Katrin Langewiesche

# A review of 60 years of scholarship on religions in Burkina Faso

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**Langewiesche, Katrin: A review of 60 years of scholarship on religions in Burkina Faso.**

## Abstract

Knowledge about religion is currently regularly summoned and discussed in highly politicised debates on social cohesion in both Europe and Africa. The European Union's request for a review of the academic literature on religion in Burkina Faso fits this social context and proves the concern and need to anchor concrete actions and political decisions in a long-term academic reflection that goes beyond the moment of "radicalisation".

The article, in a chronological manner, presents the academic literature from the initial studies on religions in Burkina Faso in the late 1950s to the present and according to the different subjects covered. The first part discusses the classical works of anthropology of religion, the second part deals with historians' publications on processes of Islamisation and Christianisation in Burkina Faso. Finally, a third part analyses the publications that focus on religious diversity and contemporary religion as well as the comparative studies of Burkina Faso with other countries in the sub-region. The last part addresses the issue of radicalisation and its reception in research in religions in Burkina Faso. The common thread that runs through the different parts is the emphasis on the interactions between the political and religious situation of the country, researchers' interests and global interest in relations between Muslims and Christians. By way of conclusion, the article proposes a set of questions and initial interpretations that constitute opportunities for further research and new paths of exploration.

## Zusammenfassung

Religionswissenschaftliches Wissen wird derzeit regelmäßig in stark politisierten Debatten über den sozialen Zusammenhalt in Europa und Afrika eingeholt und diskutiert. Die Aufforderung der Europäischen Union zur Neubewertung der wissenschaftlichen Literatur über Religionen in Burkina Faso fügt sich in diesen sozialen Kontext ein. Sie beweist das Anliegen und die Notwendigkeit, politische Entscheidungen in einer langfristigen wissenschaftlichen Reflexion zu verankern, die über den Moment der "Radikalisierung" hinausgeht. Der Artikel stellt die Literatur von den ersten Religionsforschungen in Burkina Faso Ende der 1950er Jahre bis zur Gegenwart chronologisch und nach den verschiedenen Themenbereichen dar. Der erste Teil behandelt die klassischen Werke der Ethnologie zur Religion, der zweite die Publikationen der Historiker zu den Prozessen der Islamisierung und Christianisierung in Burkina Faso, bevor in einem dritten Teil die Publikationen analysiert werden, die sich auf religiöse Vielfalt, zeitgenössischer Religionen, sowie auf vergleichende Arbeiten zwischen Burkina Faso und anderen Ländern der Subregion konzentrieren. Der letzte Teil widmet sich insbesondere der Frage der Radikalisierung und ihrer Rezeption in der Religionsforschung in Burkina Faso. Abschließend wirft der Artikel eine Reihe von Fragen auf, die Wege für die weitere Forschung und neue Forschungsansätze darstellen.

**Résumé**

La connaissance sur le religieux est régulièrement recherchée et discutée dans les débats hautement politisés sur la cohésion sociale en Europe et en Afrique. L'appel de l'Union européenne de réaliser un état de la connaissance de la littérature scientifique sur les religions au Burkina Faso s'inscrit dans ce contexte social. Il démontre le souci et la nécessité d'ancrer les décisions politiques dans une réflexion scientifique à long terme qui va au-delà du moment de la "radicalisation". L'article présente la littérature depuis les premières recherches sur les religions au Burkina Faso à la fin des années 1950 jusqu'à nos jours par ordre chronologique et selon les différents thèmes. La première partie présente des travaux classiques d'ethnologie religieuse, la seconde des publications des historiens sur les processus d'islamisation et de christianisation au Burkina Faso, avant qu'une troisième partie analyse les publications sur la diversité religieuse, les religions contemporaines et les travaux comparatifs entre le Burkina Faso et les autres pays de la sous-région. La dernière partie est consacrée en particulier à la question de la radicalisation et à sa réception dans la recherche sur les religions au Burkina Faso. Pour conclure l'article pose un certain nombre de questions qui ouvrent la voie à d'autres recherches et à de nouvelles perspectives.

**Die Autorin:**

Katrin Langewiesche is an anthropologist with an area specialization in West Africa. She works on topics relating to the anthropology of religions: religious plurality in modern societies, conversion theories, faith-based organizations, Catholic convents between Europe and Africa, and Islamic transnational networks.

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# Table of Contents

This report has received financial support from the European Union as part of the project *L'état des connaissances sur le religieux au Burkina Faso*, carried out in 2018 by the *Institut de recherche pour le développement* (IRD), the *Institut des Sciences des Sociétés* (INSS) and the *Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien* (Ifeas).

# 1. Introduction

Knowledge about religion is currently regularly summoned and discussed in highly politicised debates on social cohesion in both Europe and Africa. The European Union's request for a review of the academic literature on religion in Burkina Faso in 2017 fits this social context and proves the concern and need to anchor concrete actions and political decisions in a long-term academic reflection, beyond the mere moment of "radicalisation". The call for a careful review of the literature on religions in Burkina Faso is a call to examine the origins and development of paradigms of religious studies in Burkina Faso, and to consider the consequences of these conceptualisations. Thus, this review develops a reflexive understanding of the academic and socio-political implications, as well as the consequences of methodological and epistemological choices in the study of religions and religious diversity in Burkina Faso.

Undoubtedly, the terror attacks in Burkina Faso have enhanced the awareness of an urgent need to provide "reliable" knowledge on all religious tendencies. There is, as everywhere else, a dynamic interaction between political conditions, social transformations and research programmes on religion in Africa. The current policy paradigm combines religion and plurality, and is articulated around ideas of social cohesion, de-radicalisation, religious freedoms, and secularism. The Islamic-Christian relations have become the prism through which policy problems are filtered and solutions proposed (Griera 2018: 44). This review on the academic literature on religions in Burkina Faso may therefore well be interpreted as the consequence of a change in academic but also policy paradigms in terms of religion. For this reason, it is important to critically examine approaches to religious phenomena.

The review, by adopting a chronological perspective, presents the academic literature from the initial studies on religions in Burkina Faso in the late 1950s to the present day. It also explores the various subjects tackled. Although I have taken account of six decades of research, I highlight the current picture of religious studies in Burkina Faso, in order to understand its major trends. The first part discusses the classical works of the anthropology of religion, the second part deals with the historians' publications on the processes of Islamisation and Christianisation in Burkina Faso. Then, a third part analyses the publications that focus on religious diversity and contemporary religion, as well as the comparative studies of Burkina Faso with other countries in the sub-region. The last part addresses the issue of radicalisation and its reception in research on religions in Burkina Faso. The common thread that runs through the different parts is the emphasis on the interactions between the political and religious situation of the country, researchers' interests and global interest in relations between Muslims and Christians. By way of conclusion, the article proposes a set of questions and initial interpretations that constitute opportunities for further research and new paths for further exploration.

# 2. Methodology

I have identified about 450 publications concerning religious matters in Burkina Faso, taking into account only works published in French, English and German. This census includes monographs, books, articles in edited volumes or scientific journals published between 1957 and 2018 and excludes unpublished academic and doctoral theses, reports of colonisers and explorers' accounts as well as books and articles in languages other than those cited. There

exist specialized bibliographies such as Haberland's (1986), which presents German explorers who travelled across the territory of present-day Burkina Faso; Izard and Bonnefond's (1967) on the history of Upper Volta; Niang's (2012), which includes publications on the history of the Mossi country; Schrijver's (2006) on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa; and Kuba and Lentz's (2001) on the Dagara. Unpublished university dissertations and theses constitute a considerable contribution to religious knowledge that no researcher can afford to ignore. However, these writings are only accessible for consultation on site in African universities' libraries. Their identification would go far beyond the scope of this work and remains in each researcher's responsibility according to his or her interests. With regard to unpublished work, I made an exception for some NGOs' and think tanks' reports when they deal with the issue of radicalisation in Burkina Faso, because work on this timely topic is so rare that it seemed inevitable to take them into account in order to discuss the concepts of radicalisation, violent extremism or jihadism more thoroughly. Research on religions in Burkina Faso in languages other than French, English or German, and particularly Arabic, would merit further consideration.

Using keywords,[1] the research was carried out in general databases: in Jstor (Journal Storage), the online archiving system for academic and scientific publications based in New York; in Worldcat, a union catalogue under the governance of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) also located in the United States; the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Cairn and Persée for French-language publications; the German National Library in Frankfurt for German-language works. I also used the database of the African Studies Centre in the Netherlands, Leiden (AfricaBib).

Research in these databases has identified a large number of authors and documents in different disciplines. However, they undoubtedly neglect the productions of African university researchers in local journals. It must be noted that the choice of databases and documentary resources influences the state of the art on the one hand, and the representativeness of certain authors and topics on the other hand. In order to avoid these gaps between the visibility of research done in Africa and that produced in Europe or the United States, for each author I checked their production from their personal site, that of their university or sometimes by contacting them directly. Personal contact was necessary because there is a marked discrepancy between the visibility of African researchers and their institutions on the Internet and their colleagues in the North. This strategy allowed me to identify 58 researchers from different African institutions[2] working on religious issues in Burkina Faso and to determine Africa based journals in which these researchers publish.[3]

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[1] "Burkina Faso" combined with "traditional religions", "Islam", "Christianity", "Catholicism", "Evangelicals", "Protestants" as well as "Upper Volta" in connection with the same words.

[2] These are mainly the University of Ouagadougou, CNRST and INSS, but also the universities of Abidjan, Niamey and Dakar.

[3] I was able to identify 14 local periodicals: *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, les *Recherches voltaïques* ; *Cahiers du CERLESHS* (Presses Universitaires de Ouagadougou); *Annales de l'université de Ouagadougou series A*: *Lettres, Sciences Humaines* ; *Sciences et technique série sciences sociales et humaines*, published by the CNRST; *Espace Scientifique* published by the INSS; *Wiré* of the University Norbert Zongo in Koudougou; *Sciences Humaines, la Revue du Cames* and in Côte d'Ivoire: *SIFOE Revue électronique d'histoire, d'arts et d'archéologie* in Bouaké; *ACTA ISLAMICA: Revue*

These scientists belong to several disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, art history, theology, literature, political science, information science, and educational science. Religious studies (Religionswissenschaften) do not exist in Burkina Faso as an independent academic field. Religious studies are integrated into other disciplines: history, sociology, anthropology, theology. The question of dissemination of knowledge is essential to understand the difference in the visibility of research produced in Africa and outside the continent.

