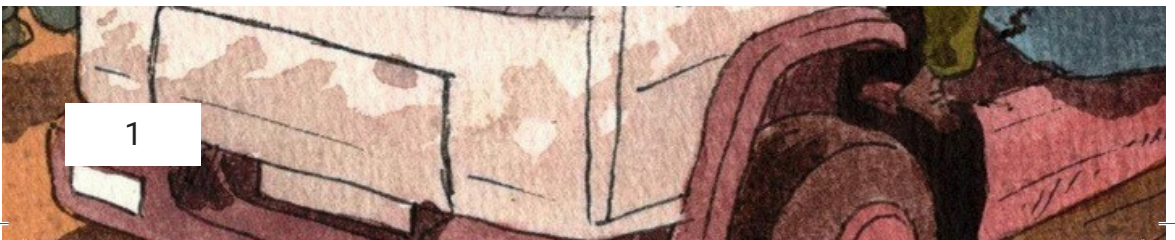


# Displacement and Return in Central African Republic

One of the defining features of the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) since 2013 has been massive displacement. Currently, about a quarter of the country's population is displaced. People who have been forcibly displaced, whether internally or abroad, and people who stayed behind this time (but frequently have their own memories of displacement) provide particular kinds of information about war and its not particularly peaceful aftermath. In this research, based on interviews with a broad range of people affected by displacement, we show that Central African views about the prospects for peace are deeply affected by how displacement has shaped tensions over the political senses of distribution (who has a right to what, and on what basis).

Who should pay for war, in senses both material and otherwise, and who should be compensated? However, distribution and belonging are not the issues prioritized in the aftermath of war, when elite deals, punitive justice and technocratic recovery plans crowd out treatment of the material justice and belonging questions that dominate neighbourhoods. The political dimensions of material justice in the aftermath of war require more thorough treatment, as listening to people who have experienced displacement makes abundantly clear.

- **Louisa Lombard, Enrica Picco**



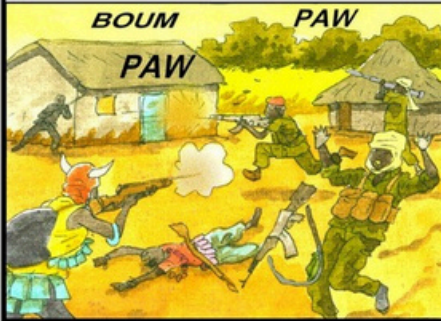
## Didier Kassai

Didier Kassai was born in Sibut. He studied to become a comic artist, first in (Bangui, Libreville, Yaoundé and Kinshasa), and later in Brussels. In 1999, the work of Kassai appeared at the Gabonese festival Journées Africaines de la Bande Dessinée. One year after that, he contributed to the collection album 'A l'Ombre du Baobab', which was published on the occasion of a group exhibition at the festival of Angoulême (France). He also participated in Africa Comics 2003 in Italy and in Shege in Cameroon. In

2006, he won the "Prix africain méditerranéen" in Bologne with *Azinda et le mariage forcé*. He also won the Pan-African competition "Vues d'Afrique" with *Bangui coquette* at the Angoulême festival. In 2009, he won the "Prix du meilleur projet," for the Best Comicbook project with *Pousse-pousse* at the Algiers festival.



CONFLICT HAS RAGED IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC SINCE 2013.



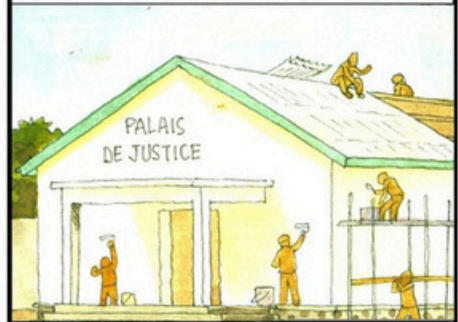
IN 2017, THE NUMBER OF DISPLACED PEOPLE REACHED AN ALL-TIME HIGH OF 1.1 MILLION PEOPLE (OUT OF A TOTAL POPULATION OF 4.6 MILLION).



