fish in floodplains of the middle Chari. Repeatedly through their history, the Massa suffered raids from their Muslim neighbors—the Kanuri of the Borno Empire, the Barmi of the Bagirmi Empire, and the Fulani of Cameroon. The Massa survived these military onslaughts, in part because their villages, which crown the hills in the Chari floodplain, afforded protection for much of the year. Having survived these threats, in recent years the Massa ironically have adopted Muslim dress and have superimposed some features of Fulani political structure on their local "chiefs of the lands." The other speakers of Massa languages resemble the Massa proper. Estimated to number 120,000 in the late 1970s, the largest group among them is the Moussey, who live in and around Gounou Gaya in Mayo-Kebbi Prefecture.

The last cluster of Chadic languages in this first distribution encompasses Nachéré, Lélé, Gablai, and Guidar spoken primarily in Tandjilé Prefecture and with outlying languages that include Gabri (in Tandjilé Prefecture) and Toumak, Somrai, Ndam, Miltou, and Saraoua (in Moyen-Chari Prefecture). This cluster of languages forms a transition zone between the Massa and the Sara languages. The numbers of speakers of these languages are small, probably because their peoples have been absorbed by more numerous neighbors through intermarriage or emigration.

The second Chadic language distribution comprises two clusters. The first brings together the languages spoken by the Hajerai, the mountain peoples of Guéra Prefecture. These peoples are descended from refugees from the surrounding plains who sought shelter in the mountains when invaded by raiders from neighboring centralized states. Despite the presence of non-Chadic languages (such as Kenga, which is part of the Sara-Bongo-Baguirmi group), most Hajerai speak Chadic languages, such as Djongor, Dangaleat, Bidyo, Mogoum, Sokoro, Barain, and Saba. The Hajerai groups share important religious institutions, such as the *margai* cult of place spirits; at the same time, they maintain separate identities and refuse to intermarry (see Classical African Religions, this ch.). All have

traditions of fierce independence. The Hajerai were among the earliest supporters of rebellion against the Chadian national government in the 1960s.

Moubi languages of Ouaddaï Prèfecture make up the second cluster of this second distribution of Chadic languages. The Moubi are a sedentary people who live south of the Massalit. They grow millet, sorghum, sesame, beans, cotton, and peanuts. In recent years, they have also adopted cattle herding, a practice borrowed from the Missiriye Arab herders who regularly cross their lands and with whom the Moubi have long exchanged goods and services. Like the Hajerai, the Moubi have resisted the government since shortly after independence.

Arabic

There are about thirty different dialects of Arabic in Chad. The Arabs divide themselves into three major "tribes": the Juhayna, the Hassuna, and the Awlad Sulayman. In this context, tribe refers to a group claiming descent from a common ancestor. The Juhayna, who began arriving from Sudan in the fourteenth century, are by far the most important. The Hassuna, who migrated to Chad from Libya, live in Kanem Prefecture. The Awlad Sulayman also hail from Libya, but they arrived in the nineteenth century, well after the others. Most of the Arabs are herders or farmers.

Among Arabic herdsmen, life-styles vary considerably. The different needs of camels, cattle, goats, and sheep result in different patterns of settlement and movement. In addition to herding, many Arabic speakers earn their livelihoods as small and middle-level merchants. In N'Djamena and in towns such as Sarh and Moundou, Arabic speakers dominated local commerce up until the 1970s; however, because of the anti-Muslim violence in the south in the late 1970s, many moved to central or nothern Chad.

Despite the diversity of dialects and the scattered distribution of Arabic-speaking populations, the language has had a major impact on Chad. In the Sahel, Arab herdsmen and their wives frequent local markets to exchange their animals, butter, and milk for agricultural products, cloth, and crafts. Itinerant Arab traders and settled merchants in the towns play major roles in local and regional economies. As a result, Chadian Arabic (or Turku) has became a lingua franca, or trade language. Arabic also has been important because it is the language of Islam and of the Quran, its holy book. Quranic education has stimulated the spread of the language and enhanced its stature among the non-Arab Muslims of Chad.