Chart 1

Types of journals in which researchers from African institutions publish their articles on religion in Burkina Faso between 1966 and 2018
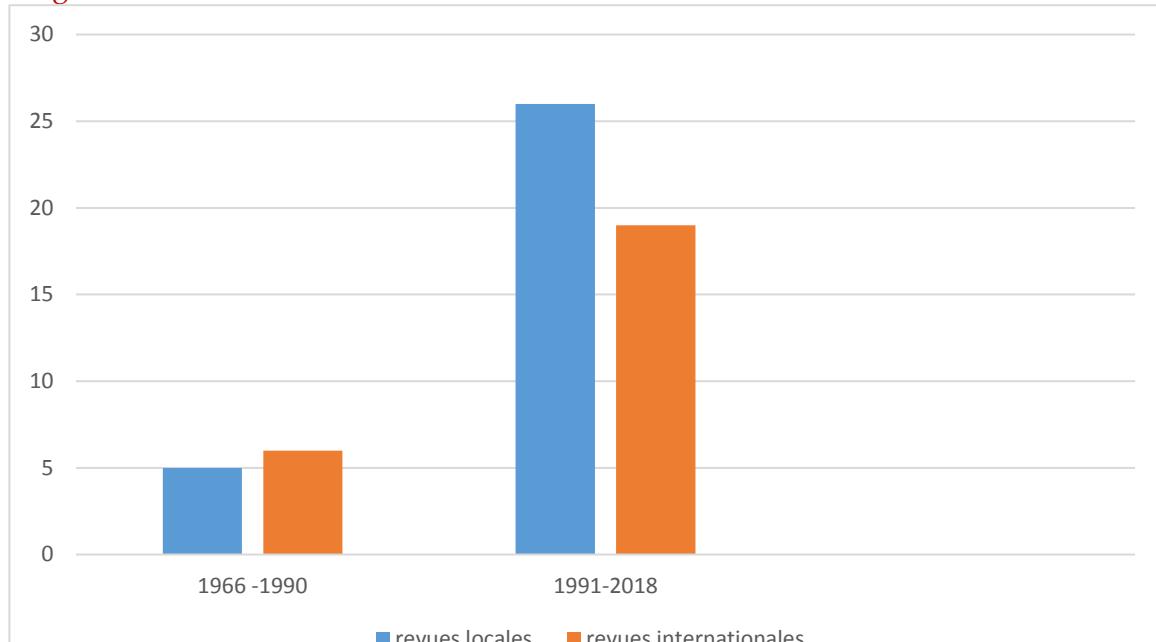


Out of a total of 56 articles on religion in academic journals issued between 1966 and 2018, researchers based in African institutions published, between 1966 and 1990, almost as much in international journals (6) as in African journals (5). Between 1991 and 2018, the gap between publications in Africa based journals (26) and in international journals (19) widened. This suggests that, despite increasing networking, the research of African colleagues is less accessible than before 1990, as only two of the 14 mentioned Africa based journals are partially available online.

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*d'études islamiques / African Studies Review* (online); *Revue Ivoirienne d'Histoire* and in Togo: *Mu kara sani; LɔŋGBOWU,* University of Kara and *Annales de l'université de Lomé.*

# 3.    Who are the researchers working on religion in Burkina Faso? Nationalities, universities, disciplines

The 450 publications listed on religious phenomena in Burkina Faso were produced by 172 researchers, including 58, as already mentioned, working in African universities. The others belong largely to institutions in France (45), Germany (22), the United States (15), Canada (10), Belgium (8), England (3), Austria (3), Italy (2), Israel (1), Holland (1), Sweden (1), Switzerland (3), and Slovakia (1). They come from a variety of disciplines: anthropology, ethnology, political science, art history, sociology, history, and economics. Most of the knowledge about religion in Burkina Faso is therefore produced in the Global North.

Chart 2

Number of researchers working on religion in Burkina Faso between 1958 and 2018 according to their university affiliation
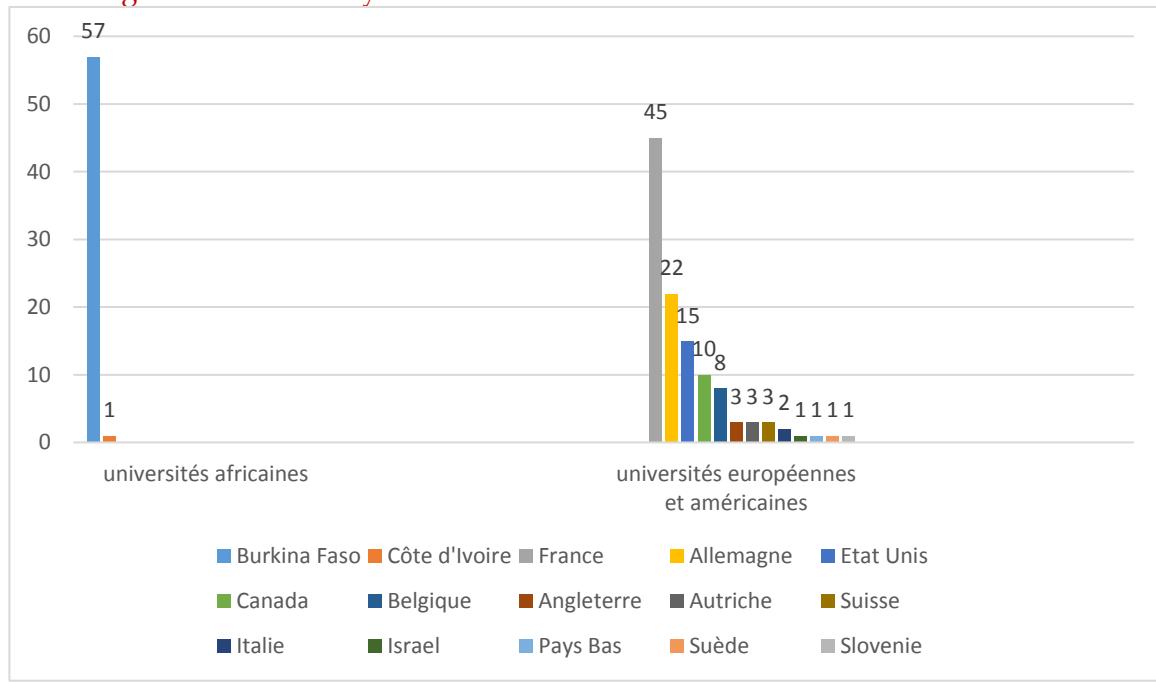
English publications on religions in Burkina Faso have increased in recent years, but remain a minority.



Chart 3

Publications in English on religion in Burkina Faso between 1958-2018
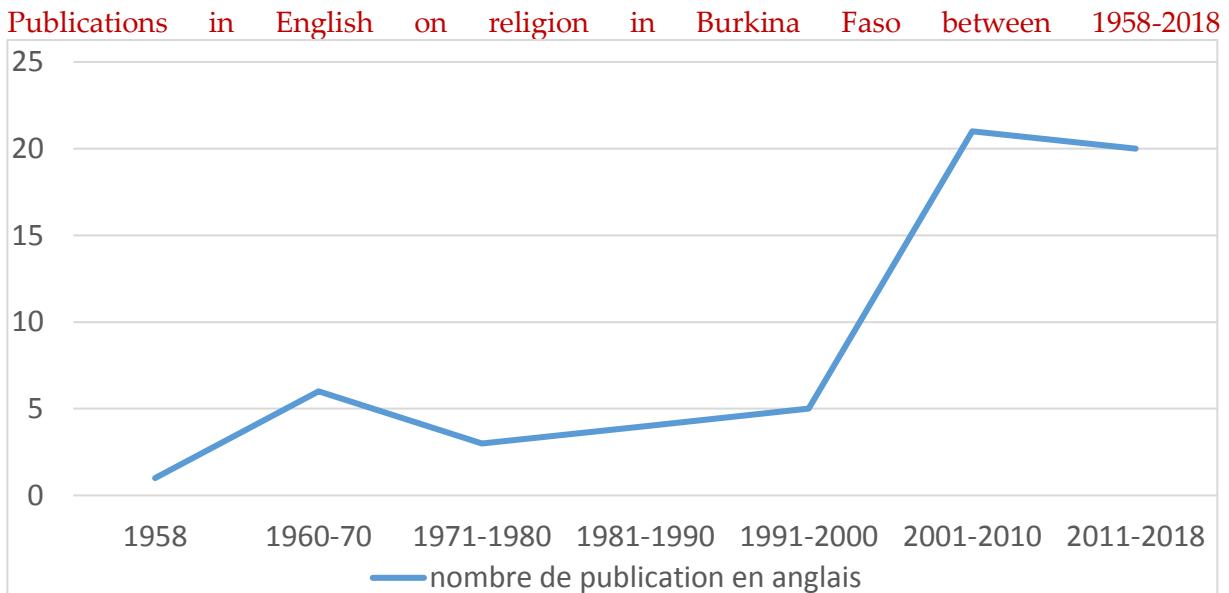
If we look more closely at the work on religion in Burkina Faso, we see that the analyses are rarely published in English, and that English-language works find limited reception in the publications of French-speaking researchers. The lack of communication and exchange between the French-speaking and English-speaking academic community, which is often observed, is still marked in Burkina Faso. As a result, Francophone research lacks visibility and recognition in the international academic community. Some English-speaking researchers present Burkina Faso, despite the huge scientific production that exists, as a country still under-studied. Some recent work on religious diversity in English-speaking African countries simply ignores research on similar or comparable situations in French-speaking countries (Akinade 2013, Nolte et al. 2017).

We can differentiate between researchers who contribute to our knowledge of religion in Burkina Faso according to their professional backgrounds:[4] members of the African diaspora working abroad, who are very few in number,[5] researchers of European, Canadian and American origin who have worked for a long time in Africa and who work in institutions outside the African continent, as well as African researchers based in Africa. In our networked society with the accessibility of computer platforms and databases, it is certainly difficult to differentiate between African researchers based in African institutions and their colleagues

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[4] These are not generations of researchers as identified by Thandika Mkandawire in his articles (1995 and 1997), but educational curricula that are similar through generations.

[5] Étienne Damome, University of Bordeaux and Roger Somé, University of Strasbourg.

based abroad. Especially since a large number of African anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists working on religion were trained in universities abroad before taking up an academic position in their country of origin. However, it is still valid that the institutional attachment has a consequence on integration into research networks, access to funding and the ability to travel and investigate easily. If in Burkina Faso research on religion largely follows the concepts and epistemologies developed in France, it is not because there is a lack of original local production, but mainly for linguistic and financial reasons, and because of higher education policies. Indeed, you cannot earn a doctorate in anthropology in Burkina Faso. Doctoral schools in law, political science and sociology are relatively recent. The first social scientists trained in the country were historians. It should be added that the development of fields of knowledge depends on changes in the orientation of public policies in higher education and research.

It should also be noted that the Burkinabe community of researchers working on religion is essentially male, while many of the foreign researchers interested in religious phenomena are women.