PEACEKEEPING AND RECONCILIATION OFTEN FOCUSES ON DEALMAKING ELITES...



...AND ON PUNITIVE JUSTICE.



HOWEVER, CONFLICT AND ITS AFTERMATH ARE EXPERIENCED DIFFERENTLY BY THE PEOPLE. TO THEM OTHER ISSUES, ADDRESSED LESS OFTEN, MATTER.



THESE ISSUES CONCERN:

**BELONGING**

IN CAR, IF YOU ARE A MUSLIM, YOU ARE A FOREIGNER.



**MATERIAL DISTRIBUTION**

IF THEY ACCEPT TO REBUILD WHAT THEY DESTROYED, I CAN GO BACK.



**JUSTICE**

YOU CAN'T START WITH THE TRIBUNAL





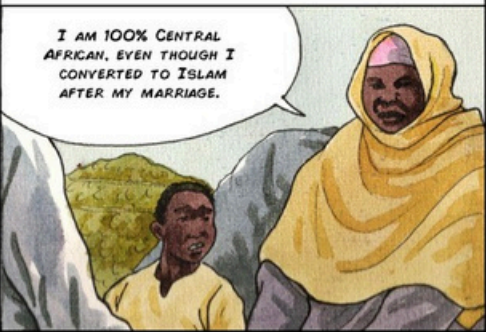
**I. BELONGING:  
WHO IS REALLY CENTRAL AFRICAN?**



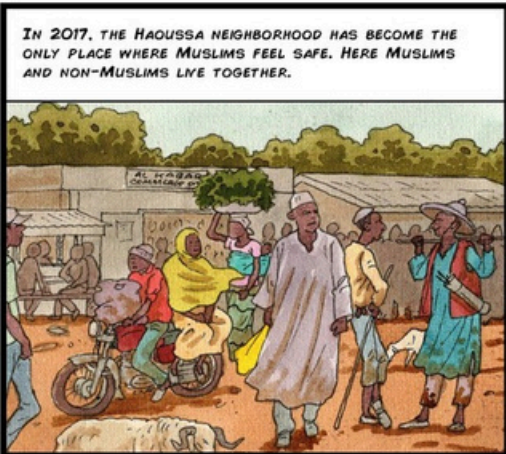
**MOST CENTRAL AFRICANS CAN'T OFFICIALLY PROVE THEIR NATIONALITY. GETTING AN ID CARD MEANS TRAVELING FAR AND PAYING EXORBITANT FEES.**



**INSTEAD, NATIONALITY IS OFTEN DEFINED THROUGH FEELINGS, FEARS, AND PERCEPTIONS.**



**RETURNING TO CAR IS DIFFICULT FOR MUSLIMS, AND FOR SOME MORE THAN OTHERS. IN THE WESTERN TOWN OF BOUAR, MUSLIMS USED TO LIVE MAINLY IN TWO NEIGHBORHOODS: HAOUSSA AND MAMADOU SARA. HAOUSSA WAS A MIXED NEIGHBORHOOD, COMPRISED OF MOSTLY CONVERTED MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS. MAMADOU SARA HOUSED MAINLY MUSLIMS FROM SARA AND ARAB MINORITIES.**



**IN 2017, THE HAOUSSA NEIGHBORHOOD HAS BECOME THE ONLY PLACE WHERE MUSLIMS FEEL SAFE. HERE MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS LIVE TOGETHER.**



**IN CONTRAST, MAMADOU SARA HAS BECOME A GHOST TOWN.**



AFTER THE 2013 COUP, MUSLIMS LIVING IN MAMADOU WERE ASSOCIATED WITH THE REBELS, BECAUSE OF THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. THEY WERE FORCED TO LEAVE, SHOPS WERE LOOTED AND THE LOCAL MOSQUE WAS DEMOLISHED.