Chart 4

Number of women working on religion in Burkina Faso by university affiliation between 1965- 2018
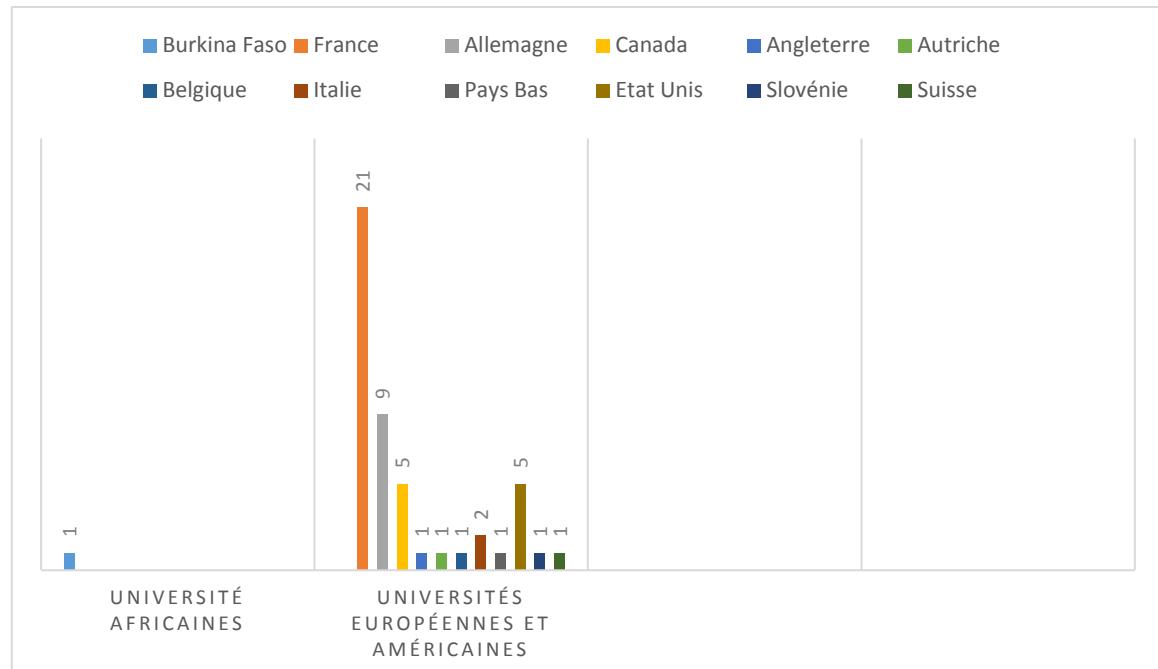
A large number of researchers and lecturers in social sciences in Burkina Faso have been trained in France, a minority in Germany, the United States or Scandinavian countries. This is what Christian Agbobli and Marie-Soleil Frère (2018) define as the mechanisms of "trajectory dependence". They describe this dependence not as a lack of post-colonial criticism on the part of French-speaking African researchers, but in terms of the influence of the past on a knowledge sector. History has an impact on the constitution of knowledge, even if the

university and academic system have evolved. This historical dependence, they argue, provides an indication of the concepts, methodologies and theoretical frameworks that are used in Francophone research on religion in Burkina Faso, but also on the topics and objects on which researchers decide to focus.

The following section describes and thoroughly analyses the publications on religions in Burkina Faso in a chronological order, placing them within the broader framework of the development of religious studies in Africa.

# 4. **Evolution of the topics. Presentation of the publications.**



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## 4.1. From the Religions of the Others to an Anthropology of Religious Traditions

"Classical" ethnology has produced many studies on traditional religions in Burkina Faso, including ethnic or village monographs. Of the sixty or more ethnic groups in Burkina Faso, about a third have had publications on their religion, following Germaine Dieterlen's famous example on "The Bambara Religion" (1951) or which analyse certain aspects of this religion, often in relation to the description of their social structure.

The Mossi and various aspects of their socio-religious traditions are studied by Badini (1979), Bonnet (1992), Fidali (1987), Ilboudo (1966), Izard (1985, 1986), Lallemand (1978) and Mangin (1960). Capron (1973) conducted ethnographic surveys among the Bwa who live on both sides of the Burkinabe and Malian border. Cartry (1973) and Swanson (1976) provide descriptions of the notion of person for the Gourmantché. Dacher (1984, 1985) analyses different aspects of the Goin society in the Banfora region. Dittmer (1958, 1961) and his colleague Zwernemann (1963) of the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology undertook ethnographic surveys, between 1954 and 1965 and in 1962, among the Gurunsi, Kasena and Nuna with a particular attention to their leadership and religious system. A group of French ethnologists, in the wake of Andras Zempleni, focused on the conceptions of disease and misfortune among the Bisa (Fainzang 1984, 1986), the Senoufo (Sindzingre 1984), the Mossi (Bonnet 1988), the Winye (Jacob 1987) and the Lobi (Cros 1993). The social and ritual institutions of the Lobi were studied by Gottschalk (1999), Fiéloux (1994), Meyer (1981) and Rouville 1987. Jack Goody (1959) found interest in the conception of death of the Dagara or loDagara, Heir (1978) in the Samo. Schott (1984) and his colleagues at the University of Münster worked between 1982 and 1984 among the Leyla on the status of women, particularly on rites related to marriage (Steinbrich 1987). Other aspects of Leyla society and their religious practices are also described by Bayili (1998) and Bamony (1997). Several publications on the social structure of the Kurumba and the Nyonyosi have carefully described their religious practices, social organisations, and the use

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of masks (Schweeger-Hefel (1980), Gerard (1985). Various members of the Frobenius Institute of the University of Frankfurt (Fliedermutz-Laun, Geis, Gruner, Schneider, Stössel, Haberland) have collaborated in a research programme on material culture, namely architecture and ceramics in Burkina Faso. Some of their publications focus on the religious meanings of jar decorations or ritual functions by the Lobi (Schneider 1986) and Gourmantché (Geis-Tronich 1991). Le Moal (1973, 1981, 1987, 1987, 1989, 1991) has dedicated several articles to the notion of person among the Bobo, to sacrifices and funeral rituals. Trost (1986) and Hébert (1964, 1997) study religious conceptions of the Tussian, Erbs (1975) those of the Bifor. From 1975 to the 2000s, a group of researchers from the laboratory *Système de pensée en Afrique Noire* working on so-called "Voltaic" societies undertook a series of seminars to compare sacrifice, initiation, rites and relationship to the earth and the role of the masters of the earth in these different societies, most of them located in Burkina Faso (see in particular the publications of the journal *Système de pensée en Afrique noire*, and those of Michel Carty, Danouta Liberski-Bagnoud, Stephan Dugast).

Most of these studies interpret traditional practices observed in the ethnographic present as a system of thought, evidence of a traditional past focusing on the idea of establishing a description of pure traditional religion. These studies assume stable religious boundaries and a fixed social system that, as it is known today, does not exist anywhere. Many of these publications on traditional religion between 1960 and the late 1990s are based on an essentialist conception of religion on the one hand, and on the notion of ethnicity on the other hand. Dakhila notes that the difficulty for anthropologists of that time to see the influences of Islam or Christianity in the societies they studied is due to an omission linked to the tendency to "paganise" ethnic groups to enhance their exoticism, and in connection with the postulate of the local coherence of a society (1995: 146).

Traditional religion has been described in all the publications mentioned above by surveying rural areas, leading to the production of a series of monographs on the traditional religion of a particular ethnic group. This conception of ethnicity as a strictly local reality has been criticised by many (Amselle 1990, Lentz 2006, Mudimbe 1988). Since the 1990s, the notion of "territorialised social group" or "ethnic group", which used to be long-standing object of discussion among anthropologists, has been increasingly substituted by notions of social space, networks, or issues questioning identity (Hagberg 2003). However, appreciated in their scientific and historical context, these publications provide a valuable basis for analysing the contemporary religious landscape and the changes that have occurred.[6]

As interest in a more dynamic conception of African societies has emerged following the Manchester school and Georges Balandier in France, a number of more recent studies, enriched by new approaches and methodologies, focus on traditional religious practices in their interactions with other religions and as a transversal element in the economic, political and social sectors in Burkina Faso.

**Funerary rituals, beliefs and practices surrounding death** emerge as a topic that allows for the studying of contemporary situations and observing the reorganisation of family, social and

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[6] Langewiesche (1998), for example, used the work of the Austrian anthropologist Schweeger-Hefel to analyse the changes that have occurred in the Yatenga region over the past twenty years.

even political positions. The analysis of funerary rituals and processes is both one of the privileged topics addressed in the anthropological production of the "traditional" image of Africa and a significant approach to broader social changes in African plural societies in an empirical way (Jindra and Noret 2011: 6). This ambivalence is reflected in the publications concerning funerals in Burkina Faso.[7] The interest of anthropologists and art historians in ritual objects and particularly in masks is linked to funerals.[8] Nevertheless, it should be noted that these studies often omit the discussion on the evolving use of masks in a contemporary context, in both rural and urban spaces.

Another ritual that has attracted the attention of anthropologists is **marriage**. The practice of free union as a method of forming couples and families tends to take precedence over formalised marriage and gives way to new matrimonial arrangements. By studying marriage as a religious ritual, a family ceremony and a social institution in its historicity, these pieces of research make it possible to address different aspects of a changing society.[9]

In line with this very same approach, i. e. by taking a striking feature of traditional religion and studying it through the prism of social change and its integration into contemporary economic and political contexts, a wide array of classical topics have been investigated in Burkinabe societies: the relationship to **nature and the environment,**[10] **kinship,**[11] **witchcraft/magic,**[12] **conceptions surrounding illness and health,**[13] as well as **music and its ritual use.**[14] Except for these books and articles, which deal with aspects of traditional religion in a contemporary context, there is (almost) no scientific study dealing with contemporary developments of traditional religions in Burkina Faso, for example the trend leading to folklorisation or patrimonialisation of local traditions, the return to "authentically African" values as a socio-political, identity or artistic claim, the contribution of local traditions to development, or in the context of the Burkinabe diaspora in Europe or the Americas. Katja Werthmann's (2014) article on a sacred place considered traditional used by followers of different denominations remains the exception. This trend in the evolution of religious studies in Burkina Faso follows the trend of French anthropology, which showed a decreasing interest in traditional religions and societies between 1960 and 2013 (*Les études africaines en France. Un état des lieux*, 2016 published by the GIS, Groupement d'intérêt scientifique: 102).

A **political anthropology of religion** linked to the question of power and access to resources is emerging for Burkina Faso with Kuba and Lentz's research (2002) and that of Reikat (2000) on land-ownership as well as the studies of Pfluger (1988) and Schott (1991) analysing the links between political, legal and religious organisation. The issue of the state in Africa and its links

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[7] Attané 2014, Bidima 2008, Bonnafé and Fiéloux 1984, Bonnet 1981, Bruyer 1997, Degorce 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016, Durantel 1994, Langewiesche 2003, 2007, 2011, Ouédraogo H. 1993, Poda 1991, Reikat 2003.

[8] Bognolo, 1990, 2008, 2016, Diamitani 2008, Dugast 2015, Giorgi 2001, Homann 2014, Millogo 2007, Pacéré 1998, Pataux 2010, Tengan 2012.

[9] Attané 2007, Kibora 1996, Laurent 2003, Steinbrich 1987.

[10] Alferie 2010, 2013, Hagberg 2006, Liberski-Bagnoud, Fournier and Nignan, 2010, Luning 2007, Ritz-Müller 1994.

[11] Izard 1986, Dacher 2005, Fiéloux and Kambou 1993, Fiéloux and Lombard 1998, Lallemand 1977, Liberski-Bagnoud 2002.

[12] Bamony 2009, Bieri/Froidevaux 2010, Jacob 1989, Förster 1985, Gottschalk 1999, Royer 1999, 2000, Schott 1997.

[13] Bonnet 1988, Ergot 2002, Fainzang 1986, Jacob 1989, Cros 1987, 1995.

[14] Degorce 2010, 2014, 2016, Kaboré, O. 1993, Liberski-Bagnoud 2012.

with religious actors also began to emerge during the 1990s[15] and continues to be discussed by researchers. Benoît Beucher (2017, 2018) recently analysed the coexistence of monarchical systems of divine law and republican regime by pursuing Michel Izard's history of Mossi kingdoms to the present day. Sabine Luning (2010) examined the contemporary challenges of rituals through an in-depth analysis of the chieftaincy in Maane.

Finally, the interest in **religious phenomena in the urban environment** of Burkina Faso has been evidenced thanks to the seminal work of Laurent Fourchard (1999, 2001) and the volume published by René Otayek in 1999, *Dieu dans la Cité*, to which several Burkinabe and foreign researchers participated. As a result of this series of studies, which combine Anglo-Saxon anthropological traditions with a Francophone geographical approach to provide a better understanding of the complexity of urban societies, spaces and urban societies on the one hand, and politics, religions and societies on the other, two major lines of research were launched to investigate contemporary cities (Fourchard 2004: 135, Peel 1980, Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991).[16]

All these studies help to understand how religious traditions shape the multiple dimensions of Burkinabe societies and illustrate the centrality of religion in understanding social change. It is also apparent that the topics of anthropological studies on religion in Burkina Faso are becoming increasingly similar in their scope to those of sociology by integrating political and historical analyses.

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[15] The authors are interested as much in pre-colonial states as in colonial and postcolonial states and their collaborations or tensions with religious communities (Izard 1985, Diawara 1999, Otayek 1993, 1996, 1997, Somé 2003). See also various contributions in the collective book in honour of Michel Izard published by Dominique Casajus and Fabio Vitti in 2012.

[16] For Ouagdougou, see: Fournet et al. 2008. For Koudougou: Hilgers 2009. For Bobo-Dioulasso: Werthmann and Sanogo, 2013. For Dori: Kaboré, 2018. For Dédougou: Werthmann, 2004.

© Alice Degorce, 2018 palais du naaba d'Issouka à Koudougou
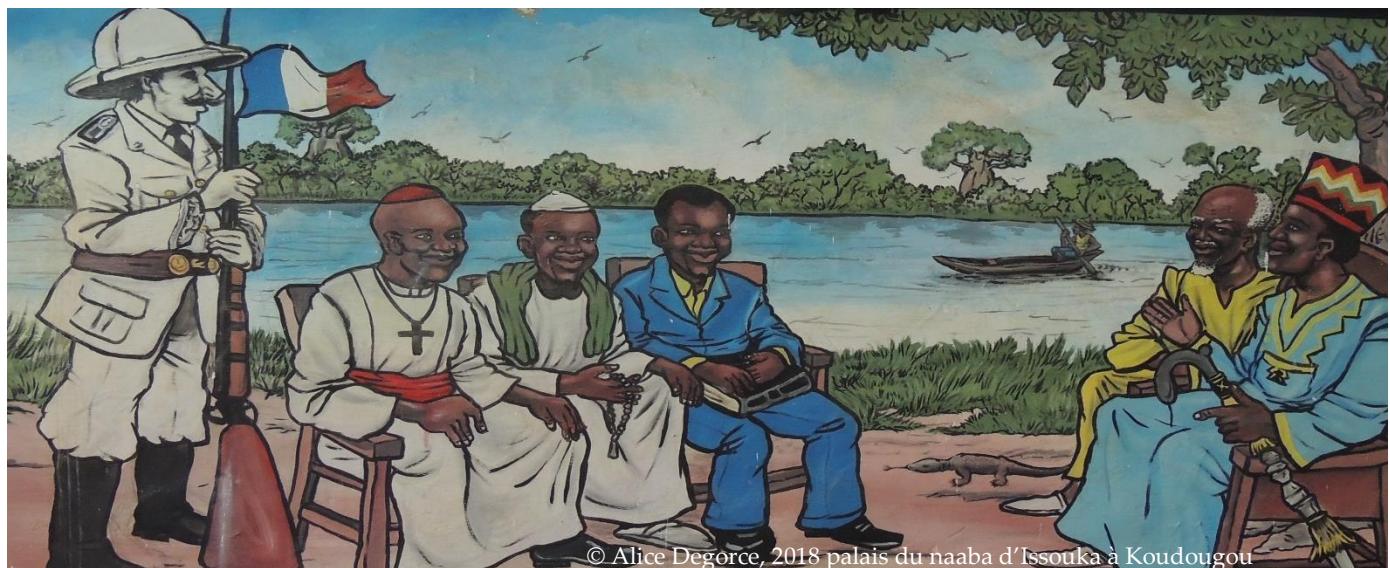
## 4.2. Historians and Religions: The Processes of Islamisation and Christianisation

Beside the anthropological paradigm that focuses on social change, it is also the development of a historical anthropology that challenges the categories of classical religious anthropology (Mary 2010). The work of historians has made it possible to question the anthropological construction of "traditional religion" and the concepts underlying its development by pointing out the long-standing history of Islam in Burkina Faso and the decisive role of Christian missionaries in the development of local identities.

The first studies on Islamisation and Christianisation in Burkina Faso were written by an American researcher (Skinner 1958, 1962) and a Canadian researcher (Echenberg 1969), followed by studies by three White Fathers: Audouin, Deniel and Benoit. Audouin and Deniel (1978) published a study on Islam in Upper Volta during the colonial period; Audouin (1982)[17] wrote a thesis which, although unpublished, remained a reference in the field of Christianisation of the Mossi country for many years. Similarly, Joseph-Roger de Benoist's (1987) book is still today deemed a valuable tool for all those who are interested in the relationship between the colonial administration and Catholic missionaries.

Since the late 1980s, Burkinabe historians have been providing detailed research on Islamisation[18] and Christianisation[19] in the different regions of the country, addressing specific aspects such as education, resistance to colonisers, brotherhoods, intra-religious conflicts, the

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[17] In part of his PhD thesis, Audouin summarised his work on Islam in Upper Volta published in 1978 in collaboration with Deniel. (Audouin 1982: 399-449).

[18] Cissé 1990, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013, Diallo 1985, 1990, 2003, Kouanda and Sawadogo 1993, Kouanda 1988, 1989, 1996, 1997, Ouedraogo 2008, Savadogo B. M. 1996, Traoré 2004, 2005, 2010.

[19] Bado 1993, Compaoré 1993, 2003, Halpougdou 2005, Ilboudo 1993, Poda 1997, Rouamba 1999, Sandwidé 1999, Sanon 1993, Sanou, Doti 1991, 1994, Somé 1993, 1998, 2004, 2012.

condition of women, conversion, and so forth.[20] Islam in the pre-colonial period seems to have been slightly less appealing to researchers than the growth of Islam during colonisation.[21]

It was only around the 2000s that a number of detailed studies began to investigate the question of the links between colonisation and Christianisation in Burkina Faso.[22] In this context, it is worth mentioning the brilliant work of Jean-Marie Bouron, who wrote a thesis on the missionary enterprise of the White Fathers in Burkina Faso and Ghana and published numerous articles that shed light on various points, not least the influence of missionaries on Voltaic politics.

With rare exceptions (Schweeger-Hefel and Staude 1965, Skinner 1967, Cissé 1993, Kouanda 1997), few researchers interested in the processes of Islamisation and Christianisation in Burkina Faso have addressed the two monotheistic religions in parallel, as if during the colonial period Christians and Muslims were living in two separate spheres of society. This tendency to rarely examine Islamic-Christian encounters in depth is not specific to Burkina Faso, but is to be found in all historical studies of Islam or Christianity in Africa (Soares 2006: 675). Soares notes that the propensity of most scholars to study a particular religious tradition, and sometimes its interaction with the so-called "traditional" African religion, is linked to the nature of doctoral training, which prevents most people from acquiring the adequate training necessary to build the expertise to deal with both Islam and Christianity as religious traditions. In contrast, for Burkina Faso, Skinner's text is an outstanding exception to the rule: he indeed considers both Islam and Christianity and their encountering traditional religion (Skinner 1967). This research primarily investigates the dynamics and expansion of one religion in detail, referencing the others only if it is necessary to understand the religion initially studied. Kouanda compares the missionary strategies of Catholics and Muslims during the colonial era (Kouanda 1997). Cissé analyses Islam and Christianity confronted with the colonial administrator and in decolonisation movements (Cissé 1993). The French political scientist, René Otayek, is one of the few authors who has studied Islam (1984, 1988, 1993, 1996), Catholicism (1997) and Protestantism (1998) in Burkina Faso. He analyses the three universalist religions by comparing their organisational structures and their relationships with political power. From a political scientist's perspective, he studies institutional religion and religious change as a global historical process. He has little interest in the religious choices of individuals and the social significance of their religious trajectories. The limitations of this approach, insisting on the existence of distinct communities for an understanding of Muslim-Christian relations, seem blatant today. Since Skinner's research based on surveys from the late 1950s, knowledge about the social role of conversions and their potential for change in African societies has advanced considerably, both empirically and theoretically. Especially from the discussion around such authors as Horton (1971, 1975), Fischer (1973) and Peel (1978,

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[20] It should be noted that Christian scholars generally devote themselves to the history of Christianity and their Muslim colleagues to the history of Islam.

[21] Cissé 2003, Diallo 1985, 2003, Echenberg 1969, Gérard 1997, Jacob 2014, Kouanda/Swadogo 1993, Kouanda 1997, Levtzion 1986, Otayek 1988, Ouédraogo Y. 2017, Phliponeau 2009, Saul 1984, Skinner 1962, Traoré 2005, Werthmann 2012, Wilks 2000.

[22] Bobin 2003, Bouron 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, Fourchard 1997, 1999, Hawkins 1997, Langewiesche 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, Lentz 2005, Ouédraogo H. 2016.

1990)[23] whose theories have been applied on the Burkinabe cases by several authors with different approaches.[24] The major disciplinary divisions between religious studies in the anthropological perspective and in the historical perspective on the one hand, and the academic boundary between researchers who study Islam and those who devote themselves to Christianity on the other hand, is now blurred by questions about religions in the public arena, the forms of a hybrid religiosity, and by a rationale in terms of networks that cross cultures and nations.



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## 4.3. Contemporary religions in modern societies in Burkina Faso

Emerging research questions are linked to the decline of the secularisation theory[25] and the visibility of religions in the public space.[26] To some extent, after the epistemological crisis of the secularisation paradigm, a new assessment of the religious landscape is gaining ground and a new consensus is being built on the place and role of religion in the world today.

*A gradual re-engagement of religious elites in the public sphere*

This trend in the academic literature corresponds to a gradual re-engagement of West African elites in the public arena that began in the 1990s, which is well documented for the "Muslim sphere" in Burkina Faso[27] and a shift of religious actors from all currents towards the political field.[28] At the same time, the state's disengagement from public services reinforces the idea that religious communities, both Christian and increasingly Muslim ones, are capable of ensuring the public welfare. Work on the associative sector in Burkina Faso examines this idea in detail (Cissé 2007, Couillard et al. 2016, Oubda 2016). In the shadow of the democratisation processes of the 1990s, Burkina Faso, as in other parts of West Africa, is witnessing not only a

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[23] For an in-depth discussion of these authors see Mary (1991).