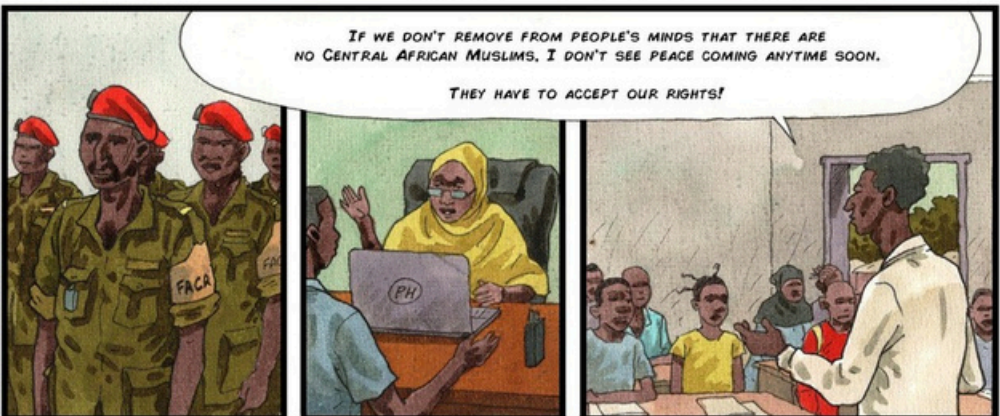
NOW, ONLY A FEW PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN UP RESIDENCE IN THE ABANDONED BUILDINGS.



POLITICIANS TALK ABOUT PEACE AND RECONCILIATION, BUT KEEP SILENT ABOUT WHO BELONGS IN CAR.



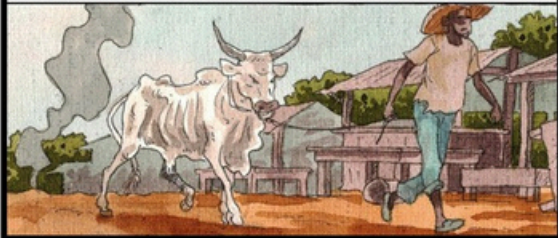
IF WE DON'T REMOVE FROM PEOPLE'S MINDS THAT THERE ARE NO CENTRAL AFRICAN MUSLIMS, I DON'T SEE PEACE COMING ANYTIME SOON. THEY HAVE TO ACCEPT OUR RIGHTS!





II. MATERIAL DISTRIBUTION: WHO GETS A (FAIR) SHARE?

MUSLIMS, HISTORICALLY INVOLVED IN TRADING, MINING AND FINANCING, USED TO BE A RELATIVELY WEALTHY GROUP IN CAR. SINCE THE CONFLICT CAR HAS DROPPED TO THE LOWEST POSITION ON THE (2016) HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX .



AS MUSLIMS FLED, LANDLOCKED CAR LOST TRADERS WITH EXPERTISE AND WITH CONNECTIONS TO NEIGHBORS.

LOOK AT THE COUNTRY, WHAT WAS BEFORE AND WHAT IS NOW!

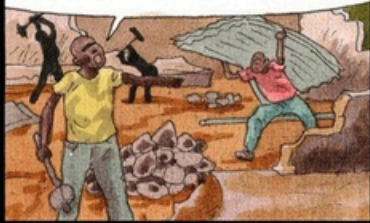
DOES THE GOVERNMENT REALIZE WHAT WAS LOST?



THE HOMES OF REFUGEES WERE OFTEN DESTROYED COMPLETELY, EVEN THEIR FOUNDATIONS. THE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR:

WE'VE GOT ALL YOUR THINGS!

DON'T COME BACK. THIS IS NOT YOUR HOME ANYMORE!



HOUSES WORTH THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS WERE DESTROYED, AND THE BRICKS SOLD FOR \$2 EACH.



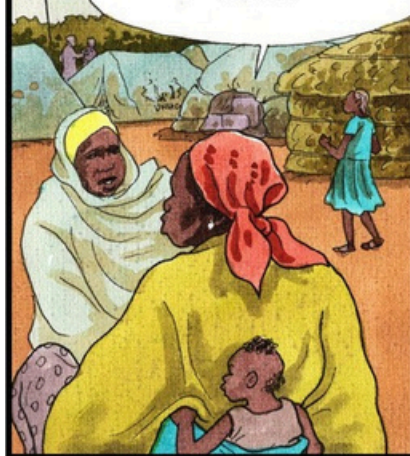
MANY REFUGEES WHO WANT TO RETURN HAVE LOST EVERYTHING. MOST ARE IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE IN CAR TO SEE WHAT'S LEFT.

IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT?

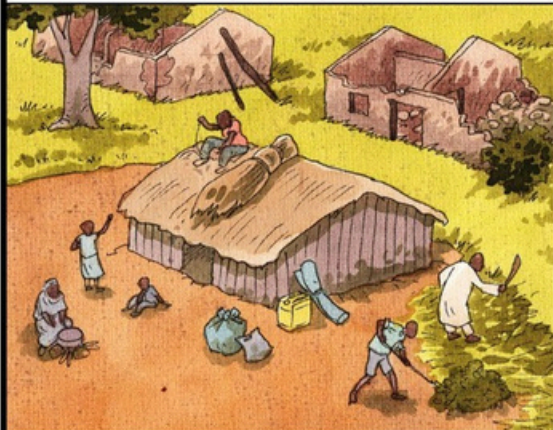


I DON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO GO BACK. I DON'T HAVE MONEY OR A HOUSE.

IF THEY WOULD REBUILD WHAT THEY HAVE DESTROYED, I COULD GO BACK!



FOR REFUGEES, LOSING EVERYTHING WAS MATERIALLY DEVASTATING, BUT JUST AS IMPORTANTLY AN INJUSTICE THAT MUST BE RECTIFIED FOR THEM TO FEEL SAFE IN RETURNING.

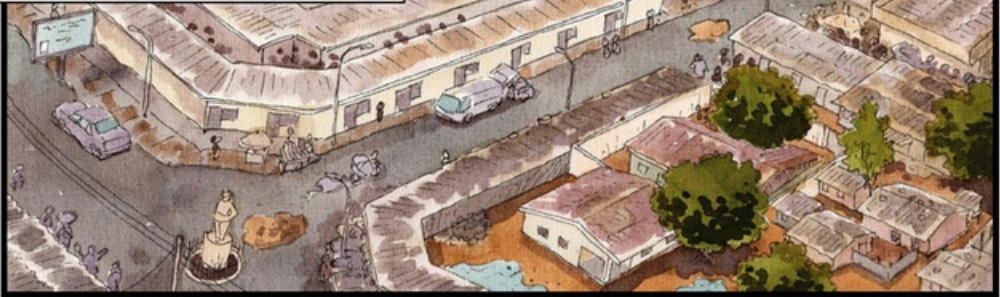


BUT AS OF YET, NO FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INJUSTICE IS FORTHCOMING. IF THEY RETURN, THEY ARE ON THEIR OWN.

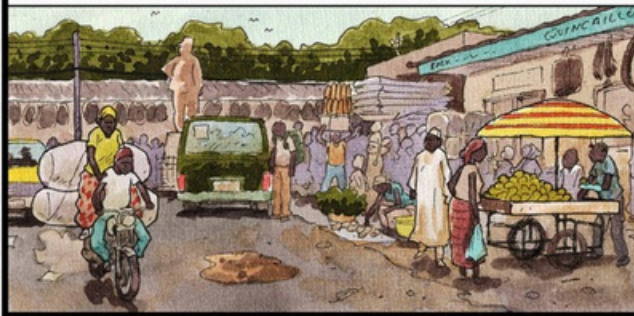


WHEN MUSLIMS DO RETURN, THEY ARE LIKELY TO END UP IN PKs.

THIS NEIGHBORHOOD IN BANGUI IS CAR'S LARGEST MUSLIM ENCLAVE.



THE FIRST CONCERN FOR RETURNEES IS HOUSING.



EVEN IF YOU CAN FIND A PLACE TO LIVE, THE STATUS OF THE HOUSES IS UNCLEAR.



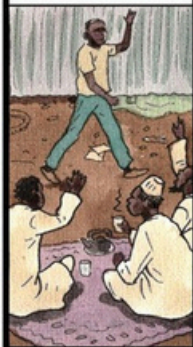
I KNOW THAT THE OWNER IS COMING BACK, I DON'T SLEEP AT NIGHT!