[24] Fancello 2006, 2007, Hammond 1992, Hawkins 1997, Langewiesche 1998, 2005, 2007, Laurent 1998, 2005, Luning 2002, Royer 1996, Somé 1993, 2004, Soubeiga 1999.

[25] For a discussion of the theory of secularisation and its consequences on the sciences of religions, see, by way of example: Casanova 1994: Chapter 1, Pollack and Rosta 2015: Chapter 2.

[26] On religions in the public space see for example: Casanova 1994, Bréchon et al. 2000, Salvatore 2007, Menieta and Vanantwerpen (eds.) 2011.

[27] Cissé 2009, Gomez-Perez 2009, 2017, Kouanda 1996, Madore 2016, Otayek 1996, Ouédraogo Y. 2014, 2017, Samson 2011, 2013, Traoré 2005.

[28] André and Hilgers 2010, Compaoré A. 2015, Hilgers 2007, Kane 2016, Kolesnore 2016, Otayek 1997, Saint-Lary and Kaag 2011, Somé 2001, Traoré 2013, Vanvyve 2015.

proliferation of religious associations, but also a rise in private and religious media (Damome 2014, Madore 2016, Samson 2011, Savadogo and Gomez-Perez 2011, Kaboré 2017) and new styles for expressing religious feelings (Degorce 2017). Issa Cissé (2009, 2014, 2015) notes that during the same period, in the wake of the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1991, there was the building of a strong connection between statesmen and the business community, which was traditionally dominated by prominent Muslim business people. A new generation of Muslim entrepreneurs was born during the 1990s, which, according to Issa Cissé, was characterized by a basic religious education, an uninhibited approach to state practices and an aspiration to rapidly enrich themselves. Other types of "religious entrepreneurs" at the service of the people, but also in their interest, are described by Mara Vitale (2009, 2016) and offer the image of a religious elite engaged in civic activities.

The influence of religious actors on the public sphere depends in particular on their involvement in the health and education sectors. The investment of religious actors in the Burkinabe health sector has attracted the attention of several researchers (Couillard 2016, Bouron 2012, Langewiesche 2011, Monné 1999, Wodon and Lomas 2015) who map out the interactions between religious beliefs and medical practices since colonisation until the present day. Other works on health focus on the question of healing in charismatic and evangelical communities (Soubeiga 1999, Laurent 2001). Some authors analyse the attitudes to a public health issue according to individuals' religious affiliation: Dehne (2003) studies the application of birth spacing methods according to religious beliefs, Hayford and Trinitapoli (2011) examine female genital cutting practices. Marshall and Taylor (2006) explore the position of local evangelical churches with regard to gender and sex, and the implications of HIV, Soura et al (2013) explore religious differences in child vaccination rates in Ouagadougou. Hadnes and Schumacher (2012) analyse the economic impact of traditional beliefs on behaviour by conducting surveys on microentrepreneurs in the vicinity of Ouagadougou.

The interest in the influence of religious actors in healthcare institutions, NGOs, associations and youth movements[29] in Burkina Faso is linked, among other elements, to the contemporary acceptance of the concept of civil society, understood as groups (associations, NGOs, think-tanks) that are set up outside the perimeter of the state, the private sphere and the economic system (Leclerc-Olive, 2009: 48). Yacouba Ouédraogo (2017) points out in particular that the movement of young Muslims was strongly visible in Burkina Faso under the regime of the Fourth Republic and resulted in the emergence of an Islam that was critical vis-a-vis the political power. Over the past two decades, public policies in the South have undergone remarkable processes of globalisation, "NGOisation", and large-scale external conditioning. This global process is analysed in Burkina Faso through the prism of education and health policies and through the work of international and local NGOs.[30] In addition to the area of health, mentioned above, religious actors have made education their primary field of intervention. As a result, much work is being done to analyse the different aspects of the

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[29] Audet Gosselin 2016, Debevec 2012, 2013, Gomez-Perez et al. 2009, Kouanda 1989, Oubda 2016, Ouédraogo Y. 2017, Vanvyve 2016.

[30] Audet Gosselin 2016, Audet Gosselin and Koenig 2016, Audet Gosselin et al. 2013, Cissé 2015, Couillard et al. 2016, Diawara 1999, Ibriga 1998, Kaboré 2014, Langewiesche 2019, Laurent 1994, LeBlanc et al. 2013, LeBlanc and Audet Gosselin 2017, Otayek and Diallo 1998, Ouédraogo Y. 2017, Somé M. 2017, Vitale 2009, 2016, Yaro 1998.

engagement of Muslim and Catholic actors in the Burkinabe education sector.[31] On the other hand, we do not yet have specific analyses of the teaching offered by the different evangelical movements.

Research on contemporary religions in Burkina Faso also reflects women's affirmation in the public sphere by analysing their involvement in associations. The understanding of religion from a gender perspective and through a questioning of the concept of "emancipation" constitutes invaluable insights for researchers on Burkinabe society and its contemporary changes.[32] The emphasis, among other things, on the agency of local actors repudiates the vision of women as passive victims of their subjection. Maud Saint-Lary (2009, 2012, 2018) notes with regard to the Islamic feminist struggle in Burkina Faso that the international context has played an important role in its emergence. Women, long-time activists in Muslim associations that combine university education and Islamic training, propose to review the Millennium Development Goals "gender equality and women's empowerment" in the light of Islam. They are thus part of the process of modernising Burkinabe Islam, which is becoming a protagonist in civil society, alongside Christian organisations and secular associations.

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[31] Baux 2006, Bredeloup 2014, Cissé 1990, 2007, 2009, Compaoré 1993, 2003, Otayek 1993, Ouedraogo A., 2007, Saint-Lary 2011, Saul 1984.

[32] Bouron 2014, 2018, Debevec 2012, Degorce 2016, Fancello 2005, Langewiesche 2008, 2012, 2014, Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016, Gomez-Perez 2016, Quimby 1979, Saint-Lary 2012, 2016, Zents 2005.

The literature on the notion of gender is very extensive for Burkina Faso, but not all authors necessarily analyse the religious dimension and gender relations together.

La **Tabaski**, c'est **carême**nt œcuménique...

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### 4.4. Research on religious plurality in Burkina Faso - transnationalisation of religions

Among historians, social scientists and religious scholars, there is growing recognition of the importance of studying Islam and Christianity in Africa not separately but together, as religions experienced in dynamic interaction over time. Benjamin Soares traces the history of research on religious encounters, particularly between Christians and Muslims in Africa, and develops the main concepts that guided researchers in their analyses in his article *Reflections on Muslim-Christian Encounters in West Africa* published in 2016. With regard to religious approaches in Burkina Faso, since the early 2000s, some researchers have studied the implications of religious plurality on the daily lives of the Burkinabe by following John J. Peel's pioneering work on the epistemological priority of interaction and his work on the encounter of different religious traditions in Yoruba countries in Nigeria, in which he analyses the interactions of different religious practices in a quite innovative way (Peel 1990, 2000, 2016). A questioning of how individuals use their knowledge and experience with religions other than their own to manage their lives cannot be limited to the analysis of one of these religions.

*The ordinary mechanisms of religious cohabitation*

This observation and the absence of studies to fill our gaps on the ordinary mechanisms of religious cohabitation in complex and plural societies have prompted research on traditionalist-Christian-Muslim relations in Burkina Faso. Rahmane Idrissa (2017) seeks an explanation in the evolution of religious diversity in Burkina Faso for what he calls "consensual secularism" that makes the Burkinabe case so exceptional among Sahelian countries. A consensus supporting the subordination of religion – including Catholicism –to the state was preferred to interreligious conflicts for hegemony and the creation of homogeneity. He explains the reasons and nature of this preference by the existing balance between Islam, Catholicism and traditional religions, which has hindered the development of Islamic politicisation, Catholic clericalism, and the affirmation of traditional authorities. From a political scientist's perspective, he hardly takes into account the daily coexistence within the families of the different religions to explain the exceptionality of the Burkinabe case. Andrea

Reikat (2003), on the contrary, examines religious plurality in east-central Burkina Faso (Tenkodogo) by focusing on the complementarities and clashes between Muslim and Christian participants in customary ceremonies. She documents the fragile and negotiated balance between religions that depends as much on socio-political realities as on the individuals who are at the head of traditional chiefdoms. In particular, her case study warns against generalisations about the behaviour of multiple types of traditional religious leaders towards monotheistic religions. Bouron (2011, 2012) takes up the theme of religious plurality and interfaith relations in a historical context. During the colonial period, religious competition became institutionalised and sometimes a conflictual situation crystallised. His work highlights the gap between the absence of a conflicting vision of religious plurality among most of the faithful and the peaceful coexistence practised on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy's insistence on interreligious dialogue and the necessary encounter on the other. He notes for the period he analyses, between 1900 and 1960, that "believers reflect, on the contrary, their willingness to mitigate conflicts. [...] By using religious pluralism to their advantage, they thus succeed in formulating an original version of secularism" (Bouron 2011: 13). Katrin Langewiesche (1998, 2003, 2011) examined religious diversity in northern Burkina Faso by following traditional religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism over time. She documents what she calls "religious mobility" and illustrates how religious change – for example, conversion from one religion to another, or cases of serial conversions – is often deeply pragmatic, sometimes reversible, and closely linked to patterns of sociability and other areas of social life such as politics, marriage, migration and livelihoods. The demographers Maiga, Abdoulaye and Banza, Baya (2014) explore a particular aspect of everyday cohabitation, interreligious marriages. They observe that unions that do not take religious beliefs into account are not uncommon in rural areas and that de-facto unions appear to be the alternative form of couple living for spouses of different religions. Sandra Fancello (2007) in her study on the installation of Pentecostal churches in northern Burkina Faso and northern Mali provides a complex narrative of conversions as well as the violence and reconciliation attempts that can accompany them. The examples she gives illustrate the link between conversions and migration in the city of Mopti, where the assembly of the faithful is composed mainly of migrants to whom the pastor offers a variety of care options aimed at strengthening community and consolidating the Church's position in this part of the country.

These studies on religious diversity, conversions and everyday cohabitation reveal the sensitive nature of research on religions that can challenge members of some religious communities whose idealised portraits of their own religion may not align with the fact that some believers either combine elements of different religions, or purely and simply reject one religion, or else adopt religious styles that are influenced by another religion.

*Institutionalised inter-religious relations and the question of secularism*

Empirical studies on religious plurality in Burkina Faso take into account the different scales of coexistence, at the individual level as already mentioned, but also at the level of local institutions and on a global scale. Institutionalised inter-religious relations have been studied

in different settings, among urban youth (Audet Gosselin 2016) and in the public health field (Langewiesche 2011). Koudbi Kaboré (2014, 2017, 2018) analyses an institution, often presented as a pioneering organisation in the field of inter-religious dialogue in Burkina Faso, the *Union Fraternelle des Croyants* à Dori in its historical dimension. He delineates the background of its founding members, studies its transnational links to Europe, and examines its place in contemporary society in detail. The political representations of religious diversity related to the question of secularism have been analysed mainly from the point of view of Islam by Issa Cissé (2012), Yacouba Ouédraogo (2013), Fabienne Samson (2014), Bakary Traoré (2010) and Mara Vitale (2014). They examine what are the different Muslim currents' self-representations, and which secularism they claim. They review pre-colonial state formations that have been able to separate the state from religious cults, before discussing the exercise of colonial governance that enshrined French secularism in the constitution, and then the state authorities that have partially unburdened themselves on religious entities to manage the society. Issues that come up regularly are the involvement of the state in the organisation of the *hadj* from 1995 onwards, which was considered to be a violation of the principles of secularism and the refusal of "laïcité" as conceived in other regions of the world.

*Transnational connections*

A growing and very recent literature explores religious diversity on a global scale, stressing the importance of studying transnational connections between Muslim and Christian movements in order to understand the cooperation and tensions between religious communities in Burkina Faso as well as the formation of networks and affiliations. These pieces of research usually include a comparison between different Muslim and Christian movements and/or between different countries in the sub-region.[33] For obvious reasons, these studies cross national borders and often require multi-site surveys. In this field of cross-border research, it is worth highlighting Mahamoudou Oubda's book (2015) on bilateral cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Burkina Faso, a subject on which there had been no publication until then. The contributions of Jean-Marie Bouron, Sandra Fancello (2006) and Ousman Murzik Kobo (2009, 2012) apply an in-depth comparative approach, linking neighbouring French-speaking and English-speaking countries with strong cultural similarities (at least with regard to northern Ghana) and differing colonial stories by studying respectively catholic missionaries, pentecostal churches and the wahhabi movement in both countries.[34] Mathias B. Savadogo (2002, 2011) compares a brotherhood in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Royer had already, in 1999, studied the manifestations of the "Massa cult" during the colonial period from a regional perspective by following the movement of his subject of enquiry between eastern Mali, northern Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, as well as in Burkina Faso. On the other hand, there is no detailed research on the analysis of current cross-border religious dynamics between Mali and Burkina Faso, similar to those addressing those between Niger and Nigeria, for example. The project on religious dynamics in a migratory context currently coordinated

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[33] Audet Gosselin and LeBlanc 2016, Bouron 2012, Damome 2014, Langewiesche 2011, 2012, 2015, Laurent 2001, LeBlanc, Audet-Gosselin and Gomez-Perez 2013, Oubda 2015, 2016, Otayek 1999, Saint-Lary and Kaag 2011, Samson 2008, 2013, 2017.

[34] The studies conducted by Goody (1959), Kuba and Lentz (2002), Lentz (2005) on the Dagara between Burkina Faso and Ghana also provide a comparative approach.

by Alice Degorce is meant to address this weakness.[35] A careful comparison between religious diversity in Burkina Faso and Nigeria should also be developed. The most obvious difference between the two countries is that in Nigeria, the secularising effects of religious diversity have been tempered by the regional distribution of religions into clusters of Christians and Muslims living in almost autonomous territories. Where this opposition has not occurred, in the Southwest, society was more secular and no Sharia ideology took root (Nolte et al. 2017, Peel 2016). Although some of the differences between Burkina Faso and Nigeria may seem obvious, we still need to understand the mechanisms underlying these differences and seek operational causes of the Burkinabe way of dealing with diversity (Valensi 2002).

In the context of debates on globalisation, the concept of transnationalism has been introduced by research on migrations to analyse the complex links between migrants, the host society, and their countries of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Vertovec 1999). More and more academic work has focused on fluxes, spaces or networks, which are considered more likely to capture the complex mobilities, connectivities and power structures that shape people's daily lives. Transnational phenomena develop through migration, but also through the exchange of goods and ideas through non-governmental organisations, associations or churches (Faist 2000, Weissköppel 2008). In most cases, existing trade links or migration precede religious transnationalism (Fourchard et al. 2005). Such as the Yoruba traders who founded their first Baptist church in Ouagadougou in 1939 (Rouamba 1999), or the Muslim Hausa living in the Zangouettin district of the capital (Kouanda 1995: 236). Transnationalism, more than a concept, has become a paradigm used in the field in Burkina Faso to analyse the activities of Catholic congregations (Bouron 2014, Langewiesche 2012), the Muslim missionary movement of Ahmadiyya (Langewiesche 2019), Pentecostal churches (Fancello 2003, 2006, Laurent 2001) and "Neo-Pentecostal" movements (Degorce 2017).

It does not seem possible to study religious diversity today without taking into account transnational and migratory movements on the one hand, and the media on the other. As several specialists for other African countries have pointed out, Burkinabe evangelicals have often adopted mass media and new media technologies earlier and more easily than Muslims and traditional religious practitioners and, in some cases, Christians have tended to dominate the use of media and broadcasting technologies (Audet Gosselin 2017, Damome 2014, Langewiesche 2015, Madore 2016, Samson 2008). Despite this Christian domination in the media, we have several in-depth analyses of different forms of media coverage of Islam in Burkina Faso. Muriel Gomez-Perez (2009, 2013, 2018) and Frédérick Madore (2016) note that there is an effort to both standardise and self-regulate the content broadcast. They note a disruption with the more radical positions of the 1970s and 1980s militants leading to conformism with the building of the image of "good Muslims", which is part of an individualisation of the religious sentiment.

All the research on religious diversity in Burkina Faso perfectly illustrates that when Muslims, Christians and traditional religions are placed in the same analytical framework, this perspective offers new perspectives on issues such as lived religion, conversions, changes in

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[35] ANR- Relinsert 2018/2019

religious practices through borrowing, appropriation, mixing or oscillation, but also on the articulation between religions and the politics or political representations of religious pluralism. Soares reminds us that "... the complexity of interactions between Muslims and Christians in Africa must not be reduced to peaceful coexistence or conflicts, latent or violent" (Soares 2016: 677). Indeed, these relationships range from collaboration to competition, from complementarity to exclusion, from tolerance to ignorance.



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### 4.5. Studies on radicalisation in Burkina Faso

Conceptual differentiations and clarifications are particularly important in the field of radicalisation research, since the terminology selected pre-structures the research subject and perspectives.

*Radicalisation*

Despite the obvious lexical proximity, it is necessary to differentiate between the "Islamic radicalisms" identified by researchers working on Islam in Burkina Faso or in the sub-region as a movement of Muslim emergence and affirmation in the public space in Africa, and "radicalisation", a term used in current political discourse to indicate violent religious extremism. A careful analysis of the scientific literature on religion in Burkina Faso shows that the concept of "radicalisation" is used by no researcher, unlike that of "Islamic radicalisms" on which a long-standing academic tradition has been established. Crettiez and Sèze note this same fact for the research on violent extremism in Europe. While this concept was almost non-existent in the two main Anglo-Saxon journals focusing on terrorism[36] until 2006, it has been central from then on (Crettiez and Sèze 2017, Crettiez 2016).

Radicalisation is defined by most scholars as "the process by which an individual or group adopts a violent form of action, directly linked to an extremist ideology that challenges the established political, social or cultural order" (Quoted in Saoud El Mawla 2017, Khosrokhavar 2011, Borum 2011, Wilner and Dubouloz 2010). The notion of radicalisation therefore shifts the analysis towards the subjectivity of the individual and the interactions between the group and the individual on the one hand, and towards the use of violence as a means of expression on

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[36] *Terrorism and Political Violence*; *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

the other. In terms of research methodologies, this approach to radicalisation implies a greater focus than before on the psycho-social factors underlying the phenomenon of violent extremism. The use of the term "radicalisation" now emphasises the processes that drive individuals to engage in a violent path. The question is less about understanding why people engage in terrorism than about how they are enrolled (Borum 2011).[37]

*Islamic radicalisms*

While research on Islamic radicalisation in Burkina Faso (as elsewhere) is still in its infancy, work on Islamic radicalisms can be based on a solid knowledge production.[38] When in the late 1980s researchers began to focus on "Islamic Dynamics in Black Africa",[39] they defined Islamic radicalism as a growing involvement of Arabising intellectuals in the political life of different African nations. The first studies on Islamic radicalism south of the Sahara singled out this trend with the emergence of Wahhabiyya in West Africa, specifying that their radicality consisted in positioning themselves against all forms of Sufism and traditional marabouts, as well as by stigmatising a series of cultural habits (Kaba 1974, Launay 1992, Soares 2005). The emergence and affirmation of this reformist movement in Burkina Faso from the 1960s onwards has been studied by Maimouna Koné-Dao (2005), Ousman Murzik Kobo (2009) and Issa Cissé (2009). Originally, the followers of this movement envisaged an educational reform that involved the Arabisation of African Muslims, deemed the essential condition for accessing authentic reading, outside any mediation of the Koran and the Sunna (Bredeloup 2014, Cissé 2009, Ouédraogo 2017, Ouedraogo 2008). René Otayek has collated a series of articles on these intellectuals, the so-called *arabisant*s in different West African countries and the promotion of the Arabic language. He describes their discourses as radical or fundamentalist, which links religious renewal to social change through a critique of the West. Yet he insists that not all *arabisant*s are wahhabi, contrary to the received belief (Otayek 1993). The followers of this movement in Burkina Faso do not recognise themselves in the name "wahhabite", they refer to themselves as a sunni movement. In 1973, the first Burkinabe wahhabites to return from Saudi Arabia founded the Upper Volta Sunni Movement (MSHV), which later became the Sunni Movement (MS). The literalistic educational reform of the movement was gradually accompanied by a more political reading. However, Bakary Traoré points out that the Burkinabe Sunni Movement does not envisage the Islamisation of the state, even if it participates in political and economic life and although its struggles for emancipation have had political resonances (Traoré 2005). Canadian historian Muriel Gomez-Perez coordinated a collective book in 2005 that gathered together contributions on what she calls "political Islam" in Senegal, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and other countries. The three articles that deal with Burkina Faso in this collection examine the presence of a political Islam in Jelgooji (Diallo) and Bobo-Dioulasso (Traoré), as well as within the wahhabi community in Burkina Faso (Kone-Dao). Gomez-Perez (2005, 2017) herself notes the hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity of groups representing political Islam, which makes this concept difficult to employ for anyone

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[37] Borum invites researchers "to be less focused on why people engage in terrorism and more focused on how they become involved" (2011: 2).

[38] For an overview of this research see Hodgkin (1990), Kane (2008), Lovejoy (2016).

[39] Name of a research programme at the *Centre d'Etudes d'Afrique Noire de Bordeaux* that was launched in 1987.

wishing to describe local empirical situations in order to compare them with those observed elsewhere.[40] It is therefore important to remember to take seriously the way in which contrasting representations of political Islam or Islamic radicalism and ways of engaging with them at the individual level are the outcomes of diverse trajectories and social configurations (Roussillon 2001: 97). All the more so as terminologies are evolving and often reworked by analysts, as well as by the movements they study (Saint-Lary 2012).