THE SECOND CONCERN IS INCOME. PEOPLE ARE RESOURCEFUL WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING MONEY FOR DAILY SURVIVAL, BUT IT'S DIFFICULT BECAUSE MOVEMENT OUTSIDE THE AREA IS LIMITED.



I'VE NEVER LEFT PKs.

WHEN THEY DO LEAVE PKs, MEN REPORT HAVING TO CHANGE THEIR MUSLIM CLOTHES AND WEAR A T-SHIRT AND JEANS.



WOMEN HAVE TO HIDE THEIR VEILS IN THEIR HANDBAG.



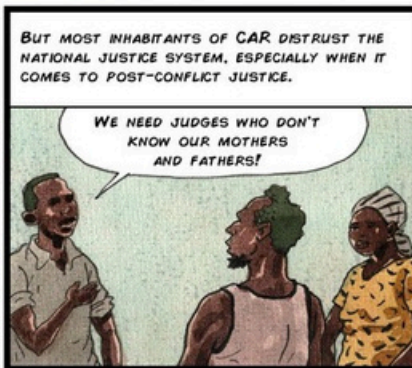
OFFICIALS SEEM LARGELY UNINTERESTED IN THE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS.

IF MUSLIMS ARE CONSIDERED FOREIGNERS, THERE IS NO NEED TO RECONCILE WITH THEM OR PROVIDE FOR THEIR NEEDS.





III. JUSTICE.





THE CENTRAL AFRICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM IS OUT OF TUNE WITH HOW PEOPLE ACTUALLY LIVE.

JUSTICE IS INACCESSIBLE FOR MOST.



PEOPLE SEE JUDICIAL OUTCOMES AS POLITICAL, NOT IMPARTIAL.

OR A TRIAL IS PERCEIVED TO BE WON BY THE ONE THAT PAYS THE MAGISTRATE THE MOST.



IN 2015, A SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT WAS SET UP TO DEAL WITH VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CAR CONFLICT SINCE 2003. THE SCOPE OF THIS COURT IS NATIONAL, PUNITIVE, AND LARGELY SYMBOLIC.

A TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION WAS RECOMMENDED BUT REMAINED ON PAPER.



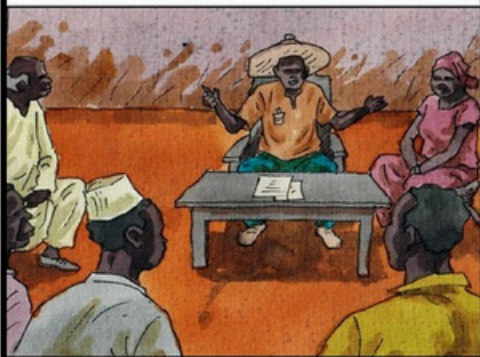
CENTRAL AFRICANS ARE USED TO SETTLING THEIR DISPUTES OUTSIDE OF COURT.

IF YOU WANT JUSTICE, YOU CAN'T START WITH A TRIBUNAL.

CHIEFDOMS SHOULD BE RE-ESTABLISHED. JUSTICE SHOULD BEGIN WITH THEM, AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL.



LOCAL CHIEFS COULD PLAY A KEY ROLE IN MEDIATING QUESTIONS OF LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS.



HOWEVER, THE QUESTION WHETHER CHIEFS WOULD DISPENSE FAIR VERDICTS IN SITUATIONS WHERE SECURITY AND INCLUSIVE SOCIAL NORMS DO NOT PREVAIL IS NOT FULLY REESTABLISHED.



THE ABSENCE OF PEACE IS NOT JUST CAUSED BY VIOLENCE, BUT ALSO BY CONFLICTS ABOUT NATIONALITY, MATERIAL DISTRIBUTION, AND JUSTICE.

UNTIL NOW THE PEACE PROCESS HAS FOCUSED ON POLITICAL AND REBEL LEADERS, AND LEADERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY.

IT LARGELY IGNORES THE REAL AND FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL QUESTION OF WHO GETS WHAT, WHEN, AND HOW.

THIS QUESTION NEEDS TO BE ANSWERED AT THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNITY.