Particular caution should be taken when, in current discourses on Islamic radicalisation, the terms salafism or wahhabism are associated with radicalisation. This means in particular reflecting on the question of the relationship between the ideas of fundamentalist Islam and the emergence of violence as a protest expression. Maud Saint-Lary's work (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013) clearly shows the diversity and fluidity of this movement in Burkina Faso. Her work has the great advantage of describing the phenomenon of salafism not only as a political ideology, as it is relatively often found in the scientific literature, but also as a religion and a practice of life. Research in Burkina Faso highlights that not all radical behaviour is necessarily violent and that linking strict religious observance (salafism or wahhabism) and violent activism (jihadism)[41] is a shortcut that does not take account of the multiplicity of forms of salafist engagement. This seems self-evident in the case of radical Christian currents – no one stigmatises the radicality of catholic monks or evangelical preachers in Burkina Faso, but in the case of Islam, the absence of an unquestioned link between a purist religious practice and the use of violence must be highlighted. In the writings of scholars of Islam in Burkina Faso, we find no evidence of a promoting effect of radicalisation by salafist ideologies. Rahame Idrissa concludes that Burkina Faso is an exception in the Sahel as no politicisation and ideological radicalisation of Islam has taken root in the public sphere. This does not mean, however, that Muslims are politically absent from it, but that they tend to mobilise politically not as Muslims, but as citizens of Burkina Faso, as the country's turbulent political history evidences (Idrissa 2017). Analysts of NGOs or research institutes interested in violent extremism in the Sahel region agree on the fact that it is rather social and economic circumstances that encourage members of marginalised social groups or minorities to use violence, much more than salafist ideas (Raineri, International Alert 2018, International Crisis Group 2017, Nsaibia and Weiss 2018, Loada and Romaniuk 2014, Romaniuk 2015).

But if one looks away from the fields of violent extremism and religious radicalism, research on Islamic radicalisation can be informed by the results of the analyses of protest movements, particularly those of youth, marginalised minorities and their specific claims.[42] Several studies on protest movements or community violence in Burkina Faso are worth being revisited. In

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[40] Gomez-Perez distinguishes four groups representing political Islam: a first group that is often highly politicised and bilingual; a second group close to the Iranian revolution that advocates radical Islam; a third group that she describes as fundamentalist close to wahhabi ideologies; and the fourth group of brotherhood Islam (2005: 11ff). For a more in-depth discussion of the notion of "political Islam", see for example: Roy (1992, 1999), Burgat (2001).

[41] Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos defines jihadists such "insurrectional movements that claim to be Koranic, that resort to armed struggle and that have a strong political and social dimension, regardless of their other motivations, their links with salafist fundamentalists and their ability or not to manage states based on Sharia law." (2018: 6).

[42] Debevec 2012, Diallo 2012, Gomez-Perez et al. 2009, Hagberg et al., 2017: chapitre 3, Madore 2016, Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016, Oubda 2016, Ouédraogo 2017, Saint-Lary 2012, 2018.

1997, Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo wrote a study analysing the bloody oppositions between Fulani and indigenous nomads in southwestern Burkina Faso, using the historical dynamics of these societies to explain the eruption of violence. He repudiates ethnic explanations (and one could add religious ones) usually hastily summoned because they seem obvious. Hamidou Diallo (2003, 2005, 2012) has studied the long-term influences of Islam and competition between Maraboutic families on the relations between pastoralists and sedentary farmers in northern Burkina Faso.[43]

Recent studies on Muslim activism in Burkina Faso and protest movements show the explanatory nature of local affiliations and power relations according to geographical and historical areas. This perspective proposes to look as closely as possible at forms of religious commitment that find models for action in Burkina Faso elsewhere. Studies on protests and also on the consequences of decentralisation (Hagberg 2004, Laurent 1995) show how national land-use policies have contributed to the fragmentation of rural areas in the North of Burkina Faso and to the deprivation of access to education, health, justice, and state administrative services for entire sections of the population.[44] The remarks of Amagoin Keita of the *Groupe Observation des Dynamiques Sociales, Spatiales & Expertise Endogène* (ODYSSEE Group) concerning the situation in Mali also apply to northern Burkina Faso:

> The local space [...] has become the arena for the conflicting expression of divergent local interests, the arena where different community interests clash around the control of political power, land ownership and access to local natural resources. In this local bubbling, the question of community identities has called into question the objectives officially assigned to decentralisation, namely: on the one hand, to anchor democracy at the local level through the practice of elections and public debates and, on the other hand, to promote local development with the participation of local populations.[45]

Decentralisation is nowadays confronted with the question of how to deal with the aspirations regarding identity of ethnic communities. We then need research that focuses on the emergence of these political or religious movements among pastoralists. These groups were easily attracted by jihadist groups who promised they would make easy money, thus alluring them to embrace their ideology; at the same time the whole Fulani population has been stigmatised for being suspected of jihadism (Human Rights Report 2018). For Burkina Faso, we do not have any material at present to understand the strategies, mechanisms and methods for expanding the jihadist ideology in pastoral settings or among the sedentary populations in the region.[46]

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[43] See also the research of (Diallo 2008, 2012) and Saint-Lary (2012, 2006) on the Fulani of Yatenga, their social marginalisation and political integration, studied from a historical perspective, as well as multiple other studies on Fulani societies in Burkina Faso.

[44] See also the studies on the mining boom and foreign exploitation of the subsoil: Werthmann 2012 2017.

[45] http://nomadesahel.org/la-decentralisation-et-la-mobilisation-politique-en-milieu-pastoraliste-au-mali/ accessed the 18/10/2018

[46] On this subject, see the Nomadesahel project led by Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk of ASC Leiden, Mamadou Goita and Moodibo Cissé of IRPAD-Africa, Mamadou Togola and Amagoin Keita of the ODYSSEE Group. Their research mainly concerns Mali, but they plan to expand to northern Burkina Faso and western Niger. http://nomadesahel.org

*Violent religious extremism*

The study conducted by the International Crisis Group in 2017, one of the first, if not the very first, on violent, religiously motivated extremism in Burkina Faso, presents a detailed analysis of how the phenomenon is rooted in the Soum province. Although linked to Jihadists active in Mali[47] and globalised,[48] violent religious extremism in Burkina Faso and the conflict it expresses are deeply embedded in history and political geography, particularly in the issue of social classes and hierarchies of Maraboutic families in the Burkinabe Sahel. According to the International Crisis Group, Ansarul Islam (Ansar al-Islam), which appears to be the main actor of the insecurity in northern Burkina Faso, is above all a movement challenging the social order that prevails in Soum province characterised by the division between Fulani people from the noble classes and descendants of slaves, called Rimaibe (ICG 2017: 3). Nsaibia and Weiss describe the group as a movement halfway between terrorism and banditry (2018: 26).[49] These analyses are in line with that of Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, who notes, speaking of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Aqmi in northern Mali and the Chebab in Somalia, that "insurrectional movements developing in Africa under the banner of the Koran benefit from frail societies in which they operate and the dysfunctions of the States supposed to administer the territories on which they prosper" (Pérouse de Montclos 2018: 17). These socio-political readings of violent religious extremism focus on what Rougier describes as "class jihadism" for Syria, i.e. the combination of identity, political divides and socio-economic cleavages, demonstrating that conflict lines are, on many fields, also wealth distribution lines (Rougier 2016). Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a Burkinabe Islamic preacher, founder and thought leader of Ansarul Islam, denounced social inequalities as being contrary to Islam in his speeches. Islam then serves to challenge a rigid and unequal social order, and practices that are no longer in line with the aspirations of the population:

> It is not so much an Islamist challenge to modernity, as a rejection of traditions that perpetuate an ossified society that breeds frustration. This phenomenon, which has deep local roots, seems to have attracted support by groups in neighbouring Mali, which gives it regional ramifications (International Crisis Group 2017 n°254: 7).

Ansarul Islam is said to be the first indigenous terrorist group in Burkina Faso (Nsaibia and Weiss, 2018: 23). There have been several attempts to set up terrorist cells in Burkina Faso. In

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[47] The links between Jihadist groups in Mali and Ansarul Islam are unclear, but Burkinabe security sources claim that the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (EIGS) and Ansarul Islam jointly carried out the attack on Nassoumbou on 16 December 2016. Officially endorsed by the Islamic State at the end of 2016, the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (EIGS), operating mainly in the three-border zone (Mali, Burkina, Niger) called Liptako-Gourma, is led by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, a former dissident member of al-Mourabitoune (International Crisis Group 2017). Human Rights Watch documented in 2012 a cross-border recruitment operation to bring Fulani men and boys from Niger and Burkina Faso to Gao for training by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), a group affiliated with AQIM. Since then, large numbers of Fulani men have been recruited into armed Islamist groups in central Mali and northern Burkina Faso (HRW 2018: 16).

[48] The "Group to Support Islam and Muslims" (JNIM) claimed another major terrorist attack in Ouagadougou on 2 March 2018. JNIM was born in March 2017 from the merging of the Sahara branch of AQIM, Ansar Dine, Al Mourabitoune and the Katibat Macina. The group is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly and has sworn allegiance to Al-Qaida leader Ayman al Zawahiri and AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (Nsaibia and Weiss 2018: 24).

[49] Their article is published in the journal of the *Combating Terrorism Center* of the American Military Academy.

the West, in the Upper Basins region in October 2015, the Katiba Ansar Dine Sud tried, to no avail, to form a cell.[50] In the East, elements of al-Murabitun, a group born from a split within al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, reportedly tried to establish themselves in the Tapoa forest, but they failed (Crisis Group 2017). On the other hand, according to Nsaibia and Weiss (2018), the JNIN group (Group for Support of Islam and Muslims), which claimed the March 2 attack in Ouagadougou, succeeded in establishing a local network that would also include members of the armed forces of Burkina Faso.

The areas of operation of these groups were concentrated in the provinces of Soum and Oudalan, in the Sahel region in the north of the country, bordering Mali and Niger, and in Ouagadougou. Since the end of 2017, the attacks have spread to the East, the Boucle du Mouhoun, and the North. The expansion of the conflict areas calls into question the argument that seeks an explanation for the violence in the strong Islamisation of the Soum and the Udalan. The prevalence of animism in eastern and western Burkina Faso has clearly not prevented Jihadist groups from operating there.

Research on Islamic-inspired insurrectional movements is characterized by an overlap of scientific perspectives, of those of security authorities and of representatives of the civil society. In the absence of other empirical surveys, policy makers, journalists and academic researchers regularly refer to the facts of security forces or newspaper articles[51] and think tank reports[52] to assess or classify movements. The facts reported are often controversial and hard to check. For reasons of insecurity, these regions do not allow for much field research. It is therefore clear that there is a lack of long-term research on specific areas in order to highlight the anchoring of these violent mobilisations in multiple sociabilities that are not reduced to religion in order to focus more on the local articulations of forms of dissidence and loyalty, civil resistance and the politicisation of territories, or the impact of inter-generational relations.

The research field of radicalisation, in its above-mentioned meaning, which focuses on the recruitment of individuals and the use of violence, remains at its early stages in Burkina Faso. Recent scientific work on groups or individuals claiming to have committed violent acts is missing in Burkina Faso. There is a lack of a systematic analysis of the economic and political basis for terrorist recruitment and the level of political organisation of young Sahelians, nomads and sedentary people. There is also a lack of studies on the ideological roots of

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[50] Ansar Dine's Khalid Ibn al-Walid *katiba* (brigade) is also known as Ansar Dine South. The *katiba* has established a base in the Sama forest in the Sikasso region, near the borders of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. However, the group was short-lived and only managed to carry out two attacks against the Malian gendarmerie positions in the villages of Misseni and Fakola in mid-2015. The Khalid Ibn al-Walid brigade was quickly dismantled by the Malian army, and Keita and Touré were arrested (CTC 2017: 24) Ansar Dine also created a branch to operate in Burkina Faso. Boubacar Sawadogo, a Burkinabe and partner of Keita and Touré, was at the origin of the creation of this squad, which can be considered a predecessor of Ansaroul Islam.

[51] Analysts, journalists and academics frequently quote: "How was Ansaroul Islam born, the first Jihadist group in the history of Burkina Faso", *Le Monde*, 11 April 2017; "Who is Imam Ibrahim Dicko, the new terror in northern Burkina Faso?", *Jeune Afrique*, 9 January 2017; Morgane Le Cam, "Burkina Faso: Confessions of a Former Jihadist", *Le Monde*, 10 December 2017; Seidik Abba, "Jafar Dicko, le nouveau visage du djihadisme au Burkina Faso", *Le Monde*, 21 December 2017.

[52] International Crisis Group 2017, 2016, Nsaibia and Weiss 2018, Andrew Mc Gregor 2017, *IPI Global Observatory* 2017, International Alert 2018.

extremist movements, descriptions of the trajectories of some members or preachers, in-depth analyses of ongoing judgments or trials,[53] or propaganda on the Internet, descriptions (or identification) of places of radicalisation such as mosques, universities and prisons, or of the methods for spreading messages (social networks, mobile phones).[54] Nor are there any databases on the results of preventive measures against religious extremism that have already been implemented in Burkina Faso,[55] nor is there any systematic analysis of recorded cases of radicalised persons or detainees.

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[53] "All suspects involved in terrorism-related offences are transferred to the Ouagadougou High Security Prison and all their cases are investigated and tried by the Judicial Centre for the Suppression of Acts of Terrorism, based in Ouagadougou. This specialized unit was created by a law passed in December 2017 and has its own judges, staff, and a first instance chamber. A large number of terrorism-related crimes were already under investigation before the creation of the unit in 2017" (HRW 2018: 53). An official of the Ministry of Justice told Human Rights Watch that, as of 23 March 23 2018, approximately 200 suspects accused of terrorism-related offences were being held in the high security prison and were under investigation by the special unit, but that no trial had yet taken place.

[54] For Burkina Faso, there is also an issue with understanding the words of radical preachers, as proposed by Élodie Apard based on the speeches of Mohammed Yusuf and Aboubakar Shekau, who promoted the politico-religious discourse that shaped the ideology of the Boko Haram movement (Apard 2015).

[55] For examples of preventive measures against religious extremism, see: Loada and Romaniuk 2014, Romaniuk 2015, van Zyl and Frank 2018, EU Neighbours South Project, Pilot Project to Combat Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Maghreb Region (duration 2015-2019, €5 million). https://www.euneighbours.eu/fr/south/eu-in-action/projects/projet-pilote-pour-la-lutte-contre-la-radicalisation-et-lextremisme, European Union, 2016, STRIVE Building Resilience to Violence and Extremism. http://ct-morse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRIVE2016-FR.pdf

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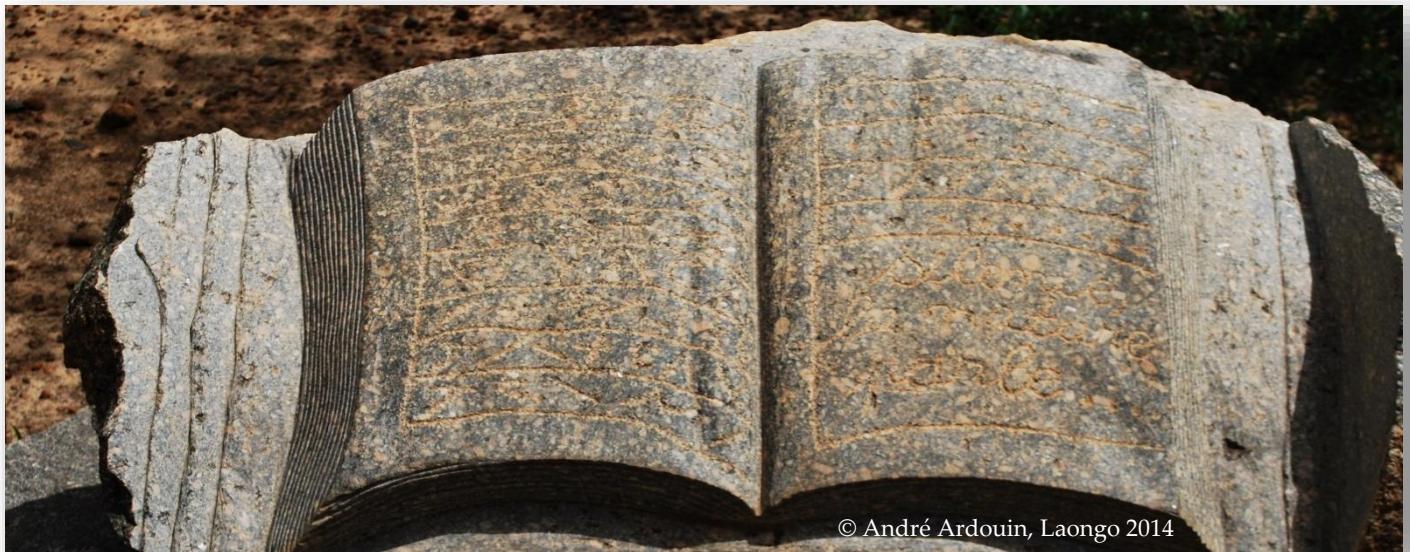
# 5.    Conclusions and Research Paths

The theory of secularisation has been carefully examined in the academic literature but also in social and political spheres, leading to a new understanding of the role of religion in modern times. The growth in migration flows over the last decades, as well as the recognition of religion as an increasingly important factor in personal and collective identification, has encouraged both studies on religious diversity and analyses of minority religious communities. In addition, the 9/11 terrorist attacks contributed to an even greater increase in political concern about religion. In Burkina Faso, the beginning of the war in Mali in 2012 had a strong influence on the views of political leaders on religion and contributed to the emergence of the notion of "religious radicalisation" in the Burkinabe context.

The review of the literature shows that political concerns and proposals to combat violent extremism in Burkina Faso, inspired by the global context and the situation in Mali and Nigeria, have outpaced academic research on religious radicalisation in the country. Scholars on religions place greater emphasis on the case of Burkina Faso's exceptionality in the sub-region in terms of peaceful religious coexistence and non-politicisation of religions in general, and of Islam in particular. The explosion of violence on Burkinabe soil has been linked by a large number of researchers to local situations, identity crises, socio-economic cleavages, and the dysfunction or absence of the state and its services in the concerned territories. This perspective opens up many possibilities for research, mentioned above, that would enable a better understanding of political and religious mobilisation.

The survey of social science research on religions in Burkina Faso over the past 60 years also indicates that the way of thinking about religion and the evolution of this thinking follow, on the one hand, political developments and, on the other hand, the concepts and epistemologies developed in French-speaking countries due to the relatively limited circulation of research results between the English-speaking and French-speaking academic communities until the 2000s. Almost all the major paradigms in the field of religious sciences are found in research on religions in Burkina Faso, with the exception of the theses of secularisation, which have

found few supporters in Burkina Faso. It is also worth noting that Burkinabe researchers have contributed to a significant renewal of the analysis of Islam, particularly in its historicity, and that foreign researchers have taken a greater interest in religious diversity and its social consequences.

At the end of this overview of the scientific literature on religions in Burkina Faso, two hypotheses may well be formulated that open the way for future research.

First, it is worth noting the heuristic contribution of comparative studies between different religious movements within the country. Analyses that study together what is happening in the Islamic and other religious movements, and that put these religious dynamics in perspective with the political trajectories of the societies observed, are among the most stimulating. The comparative approach between the religious dynamics of the different countries of the sub-region has also given rise to innovative studies. In particular when regional studies include a reflection on the links between territories in the global context. This opens up many possibilities for work, particularly in the field of cross-border studies, which are essential for understanding, among other things, the paths of radicalisation. Designing regional studies in a relational and procedural way, as called for by Spies and Seesemann (2016), means opening up the borders standing between them and opening up new research perspectives.

Secondly, an understanding of religious conflicts and violent radicalisation at the same time requires detailed studies of cohabitation and social mechanisms that lead to social cohesion. The analysis of conflicts and different forms of compromise and coexistence between religions is obscured by the overwhelming attention given to Islamic-Christian conflicts. Not all violence in Africa occurs along a religious divide. The high number of cases of intra-Muslim violence challenges the idea that conflict is necessarily associated with religious difference. And even in pluralistic societies, such as Burkina Faso, religious difference is not necessarily associated with conflict. It seems important to study in particular the contexts in which different groups coexist without resorting to large-scale violence in other countries in order to make a comparison.[56] Studies concerning non-conflicting relations between Christians and Muslims are not numerous. However, these analyses could also provide fresh knowledge on the dynamics of conflict if we look in detail at how individuals manage diversity on a daily basis in order to understand how religious boundaries are socially used.

To put the final brush on our canvas – necessarily partial – displaying the production of knowledge on religions in Burkina Faso, a few additional words on the capacity of social science to respond to the legitimate demands and concerns of society. Policy makers and security officers require a categorisation of knowledge that sets clear limits for assessing whether organisations or individuals pose a threat to democracy and security in Burkina Faso. Qualitative social research and ethnographic field studies are often criticised because they focus on case studies that are too small and emphasise the complexity and fluidity of affiliations. However, when it comes to exploring the internal perspective of marginalised groups, qualitative research methods and ethnography are particularly appropriate, especially for exploring new research questions. One of the strengths of the knowledge produced by

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[56] Barbara Cooper's (2006) study on evangelical Christians in Niger shows that although Islam imposes constraints on Christianity, it also helps to define Christian practice and expression. Nolte's and her research group's analyses in southwest Nigeria, shared between "animist" Yoruba, Christians and Muslims, offer a model for more peaceful cohabitation, where Muslims embody traditions of tolerance unknown in the north of the country (2017). In Ghana, although the society has been profoundly changed by Pentecostals, religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians are rather rare.

social sciences is that they recognise local connections in their fluidity and complexity, which is exactly what matters in research on violent radicalisation. A professional community trained in the requirements of social sciences and familiar with local fields exists. It has strong credentials in general theoretical studies and in its ability to work with civil society in response to its priorities. What is missing is a federal institutionalisation of religious studies in Burkina Faso, currently fragmented into different university disciplines, as well as an integration of religious education into the country's secondary schools and high schools.

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